

First Session – Forty-First Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, October 4, 2016

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I am pleased to table the annual report of the Manitoba Law Reform Commission as well as the annual report of the Manitoba Residential Tenancies Commission.

Madam Speaker: Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Lisa Webinger

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House today to praise the efforts of a dynamic individual that's active in the Radisson constituency.

We all know how important volunteers are to the well-being of a community. Through their example of service, commitment and generosity they inspire others to give of themselves, whether that's their time, money or talents, and in so doing they create a sense of community pride that pays dividends year after year.

And as we approach Thanksgiving weekend, it's appropriate for each one of us, and indeed all our communities, to express our thanks to these amazing individuals and to encourage them in their continued efforts.

For these reasons, I am pleased to acknowledge the efforts of one particular volunteer from my constituency, Lisa Webinger. Lisa is a single mother who first garnered attention in 2010 for her leading role in raising \$80,000 in less than one year for the new Bernie Wolfe school playground.

Since then she has volunteered with CancerCare, Manitoba's Challenge for Life, Movember, the CEO Sleepout, the Transcona Food Bank and Siloam Mission. She was also a recent recipient of the Premier's Volunteer Service Award this past April.

Over the summer, she and a few friends formed Team Cornell—actually, some of you may remember Lisa from when she served us delicious Cornell ice cream at a reception after our swearing-in ceremony on May 11th. The lemon flavour is exceptionally good, but I digress. Over the summer, Lisa and her team organized, fundraised and worked very hard, joining other teams from across Manitoba in the Health Sciences Centre Foundation Celebrity Human Race. Lisa and Team Cornell raised over \$33,000 for the HSC Foundation and were one of the top five fundraising teams in the province.

Lisa Webinger is in the gallery today, together with her mother, and I ask that this House honour her efforts in building a stronger community and a better province.

Animal Health Week

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Madam Speaker, this week marks Animal Health Week, an opportunity to promote animal rights.

Animal Health Week is also an opportunity to acknowledge the incredible and difficult work done by animal rescue organizations here in Manitoba who are on the front lines promoting and fighting for animal rights.

All across Manitoba, thousands of vulnerable animals, specifically dogs and cats, are surviving on our streets or in our rural communities without food or water, without shelter or without the care and love of a forever family. Additionally, and most egregious, many dogs and cats in Manitoba suffer abominably horrible treatment.

There is a staggering overpopulation of dogs and cats across Manitoba. Studies have shown two thirds of these animals will die from starvation, climate conditions or disease.

There are many dedicated organizations working to protect dogs and cats, organizations like the Winnipeg Humane Society, D'Arcy's Arc, Save a Dog Network, K9 Advocates Manitoba, Manitoba Underdogs, Manitoba Mutts, the Quagga Stray Cat Rescue are just a few providing front-line rescues, adoption, veterinarian services, educational resources and spay and neuter clinics.

The people who run these programs rely on sponsorship and community donations to pay for the ongoing operations of their programs. However, more supports are needed to help create safer communities for animals, control animal populations and provide for their health and well-being.

This is an issue near and dear to my heart. Three years ago, because of the amazing work of the Winnipeg Humane Society, I adopted my first ever dog, named Chilly Dog, who is just a blessing in my life.

And so, Chilly Dog and I would like to say miigwech to everyone working in Manitoba's animal rescue organizations for your compassion and your commitment to the health and safety of animals in Manitoba. And if we can acknowledge our guests in the Chamber.

Ukrainian Heritage in Canada

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Crown Services): It gives me great pleasure to recognize a Canadian milestone, the 125th anniversary of Ukrainian immigration to Canada.

Madam Speaker, 2016 marks the 125th anniversary of Ukrainian immigration to Canada. Between 1891 and 1914, approximately 170,000 Ukrainians left their home in search of land and a prosperous life in this great country.

Today, we will focus on the story of the first Ukrainian pioneers who blazed the trail for hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians across five waves of immigration, each contributing to a stronger Canada.

In 1891 the first Ukrainians came to Canada seeking a better life for their families. Through five large waves of immigration, Ukrainians have settled in Canada, a land of refuge and freedom. The Ukrainian story in Canada is a testament to the opportunities and possibilities that our great country represents. Ukrainians have remembered their traditions, language and culture while giving back to the land where they have made their homes.

They've been instrumental in the building of a diverse, inclusive and welcome Canada. There are over 1.3 million Canadians of Ukrainian descent, and for 125 years Ukrainians have been contributing to the essential fabric of Canadian life and culture.

Ukrainian heritage has evolved to become a part of Manitoba's multicultural identity, everything from dance and performing groups across the province to Ukrainian programming in schools and institutions.

Its rich history continues to be shared with all Manitobans thanks to events such as Ukrainian Day, Folklorama and Canada's National Ukrainian Festival in Dauphin.

I ask all Manitobans to join us in commemorating and celebrating the 125th anniversary of Ukrainian immigration to Canada.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and slava Ukraini.

Tourist Greeter Program

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Madam Speaker, I rise today to congratulate members of Brandon's Tourist Greeter Program. It was started in 1987 by a group of volunteers who wanted to be sure that visitors to Brandon received a warm welcome and could be informed of the many attractions and events that they could experience there in the hopes that they might stay another night and spread their tourism dollars a little further around our fine community.

Over the past 29 years, 40 dedicated volunteers have carried on this important program. From May long to September long weekends, they tour campgrounds six days a week, visit campers who have checked in that day, providing a welcome package and promoting the community that they love so much.

Madam Speaker, there has been wonderful feedback from many people who have been welcomed by the Tourist Greeters, often citing that they have never experienced such a program in all of their travels across Canada. In addition to the campground greeting program, these volunteers assist with welcome and information displays at events and trade shows such as the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair and the Canadian Arabian and Half-Arabian National Championship show. In 2004 this dedicated group of volunteers was recognized as the recipient of the Mayor's Volunteer Service Award.

While some have been volunteering since the inception of the program, in 2016, the following five individuals were recognized for 20 years of service: Lois Carkener, Harvey and Irene Smith, Gorman and Anita Orsted. As Gorman said, it is interesting because we get to meet people from all over the world. There are a lot of people who travel from coast to coast. Anita finds that people really appreciate it. They're so happy that we come and greet them. Some people haven't really spoken to other people since they left home.

Madam Speaker, thank you to Brandon's Tourist Greeters for their fine work, making new friends for Brandon.

* (13:40)

Ottawa Trip—Liberal Caucus Retreat

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): I would like to begin by saying how wonderful it is to be back in the House here today with all of my colleagues. This summer went by way too quick, which I'm sure everyone can appreciate.

This past week our Liberal caucus had a very productive caucus retreat in Ottawa, and we did this for several reasons. Firstly, we wanted to ensure that ground level issues here in the province of Manitoba were being heard in Ottawa. Secondly, we believe in being a team not only here at work but in life. It's important to build healthy relationships with those you work with in order to serve the province to the best of your ability. Thirdly, we wanted to prepare for session. We did this by having back-to-back meetings with ministers, parliamentary secretaries, government whips, many of whom are our friends and even our family. In our meetings we conversed about many things, including action, post incarceration, quality home care, mental health, employment opportunities, protecting First Nations from boreal forest fires, the East Side Road Authority, agriculture policy, flood prevention, climate change and how money is being used.

The fourth reason, and you will like this one, is we were following this government's request. Last session, the government constantly told us to go and ask our federal counterparts the very questions that we were asking here in the House, so we followed instructions.

To wrap up, we had a very productive exchange with our federal government and we are so pleased with how receptive they are. We are looking forward to continuing to work with them for our great province. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, we have some guests in the gallery.

We have seated in the public gallery 10 students from the Aboriginal self-government program at Red River College under the direction of Ms. Karen Favell, and this school is located in the

constituency of the honourable member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino).

Also seated in the public gallery from Springs Christian Academy, 35 grade 9 and 11 students under the direction of Mr. Brad Dowler. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Investment in Manitoba Government Position

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, we were witness to a bizarre production yesterday where the Premier decided to treat the people of Manitoba as if they were children. He compared his role in funding social service agencies to ordering from Eaton's catalogue.

Madam Speaker, proper funding for Women's Health Clinic is not the same as a gift. It is a responsibility and a duty. Committing to a new school in Brandon is not a gift; it is a responsibility and a duty.

What we need is a Premier committed to investments that build the future of Manitoba and keep Manitoba affordable.

Will the Premier commit to working with Manitobans and not belittling them?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and welcome back to the Legislature. We think you're doing a wonderful job.

Now, the \$600 million that the NDP promised during the election campaign, was that evidence of responsibility, Madam Speaker? I don't think so, because given the fact that the NDP were in the process of more than doubling our debt, given the fact that they had raised taxes and, in fact, treated Manitobans in a disrespectful way by taking away their right to vote on the proposal, which they said they would enact, and given the fact that they actually went so far as to take Manitobans' money, invest it in prebudget consultations which didn't result in a budget at all, given all these facts plus the fact that, of course, they presided over a decade of debt, a decade of decay and a decade of, well, decline, I don't think that the member opposite or her

party have any credibility when it comes to speaking about treating Manitobans with respect.

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, from what we heard from reliable sources, Manitoba was one of the best performing economies in Manitoba before they came. It was under our watch.

Madam Speaker, the Premier said he worked hard, so hard that he found \$122 million savings for Manitoba. Public Accounts released last week showed that that is—that was not true. Instead, we found out the deficit was inflated for political purposes. Instead, he slashes the seniors' tax credits, cancels plans for the future of the province and freezes the minimum wage.

This Premier's actions speak louder than his words: a 40 per cent raise to his salary while he makes cuts to everyday Manitobans.

Will the Premier admit that this justification for raising taxes—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Pallister: Well, Madam Speaker, there are so many falsehoods contained in the comments of the member, it's hard to pick which one to address, but let's start with this.

The members opposite tabled a budget a few months ago, a few months prior to the last election. In that budget they purported to be whittling down the deficit of the province. They said they'd run a deficit of \$400 million or so. The actual results came out last week as more than double that. So, again, there they were, they missed the mark by half a billion dollars approximately, Madam Speaker, and this was not the first time. This has happened several times under their watch.

Virtually every year that the previous administration was in power, their spending exceeded their projections by a considerable amount. To feed their spending addiction they decided to launch into a massive tax grab. They raised taxes on Manitobans considerably. In the '12 budget, they raised them on things like Manitobans' benefits that they purchase through their haircuts, their car insurance, their home insurance. They raided Manitobans' pocketbooks thoroughly.

And the member knows what spending is, but does not know what sustainable money management is.

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, last we heard, they kept that 1 per cent PST.

Madam Speaker, Canada's economy is facing an uncertain time. During this moment, the question for all leaders is: Do you build or do you cut?

Will the Premier recognize that investments in hydro made today will make rates affordable for future generations? Will he put away his partisanship and get on with the job of promoting the export of Manitoba's green, clean energy advantage that will bring prosperity and low rates to Manitoba for generations to come?

Mr. Pallister: Well, Madam Speaker, it's a tragedy the way the NDP took over Manitoba Hydro and mismanaged it. They treated it as if it was their personal possession when it belongs to all Manitobans today and tomorrow: a massive Americanization strategy, an ill-advised strategy to waste \$1 billion running a hydro line around the west half of the province when that was not recommended by experts, a political decision to run it the wrong way and cost Manitobans \$1 billion, already resulting in massive increases in the hydro rates Manitobans have to pay and suppressing the job creation capability of our small-business community and the purchasing power of Manitoba families, as a consequence to go further and overbill so that they can supply Americans with low-cost power, put Americans' interests ahead of Manitobans'. And now we have to clean up that mess.

This is what I mean, Madam Speaker, when I say a decade of debt, a decade of decay and a decade of decline, and that's what we're here to do: fix it—fix the economy, fix our situation in this province. That's the job we have and that's the job we'll undertake.

Seniors' School Tax Rebate Government Election Promise

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Madam Speaker, this past summer I had the pleasure of meeting with Bonnie Hill [*phonetic*], a St. Johns constituent just shy of her 65th birthday. Bonnie [*phonetic*] shared how upset she was the Premier went back on his promise not to tinker with the Seniors' School Tax Rebate. Bonnie [*phonetic*] was looking forward to her birthday, knowing that she would have a few extra dollars to her fixed income. She was counting on those extra dollars.

* (13:50)

Because of the Premier's backtracking on his promise to Manitoba seniors, Bonnie [phonetic] is now contemplating moving out of her home.

Will the Premier (Mr. Pallister) explain to Bonnie [phonetic] why he went back on his promise and cut seniors' income?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I thank the member for the question, and I'm happy to talk at any point about the government's decision to maintain the Seniors' School Tax Rebate and then to apply an income test to make sure that those who truly need that will continue to receive it.

I wonder if the member also in her discussions with Bonnie [phonetic] was disclosing the fact that the NDP government pulled \$1,600 out of every household in the way of a PST hike. If Bonnie [phonetic] is moving out of her house, Madam Speaker, it is because that desperate government kept raising taxes instead of doing the hard work of fixing the finances.

Ms. Fontaine: When the government first cut the Seniors' School Tax Rebate, the Premier claimed it was an attempt to balance the supposed over \$1-billion deficit, which of course we know was strategically inflated to justify cuts to seniors' incomes.

The Premier made life less affordable for Manitoba seniors. Bonnie [phonetic] is angry and feels betrayed by the Premier.

Will the Premier explain to seniors in the gallery today why he chose to go back on his promise not to tinker with the Seniors' School Tax Rebate?

Madam Speaker: Order, order.

I would remind members in the gallery that they are not allowed to participate in debate, that that is a responsibility of the members here on the floor that have been elected. While we appreciate having many people come to our gallery and it's important, we do not allow people in the gallery to participate by speaking out or by clapping. So we'd really appreciate your attention to that. Thank you.

Mr. Friesen: I thank you for the opportunity to once again stand and put facts on the record.

The NDP ran a almost billion-dollar deficit and then as a last-minute, last-gasp, desperate maneuver to try to remain in power, they tried to lure unsuspecting Manitobans by more than quadrupling a credit that they could not afford, threatening the

very affordability that they purport to want to support.

The fact is this: Did the member also tell Bonnie [phonetic] that they raised her home insurance by 8 per cent year over year? Did she share that fact with Bonnie [phonetic]?

Ms. Fontaine: Obviously, we can see that this is an issue that actually touches and impacts on people's lives every single day and there are emotions attached to it.

I'm not sure, if the Premier and the Minister of Finance are so proud of this cut, why isn't the Premier getting up and speaking in this House to those seniors on why he made such a cut? And will he meet with the seniors immediately after question period?

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: All members of this Chamber should note that the members of the opposition are completely silent when it—when they are asked to explain their actions in respect of their wholesale tax hikes for Manitobans, tax hikes that cost them.

The fact of the matter is affordability matters. That's why this government was selected by Manitobans, to fix the province's finances so that we can restore those services and rebuild our economy.

Madam Speaker, that is the work that we take very seriously. It is work they never undertook because every time they were faced with a hard challenge they just raised another tax.

Green Energy Investment Government Position

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Just last week the government paraded a American consultant's report which actually said that fossil fuels were a better alternative to building clean, green hydroelectric power in Manitoba.

We know, Madam Speaker, that if the Premier followed this path, electricity bills would skyrocket, as would Manitoba's greenhouse gas emissions.

Yesterday we learned that the federal government is going—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Allum:—going to impose a carbon tax that will rise to \$50 a ton.

Will the Premier now simply acknowledge that his American consultant was wrong and that the value of building clean, green energy now and for future generations is the only way to go?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, the member's comments ring incredibly hollow.

The government—when they were government the members opposite touted on a regular basis their action plan for addressing carbon problems and climate change, yet just last year the Auditor General released a report which evaluated whether their deeds actually matched their words and followed up on the managing climate change plan that the government had advanced, and concluded that the government had acted on only two of 15 recommendations. The government that we followed did not take climate change action seriously. We will.

Mr. Allum: That's rich coming from a member who was a climate change denier for the good part of his political life.

Madam Speaker, the American consultant that was brought in by the Conservative government said that building gas plants would be a good financial decision for Manitobans, when we know it would be wrong for Manitoba, wrong for Manitoba consumers and wrong for our children and grandchildren for generations to come.

So I want to ask him again: Will he agree that building out Manitoba Hydro for clean, green renewable energy is the only way to go for this generation and generations to come?

Mr. Pallister: I would not want the record to show that the previous government failed in every respect in regard to their Hydro initiatives. They did not. They did not fail to put millions of dollars in the hands of consultants. They did not fail to throw money away while destroying boreal forest not just in the east-side road project, but along the bipole west line as well. They did not fail to disrespect the real reason that we need to build hydro in the first place, which is for Manitobans. They did not fail in every respect; they failed in all the important respects though, Madam Speaker, to deliver on the promise of cleaner energy for Manitobans that is cost-effectively available to Manitobans, not just to Americans at deep discounts.

Mr. Allum: I want to table a report which shows that Winnipeg has the second lowest electricity rates in the country. In fact, Madam Speaker, it's currently the law in Manitoba that we have the lowest bundle of utility rates in the country, the lowest hydro rates, the lowest car insurance rates and the lowest home-heating rates.

So I want to ask the Premier right now: Is he going to respect that law, or is he going to break the law and jack up rates for Manitobans?

Mr. Pallister: I encourage the member to get with the new co-operative attitude around here.

But I would say that the fact of the matter is that if there was any disrespect for the law evident, it was the disrespect the members opposite showed when they took away the right of Manitobans to vote on tax hikes which they brought in after they promised they would not.

Now, in respect of Hydro—with respect to Hydro, the member needs to do just a little, minimal amount of research and understand that Manitobans own the debt of Hydro and that Hydro's debt will more than double in the next few years because of the massive overbuild of the previous administration for the purposes of satisfying the power needs of Wisconsin and Minnesota and disrespecting the needs of Manitoba families. Disrespecting those needs and causing hydro rates to rise as a consequence of massive debt is not evidence of any kind of genuine compassion for the needs of the people of this province.

* (14:00)

Manitoba Public Insurance Rate Increase Request

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): In just a few short weeks, Manitoba Public Insurance will ask the Public Utilities Board for an increase in auto insurance rates for next year that could be anywhere from 4 per cent to 7 per cent, which would be the largest rate hike in vehicle insurance this century.

What steps has the minister responsible for consumer protection taken to try to minimize this increase for Manitoba drivers?

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Crown Services): Well, Madam Speaker, I'd like to thank the member opposite for the question, because he would know that MPI has endured a decade of decay under the former NDP government.

MPI and the PUB will work together to ensure Manitoba ratepayers and taxpayers are protected and served in the most affordable way.

Unlike the member for Minto, our government believes that repairing our services will yield quality results.

Mr. Swan: Well, for the information of the Minister for Crown Services, from 2001 to 2015, Manitobans have enjoyed MPI rates that increased by only one third the rate of the average vehicle insurance rate in Canada.

And I table page 21 of MPI's recent submission to the Public Utilities Board, confirming MPI's successful history over those years.

But now we have a Minister for Crown Services who's already refused to take responsibility for road safety, even though the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson) confirmed it's his job.

Does this Minister of Justice, who's also responsible for consumer protection, think the Minister for Crown Services can refuse to take responsibility for the largest MPI rate hike in two decades?

Mr. Schuler: Well, Madam Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for the question. And he would know, as a former member, that road safety is a collaborative approach. It is between Minister of Justice, Minister of Infrastructure and, of course, the minister responsible for MPI. And I would suggest to all members that it is not just our responsibility as three ministers, but also all Manitobans' responsibility.

And, certainly, as the minister responsible for MPI, I take my responsibility serious. And I would suggest to members they stay posted; we will be making further announcements as we get further into the fall season.

Mr. Swan: Well, I was expecting this kind of non-response from the Minister for Crown Services, so I table a chart showing changes to rates when I was the minister responsible for MPI, including reductions of 4, then 8 per cent, in back-to-back years; in fact, a decrease in MPI premiums of 11.1 per cent over five years.

Now, each year MPI experienced the same interest rate issue it's now telling the Public Utilities Board it has—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Swan: —and they're using that as justification for the largest hike in vehicle insurance in two decades.

I ask again what this minister for consumer protection will do to protect Manitoba drivers: Or just like the Minister for Crown Services, is she closing her eyes and taking her hands off the wheel?

Mr. Schuler: Well, Madam Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for his question. And when it comes to taking the hand off the wheel, that's sort of like the advice he gave the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) when he was the premier.

And I'd like to quote from a newspaper article, dated April 2015, where it says: Everyone is entitled to safety on our roadways. Our police partners will be doing their part to ensure this occurs, and the Manitoba government will continue to focus on education enforcement efforts designed to make our roads safer.

Who was the member who spoke about this collaborative approach, this approach, that it was a government approach with partners? Oh, the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum).

Post-Secondary Tuition Indexed to Rate of Inflation

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): Madam Speaker, I've spoken to post-secondary students in Fort Rouge at the Winnipeg Harvest distribution centre at the Mayfair Recreation Centre. These are students for whom budgets are so tight that they need a food bank to survive. They are making their plans for their education based on assumptions around affordable tuition.

If fees and tuition skyrocket, what will these students do?

Will the Minister of Education commit to respecting the existing legislation and keeping tuition tied to the cost of living?

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): It's a pleasure to come back today, and congratulations to the member for Fort Rouge on his recent marriage, for those that had not heard in the House.

So we are certainly very dedicated to make sure that post-secondary education is affordable in this province, and we are working very closely with the post-secondary institutions to make sure that their funding remains sustainable now and into the future.

Mr. Kinew: I'm glad to hear the minister acknowledge the importance of affordability just a few minutes after we also heard the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) tell us that affordability matters. But specifically, with respect to the portion of education borne by the students, meaning tuition, we've heard some members of the PC caucus muse about potentially letting tuition rise by some 50 per cent.

So will the minister clear the air and provide assurance to the students of Manitoba that they'll act within the law and ensure that tuition is tied to the cost of living?

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question.

And we have been consulting with students, with the post-secondary institutions, about the future of post-secondary education in this province. We will continue to do that, and we are looking forward to working with them both to find a solution that makes funding for post-secondary institutions sustainable now and into the future.

Mr. Kinew: We've heard so much from the government side of the House about how they're indexing the basic personal exemption. See, even I've figured out that that's an applause line and I can get a round of applause from my colleagues on that side. We've also heard them muse about potentially indexing the minimum wage.

So what are they hiding with respect to tuition? Why not commit to indexing tuition to inflation?

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the member's question, and I know he is very much focused on the needs of the students, but the ultimate goal for all students and all Manitobans is that funding for programs becomes sustainable. And I think we only have to look at the long history of deficits and decay with this previous government to know that the current system is not sustainable.

Provincial Nominee Program Application Wait Times

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Last June, the Minister of Education and Training stated in a response to a question that I had asked that there would be 4,000 provincial nominee applications processed by the end of September. It is now October.

My question is to the Minister of Education and Training. Did he keep his commitment in

having these 4,000 provincial nominee applications processed?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I thank the member for the question.

And we have worked very diligently over the summer, and we are on track with our numbers in terms of those that are processed. We continue to get a record number of applications, which I think is a very good sign that people want to move to Manitoba. And, of course, over the summer, as many know, we have had the additional responsibility of helping the Syrian refugees settle as well. So we are on track with our numbers.

Ms. Lamoureux: So just to confirm, that means 4,000 provincial nominee applicants have been processed? What I would like to see from the department is more accountability and more transparency in the processing of nominee applications.

Will the minister inform the House of the number of applicants that the department is currently reviewing, along with the average processing time of an individual's application?

* (14:10)

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Wishart: I certainly agree with the member. We are looking for more transparency and more accountability, and we are working very diligently to come up with a more streamlined approach that will leave applicants with better information much faster.

So I encourage the member to be a little patient, but to look forward to some improvements in the system.

Ms. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the minister is not providing me with concrete answers.

We have had people who have been waiting for over three years, putting their lives on hold, missing out on family reunification, and this isn't acceptable.

Will the minister get me the answers in writing by the end of the week because he cannot stand up in the House today and put the answers on record?

Mr. Wishart: I understand that the member wants results immediately, as do many of the people who have applied. It is a long time to wait, and certainly many of those applications go back well beyond our term as the minister—or as the member probably

understands. But we are working not only to deal with the current backlog, but to find better and newer ways to deal with these application's deadlines.

Elections Amendment Act Election Period Adjustment

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): Bill 4, The Elections Amendment Act, proposes to set a standard 28-day election period from the past 28- to 35-day period.

Can the Minister of Justice please tell the House what impact this simple common-sense but long-delayed change will have on the ability to level the playing field during elections?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I want to thank my honourable friend for his question, and I can tell him definitively that the changes set out in Bill 4 will have a positive impact for all Manitobans.

And we know—fortunately, Madam Speaker, we know that under the NDP, a decade of debt, decay and decline, Manitobans saw a steady erosion to their basic democratic rights. For close to 10 years Manitoba's Chief Electoral Officer recommended a set election period to, she said, level the playing field. Yet members opposite refused to do this for 10 years. They put their own interests ahead of the interests of Manitobans.

We will stand with Manitobans every day.

Northern Manitoba Rail Line Service Reduction Impact

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): My people in the North are in crisis. They've been dealt two major blows this summer with no support from the Province. There's more than just job losses happening in my community.

With the closure of the Port of Churchill comes the scaling down of Hudson Bay rail line to once a week. This line is a critical link between southern and northern Manitoba and a key part of keeping the North integrated. Northern communities, workers, businesses and farmers rely on this line.

Will the Premier (Mr. Pallister) stand up for northerners and push the federal government to save our rail line?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): I do appreciate the question from the member, and I certainly share her concern, and we as a government share her concern about potential job

losses in northern Manitoba and also, certainly, the effects that the closure—reduction in service that the rail line will have.

That's why we as a government have met with communities in the North and talked about possible solutions, if there's a need for food to be flown in or other issues relative to that.

So we as a government are supporting northern Manitoba. We believe we're supporting northern Manitoba more than the previous government did.

Ms. Lathlin: For northerners the cost of food is already more than many can manage. High prices and lack of access mean northerners aren't able to always make healthy food choices. With the one rail line shipping in groceries scaled back to once a week, the already limited supply of fresh produce, dairy and healthy foods is significantly cut back. Northerners deserve better than this.

What will this government do to keep healthy food options accessible up North?

Mr. Cullen: I do appreciate the comments from the member opposite.

We spent some—quite a few visits to Churchill—that community, obviously impacted the most by this reduction in service—and we met with the community leaders. We met with the chamber of commerce. They were certainly positive in terms of our response, in terms of any short-term commitment. But we talked about long-term solutions to the community as well. And if the community wants us to engage in some other activity that might be necessary, we're certainly open to have further discussions on that.

Ms. Lathlin: This government is slowly but surely making life less affordable for Manitobans.

First, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) clawed back the seniors tax rebate, and now he's refusing to fight on behalf of northerners to keep the rail line, killing jobs and increasing the cost of living in the North. A poll shows that more than two thirds of Manitoba—Manitobans agree the government should take ownership of the rail line. This government offers no details on its plans, and this Premier won't even travel to meet with our community members.

Will this government finally side with our northerners by making a real commitment to push for the federal government to save the port?

Mr. Cullen: Again, I appreciate the member's comments. You know, we've had 17 years of NDP government; they've chose to ignore northern Manitoba. We've had a decade of debt, a decade of decay and a decade of decline, especially in northern Manitoba.

This is a new government on this side of the House. We intend to repair our economy. There's great things that can happen in northern Manitoba. We want to diversify the economy, and we're open to any business plans that work for northern Manitoba. As a new government, we're here to repair the services and fix our finances and rebuild the economy, especially in northern Manitoba.

Sale of MTS to Bell Local Service Providers

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): My question is to the Premier.

Madam Speaker, one week ago, the Premier took some time from his busy schedule to have a party with Bell corporate executives. The Premier claims Manitoba companies will be more successful thanks to the Bell-MTS merger. What the Premier fails to mention is that many Winnipeg businesses already have Internet service that's faster than anything that Bell has promised, and they're getting it all from a small, Winnipeg-based company. Our local company called les.net provides customers with high-speed Internet service of up to 100 gigabytes. Bell's service, for the Premier, is one gigabyte, 100 times less. Bell's service is only one gigabyte. The local provider also does it at a fraction of the cost.

If the Premier conducted a value-for-money audit, what company does he think provides more value for money?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): I do appreciate the question from the member opposite.

Certainly there was an announcement. We, and I think a lot of Manitobans, lot of Winnipeggers, thought that was a very—a great announcement in Innovation Alley. And there are some great things happening in Innovation Alley as well. And certainly we as a new government are looking forward to working with the entrepreneurs in Innovation Alley.

And I think, you know, the Bell-MTS deal, they have signalled a tremendous investment in Manitoba over the next few years: a billion-dollar investment. Now, that is going to create jobs for Manitobans.

That's going to create jobs for small Manitobans. That is exactly what we're doing as a government: growing the business, growing the economy here in Manitoba; Bell-MTS will do that.

Mr. Maloway: The Premier doesn't recognize that the local Manitoba service is 100 times as fast. The Premier admits that the consumers may more end up paying more.

Why does the Premier think it's okay for Manitobans to pay more for worse service when companies in Innovation Alley can already pay less for better service? Why isn't this Premier putting Manitoba companies and consumers first?

* (14:20)

Mr. Cullen: Again, I appreciate the comments from the member opposite.

You know, Bell has made some commitments to all of Manitoba. And there's some great things potentially happening in Winnipeg, rural Manitoba and northern Manitoba, and they've made indications that they will be placing broadband services, increased services in northern Manitoba. We think that is a great opportunity to allow northern Manitobans in to grow—build the economy. There's great potential in this particular deal. We think it's going to be good for Manitobans, and Manitobans think its good for Manitobans.

Mr. Maloway: My final question to the Premier is this: Innovation Alley is supposed to be the Winnipeg starting point for Bell's rollout in this province, and, Madam Speaker, this isn't a rollout; it's a rollover.

Why is the Premier helping a major corporation undermine an outstanding local success story?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, I'm pleased to comment on the member's topic, Madam Speaker, because it demonstrates a clear flip-flop on the part of the members opposite who spent 17 years, the last 17 years, attacking the Manitoba-MTS at every opportunity in order to attack them and criticize them every step of the way.

We're not going to do that on this side. We believe in working with Manitoba companies. We're pleased to know that the western Canadian head office of the new company should be formed, will be located here in Winnipeg in Manitoba.

But I think the member opposite goes further, because the truth of the position the member is

taking and he and his colleagues are advocating is that they are advocating for slower services to be available to Manitobans. We are advocating for faster services, and they are advocating for lower coverage so that the people in the North and in parts of Manitoba that have not had service should continue to do without service under the NDP's position. We don't support that. We're for better service. We're for faster service. We're for better competitive opportunities for Manitoba's small businesses in Manitoba.

Hospital Parking Fees Health-Care Barrier

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Once again, Madam Speaker, this Premier is missing the point. Today we're talking about affordability, and Manitobans care about having an affordable place to live and raise their family. He's missing that point.

The one aspect that all Manitobans can agree on: the most important part of affordability for them and their families is keeping health care universal, public and accessible to everyone.

As I mentioned in this House, just in the spring, a huge barrier to accessibility for families is parking at hospitals. The Minister of Health will remember my constituent Dennis [*phonetic*] and his late granddaughter Candice [*phonetic*], whose illness was made all the more difficult on her family by the outrageous hospital parking fees. These fees make daily hospital visits a financial as well as an emotional burden.

Will the minister agree that—today—that how much is in someone's wallet should not be a barrier to access in this health-care system.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I agree, Madam Speaker, with the member's assertion that—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Pallister: The member speaks about what's in Manitobans' pockets. The only time that the NDP care what's in Manitobans' pockets is when they're grabbing taxes out of Manitobans' pockets.

Affordability is affected by things like jacking up taxes on people's home insurance. The members opposite jacked up the taxes on every homeowner in Manitoba by 7, and then by 8 per cent. Affordability is affected by people, working families, working people, paying for their benefits at work to protect

their family in case of a death or a disability. The members opposite cared so little about that, they jacked up the cost of those benefits by 7, and then by 8 per cent. They did this in dozens of other categories. They taxed Manitobans to the max.

So let's not make the argument that they care today about affordability. They never acted like they did when they were in government, and they can't pretend they care now.

We do, and we'll continue to fight for Manitobans to have more money on the kitchen table and not have to put so much more on the Cabinet table.

Madam Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Bell's Purchase of MTS

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

The background of the petition is as follows:

Manitoba Telephone System is currently a fourth cellular carrier used by Manitobans along with the big national three carriers: Telus, Rogers and Bell.

In Toronto with only the big three national companies controlling the market, the average five-gigabyte unlimited monthly cellular package is \$117 as compared to Winnipeg where MTS charges only \$66 for the same package.

Losing MTS will mean less competition and will result in higher costs for all cellphone packages in the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to do all that is possible to prevent the Bell takeover of MTS and preserve a more competitive cellphone market so that cellular bills for Manitobans do not increase unnecessarily.

This petition is signed by many fine Manitobans.

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

Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, we would like to call Bill 4 for second reading.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced by the Government House Leader that this House will consider Bill 4 this afternoon, second reading of Bill 4, The Elections Amendment Act.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 4—The Elections Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader—oh, the honourable Minister of Justice.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade (Mr. Cullen), that the elections—that Bill 4, The Elections Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi électorale, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and put a few words on the record with respect to Bill 4, a bill that I believe is in the best interest of all Manitobans.

Madam Speaker, fair elections are a cornerstone of any healthy democracy and, unfortunately, under the past NDP decade of debt, decay and decline, Manitobans saw a steady erosion of their basic democratic rights.

The NDP, Madam Speaker, took away workers' basic democratic right to a secret ballot. The NDP took away the right of all Manitobans to vote on major tax increases, and we saw that with their decision to raise the PST without going back to Manitobans and asking Manitobans what they felt about that. We saw in the last election how Manitobans felt about that.

For close to 10 years, Madam Speaker, the—Manitoba's Chief Electoral Officer has recommended a set election period to, and in her words, level the playing field. Each and every year the NDP refused to implement this and each and every year the NDP put their own political interests and advantages

ahead of the public interest in Manitoba. It's very unfortunate.

Madam Speaker, Manitobans elected our new Progressive Conservative government that is focused on fixing the finances, repairing services and rebuilding our economy. Restoring and strengthening basic democratic rights and implementing a new, more open government is part of achieving those very goals.

Madam Speaker, our Progressive Conservative team is proud of this proposed legislation that will strengthen democracy for all Manitobans. The proposed legislation establishes a standard 28-day election period for a set date general election from a variable period from 29 to 35 days, the way it was before. Our legislation shortens the election period for a by-election or a general election that does not occur on a fixed date to between 28 and 34 days from the current 32 to 39 days.

* (14:30)

This amendment strikes a balance between flexibility and increased efficiency and fairness in all—in a call for a by-election, understanding they do not occur on a fixed date. By-elections do not fall on a fixed date and flexibility is required to ensure by-election voting days fall on a Tuesday, the day of the week in which provincial elections are held in our province.

There are a number of examples when elections do not fall on a fixed date. For example, if the NDP's so-called rebellion had been genuine it would've resulted in a vote of non-confidence in the Legislature rather than the NDP leadership fiasco that took place. If principle had been the issue for the NDP, there would've been a general election that did not fall on a fixed election date. By allowing a 28 to 34-day period, fairness is increased while retaining flexibility to ensure the election day falls on a Tuesday regardless of what day the NDP vote had taken place, the non-confidence vote.

So, Madam Speaker, we are proud to put the public interest first and to help level the playing field for future elections. We're committed to making Manitoba Canada's most improved province, making Manitoban families safer and stronger.

The set period of an election proposed in this legislation act as a simple change requested by the Chief Electoral Officer for almost 10 years now. The recommendation for the set election period appears in the 2007, '08, '09, '10, '11, '12, '13, '14 and

'15 elections Manitoba annual reports. The Chief Electoral Officer put forward concise reasoning for this change in each of these annual reports, and I know members opposite have read those reports, I'm sure, and understand where the Chief Electoral Officer was coming from.

Elections Manitoba, Madam Speaker, indicated, and I quote: "Eliminating the possibility of a variable election period would further level the playing field while also providing clarity for all stakeholders." End quote.

Madam Speaker, Elections Manitoba also notes in their recommendation that, and I quote: "A set election period would also assist in recruiting election officials and may also assist in the recruitment of volunteer campaign workers." End quote.

Madam Speaker, Elections Manitoba stated a fixed election period, and I quote: "Would also assist campaigns to better manage expenses incurred in the non-election period, thereby preventing allocation issues of expenses between reimbursable election expenses and non-reimbursable non-election period expenses." End quote.

It is important also, Madam Speaker, to note Elections Manitoba recommendation identifies, and I quote: "BC and Ontario also have set election dates and have a set election period of 28 and 29 days respectively." End quote.

This text appeared in the Elections Manitoba 2007 report, meaning the NDP has lagged behind our provincial neighbours in improving the fairness of elections for almost a decade, which is very unfortunate for democracy in our province.

But we're going to do the right thing. We have introduced this bill, and in summation, Madam Speaker, our new PC government is focused on fixing the finances, repairing the services, rebuilding our economy and restoring and strengthening basic democratic rights and implementing a new, more open government initiative as part of achieving these goals.

We are committed to these challenges and we are committed to making Manitoba a better place to live, work and raise our families.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Questions

Madam Speaker: A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the minister by any member in the following sequence: first question by the official opposition critic or designate, subsequent questions asked by critics or designates from other recognized opposition parties, subsequent questions asked by each independent member, remaining questions asked by any opposition members, and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I think we can all agree that the move to setting a date for general elections does make sense. This was the second election under that system, and I think it is an improvement.

I want to ask the minister, though, about two situations. For general elections that are not held or not set—held on a fixed date, that can happen to a government voluntarily or involuntarily. Is this minister going to amend this act to provide that a government cannot voluntarily provoke an election?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I believe, in the event that a government is to fall—I think that's where the member is going—what happens is if, for example, the government falls on a Monday, that's why within the legislation it offers a range of 28 to 34 days in the event that the government falls on a day that is outside of a Tuesday.

Mr. Swan: My question, though, for the minister is that we have seen in certain jurisdictions that governments, despite there being a set date for the election, have deliberately provoked an early election, and if that happens, the government then gets back to all the things we try to avoid by having a set election date.

This bill would shorten the date for that campaign, which gives an additional advantage to the government. My question is whether this minister will amend the bill to provide that a longer period would apply if the government forces voluntarily an earlier election date.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, we're a government of openness and transparency, and we have an open government initiative which is part of my mandate, as the critic is aware. We are—it is not in my mandate to move in that kind of a direction. That would not be an example of an open government.

So that is why we are putting this legislation forward and we have other legislation coming forward as well. Some has been introduced and some will be introduced in the months and years ahead towards that open government initiative.

And so that's why within this legislation—and, again, this is something that the NDP refused to do and refused to change for almost 10 years despite the fact that the electoral—the Chief Electoral Officer asked—

Madam Speaker: Member's time—minister's time has expired.

Mr. Swan: If the member is truly talking about having an open government, as she's doing today, I would think she'd be prepared to commit that her government or any successive Manitoba government would not be able to game the system—if I can call it that—and call an early election and then take advantage of a shorter election period.

The question I have for this minister is whether she'd be prepared to amend the bill to find a way to prevent a government from going early, from causing a circumstance which would allow them to avoid the other rules for set elections and come up with an earlier date now with a much shorter election frame.

Mrs. Stefanson: I want to thank the—my honourable friend for the question. It's a good one.

And I think it's important to note that we were a government that was elected on our open government policies and ideas, Madam Speaker, and that is how we intend to govern this province. We know that members opposite went around Manitobans. In fact, they took away their right to vote on tax increases and the PST increase. We are not a government that is looking to change the rule—to—we're not looking to try and circumvent the rules.

Mr. Swan: Well, the minister's comments actually suggest otherwise. If this minister would simply go on the record and confirm that she will never be part of a government that would provoke an early election, I guess I won't have to ask the question. But since it appears she won't do that, I'm again going ask her if she'd consider amending the bill to improve it to prevent a government of any stripe in Manitoba from getting around the benefit of set election dates by provoking an early election.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, Madam Speaker, there are various things that—and it's part of a democratic

society—where there will be a trigger, there could be a trigger. In the event of a minority government, a government can fall. And under those circumstances, of course, we already see within this legislation that it takes care of that. If the government was to fall on, say, a Monday, then that would be a 29-day writ period.

So I just want to say to my friend that, you know, I believe that it's already within the scope and it's answered within the existing legislation.

* (14:40)

Madam Speaker: One moment, please.

The Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade (Mr. Cullen) was indicating he wanted to ask a question, but he would need leave of the House to do so. Is there leave?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

The honourable member for Minto (Mr. Swan).

Mr. Swan: Well, again, we won't get an answer from this minister with—about her new supposedly open government, but she won't commit either to not calling an early election or to putting rules in to prevent that from happening. The minister does, though, raise another possibility, which is a government falling. Although it's not a day I've marked on my calendar, 1988 is when that occurred. The government of the day fell, and it was then necessary for the party going into election to find a new leader, which involved taking more time and a process that, no matter how efficient, any party could run it, would take a great amount of time.

So I wonder, has the minister considered, perhaps unlikely in the next four years, but, if that was to happen, and the government of the day was to fall, does she think a shorter period—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable Minister of Justice.

Mrs. Stefanson: I just want to go back to what I had mentioned and remind the member that this was asked for. This is something that the Chief Electoral Officer has asked for for 10 years, in this province, Madam Speaker, and it was in several annual reports for the last nine, 10 years. And, of course, members opposite chose not to move in that direction.

It should be noticed—noted, though, in terms of—because the member talked about the 28-day period maybe being too short. So I just want to refer to the Elections Manitoba recommendation that identifies that BC and Ontario also have set election days that have a set election period of 28 and 29 days, respectively. So we're certainly within that range.

Mr. Swan: I understand that. I certainly respect the position of Elections Manitoba, but it's this Legislature that decides the rules. The member has had 10 years to prepare for this moment, and I've asked her to consider whether there should be some consideration given when a government falls and the previously governing party has to go and find a new leader in the course of the election period.

I simply want to know: Has she contemplated this? Has she consulted with any—about this, and can we expect the government to bring forward amendments or should the opposition then, of course, bring forward those amendments at committee?

Mrs. Stefanson: Of course, it's members opposite democratic right, if they want to bring forward an amendment, they're able to do so at the appropriate time. And—but I just want to say that, again, Madam Speaker, members opposite had 10 years to bring forward this kind of legislation. It's a fairly simple piece of legislation. It does the right thing. It's a benefit to all Manitobans when it comes to protecting their democratic rights and the time that they have within the writ period to understand the various aspects of political parties and so on. And so I would encourage members opposite to support this legislation. It's an important one that certainly the Chief Electoral Officer has been asking for for many, many years.

Mr. Swan: Well, thank you, and all right. I hear what the minister has to say, and I'm a little disappointed. She's quick to blame the previous government, but she comes to the House after what she says is 10 years without anything that, I think, has a reasonable answer on a realistic question on an event that happened in Manitoba's recent history.

But let me just ask the minister: Has she consulted with anybody else other than using the Elections Manitoba report?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, and I want to thank the member for the question. It is an important one, and, of course, we did campaign in the last election on an open government initiative, which included talking about some changes to our electoral system. And

that's exactly what we're doing. We're taking the recommendations, as set forth by the Chief Electoral Officer.

We consulted with Manitobans throughout the election campaign. We went door to door. We heard loud and clear that they were tired of an old NDP government that didn't listen to Manitobans.

And so that's exactly what we have done. We have listened to Manitobans, and that's why we're bringing this forward for Manitobans. It will benefit all Manitobans.

Mr. Swan: Well, maybe I missed something. Did the minister campaign, when she went door to door, telling people that this PC government would leave the door open to calling an early election if it suited their convenience? And I'd like to know whether that was something that she went and told people when she was knocking on doors in Tuxedo.

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the member for the question. And, of course, I think the member went, I'm sure, door to door in Minto and maybe other ridings in the province during the election period, and he probably heard from many Manitobans that they were tired of an NDP government that wasn't open to new ideas, that didn't listen, that had forgotten about basic democratic rights for Manitobans, Manitobans we heard loud and clear at the door when they were concerned about their basic democratic right being taken away when the NDP decided to strip away their right to vote on any major tax increases, and then they turned around and they raised the PST. We heard loud and clear from Manitobans that they—

Madam Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

Any further questions?

Debate

Madam Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 4 today. I've listened carefully to the minister's comments. I think we can start with common ground, and I think we can all agree that the move over the past number of years to move to a set election date is a good thing for democracy. It's certainly more convenient for Elections Manitoba as they can prepare for a set date to have those elections occur. I think we can also agree that there are some advantages to the people of Manitoba in that everybody knows when the election is going to happen and the government of the day is limited in

terms of its ability to call an election at any other date. I am, I must say, Madam Speaker, a little concerned when I asked the minister what I thought were reasonable questions about the possibility of a government, despite the set election date, pulling the plug early. We've seen governments across the country do that if they think it's their political advantage, which would defeat the entire purpose of moving ahead to set election dates.

So I will—I'll read the Hansard carefully to see exactly how the minister framed this, but that may very well be something that New Democrats will be proposing either at committee or as a report stage amendment to further enhance the democratic nature of this bill.

And I want to correct the record to some extent. Our NDP government actually went to great lengths to make the electoral process more transparent and more accountable over our years in government. And in some cases, we were able to get consensus in this House, and I think that was positive. Many other ways, when we move the goalposts on democracy and openness and transparency, it was actually the Progressive Conservative Party that stood in the way of that and tried to prevent what I believe are very, very important advances for democracy in this province.

And we began that process soon after the election by going ahead and banning union and corporate donations and limiting individual contributions. We thought that made sense, that people should not be able to buy elections. There has to be limits on those amounts. And we thought it was fair to ban both corporate and union donations to make it very, very clear that it's individuals writing cheques or handing over money or buying tickets, whatever it might be, to participate in the democratic process.

And, of course, the Progressive Conservatives—and the member was in this House all the way along—she as well as her colleagues opposed that ban on union and corporate donations, and they refused to make a commitment to keep that ban in place ever since. And, in fact, it's gone the other way when we heard the Premier (Mr. Pallister), prior to the election, musing that maybe the \$3,000-a-year limit for individuals to donate to political parties, maybe that's too low.

* (14:50)

Maybe he's got a whole number of people who want to give more money. Maybe there's some lawyers just waiting to get their silken robes, which was what we discussed this morning when there's so many important issues affecting Manitobans. Maybe they've got a bunch of lawyers lined up who want to become Queen's Counsel who are going to write bigger cheques to this new government. We don't think that big money in politics is appropriate, and I'm very pleased that over the years we were able to change Manitoba's election laws to make them more democratic.

We know that the commissioner has been provided with broader discretion to ensure compliance with the act and that enforcement process was made more transparent, which was a positive thing.

We thought it was very important to make sure there's a fair redistribution of boundaries every 10 years. The population of Manitoba is growing, and as we know it's growing at a pace not seen in a long, long time, if ever, and we know that some of the impacts can be a change in the number of people living in each area. And that's why as a government we expanded representation on the electoral boundaries commission to include rural and northern Manitobans by adding the heads of Brandon University and the University College of the North as part of that commission. And we think that's really important to make sure that everything's taken into account when those boundaries are redistributed.

And we also expanded Elections Manitoba's role to include the promotion of participation. I hope that by having set election dates by continuing to move the goal posts, that encourages more Manitobans to vote. But we know Elections Manitoba has a role.

And, of course, to comparing and contrast that with the last days of Stephen Harper when he actually forbade Elections Canada from taking steps to encourage participation and get more people out to the polls because they knew what was coming, and that may be how it looks in exactly four years and two days—not that I'm counting the time until the next provincial election in Manitoba.

And I know the member. I'm disappointed that she ignored the many other things that were done as we move forward to make democracy stronger. We introduced amendments to allow polls to open an hour earlier at 7 a.m., recognizing that not all Manitobans work 8 to 4 or 9 to 5, that more days

open on election day allows more people to exercise their democratic right.

We added the number of additional days for advance voting and we also improved access to advance polls in rural and northern areas so that residents in the community would never have to travel more than 30 kilometres to an advance poll.

And, of course, what else did we do? Well, many other things. We removed restrictions for advanced voting so anybody could vote in advance for any reason. You don't have to convince then electoral officer that you're going on holiday, you're writing an exam. You can show up and cast your vote just as you can on election day.

We increased the number of locations of advance polls and the days in which they can be open and, frankly, Madam Speaker, one of the biggest steps in trying to get Manitobans to the polls was enabling super polls in places like universities and malls, and even the airport where Manitobans, no matter which part of the province they live in, can go to one of these places and can cast their vote in their home riding. And I know in my area, not that far from Polo Park, I know we had hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people, many of the young people who took advantage of that advance poll at Polo Park and at the universities.

We extended absentee voting. We placed more voting stations in apartment complexes and we reduced the average number of voters in a rural voting area from 350 to 250, all of which was in keeping with Elections Manitoba, but also in keeping with democratic principles.

And, you know, we moved a lot on respecting citizen choice. We implemented a requirement for an MLA who crosses the floor to sit as an independent rather than joining another caucus unless a by-election is held. And, you know, it's early on in the days of this new 40-member government caucus. This might come in to play over the next couple of months, and if we have another day like today I could imagine why that might just happen.

We also implemented a requirement of municipal councillors to resign a nomination when they're seeking another position to avoid conflict.

And, of course, we did a number of other things, and I could go on for some time. But let me just say that when the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson) stands up and says, well, the New Democratic Party didn't do anything on this, there is about two hours

that I could go on and talk about the steps that we took.

So I know we get partisan. I know we debate, but I'd like to encourage the Minister of Justice maybe to temper her comments in future. If she wants to criticize the past government, that is the way this works, but I would encourage the minister—especially given her role as Attorney General—not to paint with such a broad brush because that, indeed, is not the way to motivate Manitobans to become involved politically.

So, indeed, we know that even recently there's been lots of discussion with how best to improve the electoral process. We know there's another bill, which was put forward. In fact, I believe it was the first bill the government put forward, which was on shortening the amount of time to call a by-election. And, of course, we know that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) had a couple of different positions on that, depending on, I guess, what time of year it was. We know that when our government actually called a very, very early by-election in Fort Whyte out of respect for the political process and out of respect for the Premier, but what did the—then the candidate for Fort Whyte do? He complained bitterly. He complained bitterly. How dare we call a by-election in August because everybody knows that August is family time? Well, for people who work for a living, you know, August is often a time when they're working and they're trying to find child care or other options for their children. They may be doing any one of a number of things.

I thought it was fascinating we had a premier who complained about a by-election being called too soon, and then a few months later he complained about by-elections being called too slowly. So now we have 180 days. That's fine; we can move on. I do have some concerns as I've indicated in my questions to the minister about specific examples. And I appreciate that Elections Manitoba has come forward with these ideas. I would like the minister to consider a bit further the matters that I've put on the record to make sure that whatever we do is going to bind all future governments of all future political stripes to make sure that we're using this opportunity to get it right.

So, Madam Speaker, I'm not going to use anywhere close to my time. I could spend the rest of time correcting the record, but I've already done that for several minutes. It would take hours, I suppose, to do that completely. What I think is very important

is that we keep moving forward with democracy. I think this bill could be improved, and it should be improved. I've invited the minister to do some more work to improve the bill. If she won't do it, then, certainly, we will propose amendments, and we'll expect those reasonable amendments, which could have major impact on Manitobans, to be taken seriously by the government of the day.

So we are prepared to have this bill move on to committee, to have a good discussion, to hear from the public and to hear if there are other ideas for amendments that could make this bill even better.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): Speaking to Bill 4, The Elections Amendment Act, because fair elections are the cornerstone of any healthy democracy, and having been through three provincial elections, it's always an honour to be elected by your constituents and to have that open and fair debate that we do have during elections, and certainly the 2007, 2011 elections were different to start with because they were at the premier's call, the former, former premier and then the former premier again in '11. It was at their call.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

It was a—the guessing game was on, and certainly with this, you know, Elections Amendment Act, will make it far more predictable as to when it will be. And this past election in April, after a six-month delay when the NDP tried their best to buy all of Manitobans' votes over that period, millions and millions of dollars' worth of empty promises to Manitobans, it was certainly an honour to form government, be part of forming government by the people of Manitoba.

One only has to look at the election in the US right now to see the differences between the Canadian system and the American system. The presidential election, all I'll say about that is it's an interesting affair to watch. Who knows what the outcome of it will be, but it's by all accounts—let's just say it's very interesting to watch. The—any of us who have been to conferences with our American counterparts in the legislatures down there know that money plays a huge role in the American elections, much—a lot more money than would ever be dreamt about in our Canadian elections, in our provincial elections, for sure, and—but that's their system, and it's working for them and so, good on them.

* (15:00)

But we—what this bill does and further measures that we've done is to put some predictability back into the calling of elections and by-elections. I noticed the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) talking about donation limits and, if the member for Minto was truly fair and went back to look at donations to the parties, he would have to admit that once the Progressive Conservative Party started to out-fundraise the NDP, that's when they decided to bring in a vote tax, so that they could tax all of Manitobans for—because they didn't have the courage to go to the doors, or didn't have the ambition, or the courage, whatever it was, to go to Manitobans and ask them directly for a donation.

And so there was—instead, they thought it was simpler just to tax Manitobans. And it's one thing you can always count on the NDP; there was never a tax they didn't like. And so this—and just to make sure that everyone's aware: the Progressive Conservative Party never did take the vote tax, and we're going to do away with that, and it will be better for all of Manitobans and for all candidates going forward in future elections.

But just, you know, just a note on by-elections, too, that putting some predictability back into by-elections. We had the bill yesterday where there's a set time limit to call a by-election. My colleague from Morris constituency had to wait 360 days before the former premier would call an election, and, as many of us will remember, the summer of 2013 was an interesting summer in this House—that we spent all summer in this House debating the unfair tax, the PST increase that the former government decided to bring forward without a vote, without giving Manitobans the vote to it. But I guess they thought that it was to their advantage not to call a by-election and leave that particular seat, Morris—seat vacant so that they thought it would give them an advantage, but, as we saw, that really didn't help them in the long run.

The—I remember very well the by-elections being called, in both Morris and Arthur-Virden, just right at Christmastime, wonderfully cold weather. It certainly was interesting doing door knocking and going door to door when it was 30 below and the wind was howling. I remember travelling with the member from Morris, giving him a hand there, and people really did appreciate both the member from Morris and our party, as a whole, coming out, taking the effort to reach out to Manitobans. And, of

course, we know we were very successful in both constituencies and our party is much better off with both those members being called. But the point is is that that's how this bill and the Bill 2—or bill—the previous bill will help ensure predictability for Manitobans for both by-elections and for general elections.

The NDP, under their decade of debt, decay and decline, it certainly didn't give Manitobans any comfort about the erosion of their democratic rights under this former government. Just a couple of examples: The NDP took away the workers' basic democratic right to a secret ballot. They seem—the NDP seems to think that secret ballots are not a good thing, so that's—I think that that is a hit on democracy right there: if you don't agree with secret ballots. The NDP took away the right to vote, as I mentioned, on major tax increases. They increased the PST to 8 per cent, a 14 per cent increase in taxes to all of Manitoba. That was after they broadened it to include home insurance and so many other essentials that Manitobans buy each and every day and need for their everyday living. The—there is allegations of trading votes for jobs, from the NDP. The recent NDP leadership—the rebellion leadership debate was plagued with allegations of vote tampering.

They're—they had a—an NDP member out there coercing people to—how to vote, and then that person—instead of taking sanctions against that person for their actions, they actually promoted that person into the key post on their campaign team. So I guess that speaks a lot about what their idea of democracy is; it's whatever they can get away with, that's what they will try and do.

So for—in regards to this bill the—Elections Manitoba—the Chief Electoral Officer has recommended a set election period to level the playing field, and that works for every party that wants to run in an election or every candidate that wants to run in an election, whether they're affiliated with a party or not. But it helps to level of playing field in that they know that this will be—that the period of time, this will be when the election is and when it will be—how long it will be, and it helps campaigns' budget. It helps them prepare much better. And but, you know, the—Manitoba's Chief Electoral Officer recommended this for many years and yet the NDP always put their own political interests ahead of everyone else.

We are—this government—this Progressive Conservative government, we are very much focused

on fixing the finances, repairing the services and rebuilding our economy for all Manitobans. And this is what matters to Manitoba families, and we are listening to Manitoba families each and every day, and we will respond to help Manitoba families. It's about strengthening democracy for all Manitobans, and we will continue to do that.

This proposed legislation establishes a standard 28-day election period for a fixed—I should say a set date for a general election. The NDP always liked to have fixed elections. I prefer to use the term set election dates, but this is changing from a variable of 29 to 35 days. And, by doing this, if you have a standard 28-day election period, it allows all candidates, no matter what party, no matter whether they're affiliated with a party or whether they're independent or—as long as they meet Elections Manitoba criteria to become a candidate, it puts an amount of fairness back into it, because they can then budget, they can—but not only budget their campaign funds but they can budget their time and budget to be able to become candidates and to run as candidates in an election. And the more candidates we have, the better the elections and the more democracy is served in Manitobans.

This legislation also shortens the election period for a by-election to between 28 and 34 days from the standard 32 to 39. Again, for that—it helps to strike that balance by providing efficiency and fairness in the calling of the by-election and also retains flexibility given by-election voting days do not occur on a fixed date. So this helps the candidates.

By-elections are very much different than the general election where the general election you have lots of publicity on it; the media follows it very closely. Sometimes by-elections are not followed as closely by the media as what a general election was. So this provides some certainty back to those candidates who are willing to put their names forward on the ballot, and we want to do everything we can to make sure that people have certainty when they are willing to put their names on the ballot, because it does take a lot of time and effort on behalf of those people.

It's about putting the public interest first and helping to level the playing field for the future elections in Manitoba. And this is what is so important; it's putting some faith back in the election system that the NDP has eroded so badly with—over the last number of years. And we need to help restore

the confidence of Manitobans in our electoral system here in Manitoba.

*(15:10)

And, as I mentioned, with the media interest in the US election, in the recent federal election, candidates are under increasing scrutiny all the time. So anything we can do to help develop some certainty for those candidates when they do put their name forward is certainly important.

This is just another one of those things that this government will do in helping to make Manitoba Canada's most improved province and in helping making Manitoba families safer and stronger. There are many measures we can do, and this is just another one of those, and it helps to put certainty back in the electoral system in Manitoba and helps to build the confidence of Manitobans in those candidates who run and also in governments who win—no matter who wins the election, because this is going forward into future elections.

So these—this has been recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer for many years, going back almost 10 years that this has been proposed, and yet the—I've been to Elections Manitoba committee meetings here in the committee room, and this has been put forward by the Chief Electoral Office—Officer many times. Elections Manitoba has indicated that this is eliminating the possibility of a variable election period, would further level the playing field, while also providing clarity for all stakeholders.

So we're taking the advice of Elections Manitoba, who are very good at managing and running elections across the province. And anything we can do to help provide clarity is what we should be doing, and that's what this bill helps to do.

There's other positive effects of bills such as this, and that's that it'll help assist Elections Manitoba in recruiting election officials. There's always this uncertainty, Elections Manitoba—it will assist Elections Manitoba to provide some certainty in not only the date for the employment period that they need employees for for the election period, whether it's an election or whether it's a by-election, general election or a by-election, but it puts some certainty in there when they're going out to hire people and for those people knowing that they will have some certainty as to how long they will be employed.

But it also—it helps in the recruitment of volunteers. And we all know, as elected officials,

that we don't do this by ourselves. We depend very much on volunteers to help us become the candidates to run our campaigns. And we know, as MLAs in here and as candidates, that you just can't thank your volunteers enough. And any time we can give our volunteers some certainty, that will help engage people in the election process. And we need as many people as possible engaged in the election process. That will help drive up the numbers of people voting when they lose that cynicism that they have many times about the political process. If we can get them involved as volunteers, get them involved in working with Elections Manitoba, if they're looking for some employment, this will help build democracy in Manitoba.

And so, when we have a great amount of certainty built into this, it certainly helps the democratic process in Manitoba. BC and Ontario have already have set election dates and a set election period of 28 and 29 days, respectfully, so this is not necessarily a new concept. It's being done in other provinces.

And, again, I just want to reiterate, this has really been asked for by Elections Manitoba for many years, and asked for in a roundabout way, if I can put it that way, by Manitobans, because they do want to be involved in here. And, with certainty in the election period and in the election call, it will help to increase voter participation across Manitoba. And we're all better off for that.

We know that in this job as elected officials it's not us that determine who comes in here, but it's the people around us, the teams that you build and the support that you can build for your candidacy that makes us successful here.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would certainly encourage all members of this Chamber to support this bill. This is a great step forward, long asked for by Elections Manitoba, and it deserves the support of all elected members, because democracy in Manitoba will be better off for it.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Bill 4 removes the government's ability to call an election on the date of their choosing while shortening the possible writ period by seven days. It does, however, permit by-elections and general elections without a fixed date to be called with very little notice to candidates and voters.

Whenever a bill is discussed, the first thing I like to ask myself is how would Manitobans feel about

this, and we need to consult with them and speak with them. Elections can be very overwhelming and complicated. People struggle between differentiating between provincial, federal and municipal elections. Residents of Manitoba deserve to have sufficient time to make informed opinions, voting decisions and having an opportunity to meet all the candidates.

The community that I represent, the riding of Burrows, has 7,256 homes. Now, do to some basic math, if you spend three minutes, on average, at each home, it calculates to 363 hours of door knocking. Now, you also have to consider the time of day. You can't knock on doors at 7 a.m., waking people up. A person has to use discretion. Try to imagine knocking on 7,000-plus doors, spending a fair amount at each door speaking with Manitobans, and not going into the dark hours of the night. Those seven days are essential.

Now, I'm aware you can knock on doors in advance, and I'm a strong advocate for it. However, with that said, I can speak from experience that unless you are the incumbent, Manitobans don't start getting excited to meet the candidates until the signs start going up and brochures start being dropped in the mailboxes. Shortening the writ period is an unfair advantage for the incumbent or, rather, the governing party.

A couple more important aspects of the upcoming election to consider is, one, there will be a redrawing of the constituency boundaries.

Let's bring this back to point. Shortening the writ period is not only going to inhibit constituents from getting to know their candidates, it's going to complicate things on top of the boundary change. And, secondly, nowhere on the bill does it discuss the spending limit during the writ period. As of right now, candidates and parties are given a specific amount of funds that they can spend only once the writ is dropped. This was designed with the former legislation. I believe that finances would need to be adjusted and made note of in the bill before it should even be considered. I am, however, looking forward to learning more about the bill in committee and am open to it.

Thank you.

Mr. Blair Yakimoski (Transcona): I am standing here in support of Bill 4, The Elections Amendment Act, and it's very nice to see that we agree that fixed-date elections or set-date elections are good for everybody. I think the big concern here that we have

is making sure that we have a standard regularly and listening to what the Chief Electoral Officer has put forward for us.

It's—I agree with the member from Minto; the previous government did end union and corporate deductions, but then they instituted the vote tax which had that previous government reaching into Manitobans' pockets to fund their operations, and I'm very glad that we're making a change towards that.

Fair elections are a cornerstone of our healthy democracy, and we all want to ensure that that continues moving forward. The previous government, we know, did take away some of the basic democratic rights of Manitobans. The institution of the—the term I'm looking for is misleading on the PST and instituting it on insurance, home insurance and car insurance and haircuts and then increasing the PST—we want to make sure that we're open and accountable, and, hopefully, this does that. Also, the NDP had workers—we want to also reinstate the secret ballot when it comes to union certification, and we're looking forward to that.

The big concern that I see with this previously, and I'm glad that we're following the recommendation of the Chief Electoral Officer. For many years, 2007 through 2015, the Chief Electoral Officer stated that we should be putting this in place. And I can't say I don't know why it wasn't done.

*(15:20)

It is a concern that it seems to be a regular thing that the previous government didn't listen to some of the recommendations. It seems, as the member from Wolseley has said, it's just a—he mentioned it a few minutes ago—it's just seven days. And, if it was really not necessary, I would ask him, why would the Chief Electoral Officer have recommended it for so many years? So I'm glad we're moving forward with that.

It also leads towards some of the Auditor General reports. When I was in Yellowknife earlier on this year on a public accounts committee conference, I had the opportunity to speak to some auditor generals from other jurisdictions, and they also had mentioned to me that they were concerned that the previous government was failing, as the Premier (Mr. Pallister) had mentioned during question period, to institute some of the recommendations. So I'm glad that our government is doing that.

We know that this law, or this bill, will level the playing field during elections, and I give credit to anybody that puts their name forward. And it's nice to be able to have a standard election date as well as an election writ period where we can organize and plan and budget accordingly, and this ensures that. And this legislation, as we see, establishes 28 days for the fixed-date general elections, as recommended.

The Elections Manitoba also mentioned that this works towards eliminating the possibility of a variable election period—we again, levelling the playing field and providing clarity to all Manitobans.

A set election period, as mentioned, would assist in recruiting election officials. Knowing in advance how many employees you're going to need and being able to plan for that during the 28 days benefits Elections Manitoba, and that probably had quite the bearing in why they made those recommendations on so, so many years. It's glad to see that we're following the lead; British Columbia and Ontario have already had this, and we're putting it in place, and I'm very glad for that.

The questions I would really like to know is why did the previous government not do it, but it really doesn't matter, I guess, moving forward, as we are looking to making sure that we're accountable and transparent to Manitobans and taking care of this at this point. Manitobans will benefit from this on many levels, as was mentioned by previous members, and I'm very proud that our government is working towards that level.

I am truly very happy that the present government is working to the benefit of all Manitobans and is listening to the long-standing advice of the Chief Electoral Officer to implement this recommendation.

I thank you for allowing me to speak on this, Mr. Speaker. Manitobans, in April, elected a new Progressive Conservative government focused on fixing finances and repairing services and rebuilding our economy, restoring and strengthening basic democratic rights, and implementing more and new open government as a part of achieving these goals. Bill 4, as moved by the Justice Minister, moves towards that. I thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there any other members wishing to put words on—the in the record?

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to stand here and speak to the Bill 4, The Elections Amendment Act.

Also thank you to the many other elected members from both sides of the House that are here to listen to the importance of this proposed legislation.

Today, members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba have a choice on how we move forward toward fair democracy. Before us is the proposed legislation that works on behalf of all the people of Manitoba. People have seen their rights disregarded over a decade of debt, decay and decline under the previous NDP government. A change to existing legislation that takes into account better predictability and 'transparency'—transparency, sorry, for all stakeholders, which in turn are all Manitobans.

We know fair elections are the cornerstone of any healthy democracy, and today The Elections Amendment Act puts forward what the NDP repeatedly refused to do. Election professionals presented well-advised and researched recommendations. These recommendations, for nearly a decade, were refused by the NDP, and each and every one of those years the NDP put their own political interests above—oh, interests and advantages ahead of the public interest.

Today, under the new Progressive Conservative government, we uphold our election commitment to fix election dates in the respect of public interest. The choice is to support those professional recommendations and make what's right right for the people of Manitoba.

We must never forget under the NDP Manitoba saw steady erosion of their basic democratic rights. From their own party workers' basic democratic rights to a secret ballot were taken, the right of all Manitobans to vote on major tax increases dismissed, and allegations of trading jobs for votes.

Consistency is a good thing except when consistency is taken away or constantly disregarding the democratic rights of hard-working Manitobans. However, before we continue, we must first understand that democracy by definition means not only a system of government by the whole population through elected representatives, but also by any organizations governed on democratic principles.

Democratic being an adjective means of like practising, advocating or constituting democracy or 'democrast'—pardon. Je parle les deux langues. [*I speak both languages.*] This purpose—this proposed legislation advocates to amend the fair elections amendment act and puts into practice the restoration of Manitobans' rights. It also levels the playing field. It is democratic and the right thing to do. We must not lose sight that for nearly 10 years the NDP refused to heed the advice of Manitoba's Chief Electoral Officer to set an election period to do just that. Nearly 10 years, year after year, it's too long not to act on what professionals in the very field of democracy and elections has recommended.

The recommendations for fixed elections dates appear constantly in the Elections Manitoba annual reports of the 2007 Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer, in which the recommendations can be found on page 39; in the 2008 Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer, in which the recommendations can be found on page 22; in the 2009 Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer, in which the recommendations can be found on page 31; in 2010, the Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer, in which the recommendations can be found on page 28; in the 2011 Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer, in which the recommendations can be found on page 46; in the 2012 Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer, in which the recommendations can be found on page 35; in the 2013 Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer, in which the recommendations can be found on page 30; and again in the 2014 Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer, in which the recommendations can be found on page 40; and then one more time in the 2015 Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer, in which recommendations can be found on page 41.

I believe for the sake of complete clarity we must also touch on who Elections Manitoba is and briefly on their mission and goals that relate to the proposed legislation set forth.

* (15:30)

Elections Manitoba is a non-partisan, independent office with professionals whose careers are embodied around securing democratic rights of all Manitobans through the conduct of free and fair elections by enhancing public confidence and awareness in the electoral process. Elections Manitoba adheres to the overall mission and goals by providing constant recommendations to improve our

electoral process and serve the public with its integrity and excellence.

Now, although Elections Manitoba has more to their mission and goals, the above gives a very good idea on the role in our democratic system. The Chief Electoral Officer put forward concise reasoning for this change. Elections Manitoba indicated eliminating the possibility of a variable election period would further level the playing field, while also providing clarity for all stakeholders. Elections Manitoba also notes the recommendations that a set election period would also assist in the recruiting of election officials and may also assist in the recruitment of volunteer campaign workers.

Elections Manitoba states: a fixed election period would also assist campaigns to better manage expenses incurred in the non-election period, thereby preventing allocations issues of expenses between reimbursable election expenses and non-reimbursable, non-election period expenses.

It was in the Elections Manitoba 2007 report that points out some of our neighbours, BC and Ontario, who have already set a set election date and have a set election period of 28 to 29 days, respectively. The NDP lag behind our province—our provincial neighbours in improving the fairness of elections for their own benefit, not that of Manitobans.

So with no question, although it goes without having to say, that it's an absolute shame that for nearly a decade of consistent recommendations, they were never acted upon. Even though it—for the best interest of all Manitobans, the NDP consistently put their own political interests and advantages ahead of the public interest.

Today the Progressive Conservative government team is proud of this proposed legislation that will strengthen and restore basic democratic rights. These rights were taken from Manitobans and the—in the form of consultations, and it was also taken from hard-working Manitobans and the professionals who oversee our system.

The Progressive Conservative team will do what the NDP wouldn't, and that's provide a better way through our election process by setting fixed election dates for both general and by-elections and provide fairness and predictability for all stakeholders.

Manitoba deserves to have an elected representative that upholds the democratic rights of the very people who elect them to the highest of values based on trust, integrity and fairness.

Manitobans deserve to support whichever party or person that acts in the best interests at all times without the fear of unfair practices, both broadly in general elections and internally within whichever party.

Manitobans spoke and elected a new Progressive Conservative government focused on fixing the finances, repairing services and rebuilding our economy. Manitobans have had enough of the debt and decline, and they've had enough of the decay that got us to where we are today.

They have also had enough of a government that was not acting in the best interests of the public. As the Premier (Mr. Pallister) says, there is nothing wrong with Manitoba that can't be fixed by what's right with Manitoba.

The proposed legislation is clear. It establishes a standard 28-election-day period for a fixed-date general election. This would eliminate any party from taking advantage of a variable of 29- to 35-day period.

The proposed legislation also shortens the by-election to be between 28 and 34 days from the current 32 to 39 days, which in turn balances the need to provide increased efficiency and fairness in the call of a by-election, while retaining flexibility given by election voting days that do not occur on a fixed date.

I think its importance—it's important to mention some of the other countries, including our own, that have fixed election dates. They include Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, South Korea, 'Latavina,' 'Litinia,' 'Luxembourg,' Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States. The new Progressive Conservative government consulted with the—with Manitobans in the recent election. A set election period was a key commitment to our open government initiative, and we are proud to stand together to fulfill it. We are a new government set out to repair our services, and this includes restoring and strengthening basic democratic rights.

All Manitobans benefit from this proposed legislation and look forward to seeing it pass. We may never know why it wasn't introduced by the previous NDP government. We have ideas based on their actions. We have a record of their government dismissing the professionals. We have many examples of erosion of the basic democratic rights.

But one thing we can be sure of is that our new Progressive Conservative government is moving forward.

We do know that if the proposed legislation is passed, the next election day will be set out in the legislation to fall on the first Thursday—Tuesday, in October, in the fourth calendar year after election day for the last general election. The writ would drop 28 days before that day on a fixed election day. Again, today, all members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba have a choice on how we move forward. We all have a choice to vote on the proposed legislation to set election dates. The proposed legislation before us fulfills our commitment and benefits all the people of Manitoba who have seen their rights disregarded after a decade of debt, decay and decline. And it's—it is professionally recommended as fair practice, and I support and encourage its passing.

Before I finish speaking on this important proposed legislation, I'd just like to remind the House and everyone here today that this legislation does not favour any party seeking election. It levels the playing field and ensures a smooth and predictable process in the electoral system.

Thank you again, Minister Speaker—Mr. Speaker, sorry—and all the members present today from both sides of the House. It is an honour and a great pleasure to be a part of our democratic system and work on behalf of all Manitobans.

Mr. Jon Reyes (St. Norbert): First of all, it's an honour and privilege to be here.

Just want to say, in terms of my background, I've been serving all my life, and it's a privilege to serve the people of Manitoba and my constituents of St. Norbert. My background, as you're aware, like my colleague from Kildonan, we both served in the military, served our country. I've also served in non-profit groups and organizations. As well, it's about being fair. I have a—people know that I have a passion for football. So, you know, you play by the rules. You enforce the rules. And sometimes you don't want to get partisan but sometimes we have to. And, in terms of St. Norbert, it was great to see that St. Norbert defeated both the teams that come out of the member of Minto's constituency, Tec Voc and Daniel Mac, so kudos to Saint-Norbert Collegiate for defeating both those teams. We do share a common ground, though: We both are passionate fans of the greatest team on Earth, the Pittsburgh Steelers, so

that's one thing that we can share. But we are here to work as a team and work together.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for allowing me to rise and talk about such an important bill. I also want to mention the fact that, you know, I served as a banquet server back in the day in—at Marlborough, 26 years ago. And little did I know that I'd be serving alongside as an MLA who I worked with at Marlborough, with the Minister of Crown Services, Ron Schuler. So—sorry, the Minister of Crown Services (Mr. Schuler), the member of St. Paul.

* (15:40)

Under the NDP decade of debt, decay, decline, Manitobans saw a steady erosion of their basic democratic rights. For close to 10 years, the Manitoba's Chief Electoral Officer recommended a set election period to level the playing field. Each and every year, the NDP refused. Each and every year the NDP put their own political interest and advantage ahead of the public interest.

We, however, are proud to put the public interest first and help level the playing field for future elections. We are committed to making Manitoba Canada's most improved province, making Manitoban families safer and stronger.

I say again, under the NDP decade of debt, decay, decline, Manitobans saw a steady erosion of their basic democratic rights. The NDP remain under investigation for allegations of creating jobs for votes. Our legislation shortens the election period for a by-election or a general election that does not occur on a fixed date to between 28 and 34 days from the current 32 to 39 days.

The set period of an election proposed in this legislation act on a simple change requested by the Chief Electoral Officer for almost 10 years. The recommendation for a set election period appears in the 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 Elections Manitoba annual reports.

Manitobans elected a new Progressive Conservative government focused on repairing our services. This includes restoring and strengthening basic democratic rights. The recent NDP leadership race was plagued with allegations of vote tampering. One of the allegations was so serious it forced a recount. Rather than sanction a person alleged to have stuffed ballots, the NDP promoted them to the NDP executive and the key post on their campaign team.

Our Progressive Conservative team is proud of this proposed legislation that will strengthen democracy for all Manitobans. This amendment strikes a balance between flexibility and increased efficiency and fairness in the call of a by-election, understanding they do not occur on a fixed date. We are committed to making Manitoba Canada's most improved province, making Manitoban families safer and stronger.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Kelly Bindle (Thompson): Hello, fellow members, and welcome back after such a long and gruelling summer. I know it's refreshing for all of us to finally get back in Chamber, particularly in QP—in the QP portion that I know I've been looking forward to since the end of June.

In July, I attended the Midwestern Legislative Conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, along with several other members of this Assembly, to become aware of new issues and discuss similar issues affecting our friends and neighbours across the border.

I've had a very busy summer attending many consultations, events and site visits with constituents, mayors, chiefs, local leaders, ministers and community members and groups throughout the province and the North, including Thompson, Nelson House, Split Lake, Wabowden and Churchill. I also participated in Public Accounts Committee meetings here in the Legislature and attended the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees annual conference held in Yellowknife this past August.

Through our government's actions, Manitobans are starting to trust their government again and are realizing we are not just a government for some Manitobans, we are a government for all Manitobans.

Today we're debating The Elections Amendment Act. This important legislation is a necessary tool to help ensure governments function within their means in a sustainable manner and encourages transparent, responsible and accountable decision-making in terms of restoring basic democratic rights to Manitobans. And it is necessary to provide security to Manitobans regarding their children's future and future generations.

We need this legislation because it is selfish and unreasonable for us to expect future generations to pay for our luxuries we enjoy today while putting their future in jeopardy. And long election periods

delay government's ability to pass legislation that can rebuild the economy.

Fixing the finances is required more than ever, because after a decade of debt, decline and decay under the previous government, the economy required to support the next generation is in jeopardy more than ever and must be turned around.

The debt ratcheted up under the previous government from increasingly larger deficit budgets year after year has caused a downgrade in the Province's credit rating. Interest rates have increased on that accumulated debt, and because less money is available they have threatened front-line services. Much of that spending took place in the form of government waste, close to a billion dollars wasted, choosing the route down Bipole III on the west side of Lake Manitoba, despite recommendations from Manitoba Hydro officials to take the shorter and obviously less expensive route on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. Unfortunately, the results from a recent Manitoba Hydro analysis show this—financial damage is done and would cost too much more to undo and the opportunity for savings was lost with the previous government's decision to ignore sound advice.

The decision by the previous government to charge ahead with the Keeyask Generating Station megaproject at the same time as the Bipole III megaproject was another colossal financial misstep by the previous government and has further threatened the financial health of future Manitoba generations and the government's ability to provide services. Furthermore, the previous government also decided to go ahead with a hugely expensive East Side Road project simultaneously.

The Office of the Auditor General report recently released its September 2016 Department of Infrastructure report on Manitoba East Side Road Authority and, in the words of the Auditor General, and I quote: The East Side Road project is not an ordinary infrastructure project. It involves complex community agreements aimed at ensuring benefits over and above the road accrued to the east side communities. These benefits include training and mentoring for community corporation staff and the awarding of untendered pre-construction contracts to these community corporations, coupled with capacity-building allowances, to help them develop into viable local businesses, end quote.

Now, this is a noteworthy and lofty goal, and no one can argue against the concept to help those

communities is a good idea. But this goal proved to be just more rhetoric from the previous government, because it ended up being an opportunity for ESRA to spend public money without proper monitoring.

The Auditor General goes on to say, and I quote: Our audit revealed many gaps in how the community benefit agreements and the related untendered pre-construction contracts were being managed. In addition, the lack of performance measures and targets makes it difficult to objectively assess the progress made, to date, in achieving anticipated benefits, end quote.

The report includes the phrases to ensure anticipated benefits are achieved, it is important that all involved with the Aboriginal engagement strategy and the related community benefit agreements meet their obligations, and it is critical—it's critically important that we monitor and measure performance to ensure value for money is being received.

The Auditor General's report states that, and I quote, untendered construction contracts with community corporations, including capacity-building allowance to help them increase their future capacity to operate as independent businesses. It is intended to diminish over time as the community corporations become more proficient in their work. Such an allowance is not part of a normal road construction project and is, essentially, a grant over and above the estimated market value of the contract services. ESRA was not tracking the amount of capacity-building allowances paid out. For nine of 10 contracts in our sample, ESRA did not split out the capacity-building allowance. For the one contract where it had shown—where it was shown separately, it was effectively an allowance of 22.7 per cent. ESRA did not have a policy on how to calculate the amount of the capacity-building allowance or how the allowance was to be reduced over time. In addition, ESRA did not track how community corporations actually benefitted from the allowance.

It goes on to say our example of 10 contracts contained six joint venture agreements. ESRA requires that joint venture agreements provide community corporations with at least 51 per cent of the profits, leaving the remainder to the private-sector contractor. An additional requirement is that the contractor—the contractors provide ESRA with a management plan indicating how they will mentor community corporation staff. ESRA officials advised that contractors are compensated for this mentoring by their 49 per cent share of

capacity-building allowance. However, ESRA did not obtain such plans from any of the contractors in our sample. They also did not prepare an analysis on the extent and nature of mentoring provided and whether resulting compensation was reasonable.

Further down in the report it stated ESRA was not monitoring local procurement on any of the tendered construction contracts and ESRA was not properly monitoring whether community corporations were complying with the provisions of their pre-construction contracts.

We believe the following factors contributed to ESRA's inability to ensure compliance: overall responsibility for contract administration was not clearly assigned; no contract administration policies and procedures; there was no contract administration training; and no central filing system.

Now that money for ESRA has been spent, and the communities haven't necessarily received the intended benefits. Government spending shouldn't be about buying votes but about delivering results. Our government is committed to fixing the finances of the Province, restoring services and rebuilding the economy.

On May 27th, 2016, our government announced the dissolution of the East Side Road Authority and the transfer of its operations to Manitoba Infrastructure. To further control finances, our government has eliminated the vote tax subsidy.

* (15:50)

This was a tax devised by the previous government as a way to shamelessly transfer public money to their party to use to get re-elected. To make it more palatable, they offered a portion of the other—to the other parties based on the vote percentages.

Our PC Party refused this tax in principle because we know it wasn't fair for taxpayers to fund parties they may not support, and now our new government has refused all parties from receiving public money through the vote tax subsidy to fund their campaigns.

The previous government proved that you can build support around fear, anger and deceit. You can build a party around fear, anger and deceit. You can campaign on fear, anger and deceit. And you can even get elected on it. But they've also proven you can't build meaningful relationships, maintain mutual respect or have meaningful government based on

fear, anger and deceit. Yet they continue down that path.

The NDP continues to mislead Manitobans about departure tax. For almost two years, the NDP misled Manitobans about \$700,000 in payments to NDP staffers. They previously claimed \$700,000 in departure tax political payments to senior staff were triggered by personnel employment contracts. Those statements by the NDP contradict the details uncovered by the Manitoba Ombudsman in a report released only after the recent election. At the request of the Progressive Conservative caucus, the Ombudsman investigated new details in the NDP cover-up. The report provides new details in the NDP departure tax lump sum settlement that were not previously disclosed by the NDP. The lump sum political payouts were not based on a layoff, terms of employment or employment contract but rather were negotiated to resolve a labour relations dispute. They appear to be a settlement, so political staff could leave their jobs voluntarily following NDP leadership fiasco. After nearly two years of NDP cover-up, Manitobans are finding out it was standard operating procedure under the NDP to spare no expenses in using public money to deal with their NDP political problems.

While attending the CCPAC conferences in Yellowknife, there was a presenter who had travelled many countries—had travelled through many countries collecting data on Public Accounts committees and resulting socio-economic data. He presented graphs showing a correlation of governments with strong Public Accounts committees and strong legislative auditors having less poverty, stronger economies, less corruption and better standards of living. Our new government is committed to a strong Public Accounts Committee and a strong Office of the Auditor General.

While reducing wasteful spending, our government is working hard to rebuild the northern economy by encouraging investment and diversification in the North. Thompson residents and other northerners are facing slowdowns of long-standing industries and looming threats of layoffs in the North. Every economy is based on supply and demand, and it doesn't matter how long industries have been in business; they were always faced with that uncontrollable dynamic. Economies around the world are interconnected, and all operate on the basis of supply and demand. If demand declines, suppliers suffer. Thompson is a single-company, single-industry based economy, and

demand for base metals is down. Vale, the main employer in Thompson, has announced it will be shutting down its smelter and refinery operations in 2018. This will affect the northern economy. However, they will continue to run their mines and the mills.

The fact remains, the ore body will eventually get mined out. It may or may not happen in my lifetime, but it will happen. If the city does not diversify its economy, it will be forced to shut down when the ore body is depleted. It won't matter how loud you shout; those jobs will still be gone when the ore runs out. It's worth repeating: It won't matter how loud you shout; those jobs will be gone when the ore runs out. It's worth.

Thompson's economy—the ore in Thompson's economy currently depends on is finite. It doesn't matter how many years of employment it has supplied in the past. When the ore is depleted in that location, mining stops. Many people I talked to in Thompson have the answer, well, that won't happen in my lifetime, so it won't matter. But it will happen. It'll happen either in the next generation or the generation after. And, if you can diversify the economy to a different dependency, those people, when they do leave that industry, have someone they can sell their house to.

For this reason, our government is committed to diversifying our northern economy by encouraging investments in culture and ecotourism, forestry, fishing and further exploration. Apart from Churchill, the tourism sector is underrepresented in the North and has huge economic potential. Many people underestimate the potential of the tourism industry. When I was in Yellowknife for the CCPAC meeting in August, the benefits of a diversified economy based on tourism were evident everywhere. Yellowknife originally existed because of gold mining. The two gold mines have since been mined out and closed, and Yellowknife was forced to and has successfully diversified its economy. They are now a major tourist attraction. Hotels and businesses are expanding, and there is a huge assortment of different types of restaurants. They have an ice castle in the winter and have marketed—have successfully marketed viewing northern lights to tourists and Asian tourists.

Since diversifying, Yellowknife has become a launching point for the Ekati and Diavik diamond mines in the Northwest Territories.

Of particular interest, you would probably want to note that this past January NWT brewers opened a microbrewery in Yellowknife. And that would not have been possible without the event of growing tourism.

There are also some good-news investments in northern Manitoba, too. Alamos Gold has announced its intention to develop an open-pit gold mine near Lynn Lake, and Bell-MTS has announced it will be extending high-speed, large-capacity fibre optics cell service all along Highway 6 to Thompson, and bring services to many northern communities which previously had none.

Lynn Lake reminds me of an old prize fighter that keeps getting up. It gets knocked down, but it won't stay down. And this new Alamos Gold project will help Lynn Lake back to its feet and become a stronger economic driver in the North.

Tolko has announced it has had some serious potential buyers looking to purchase its operations in The Pas and currently has a signed letter of intent from one of those parties.

Via Rail continues to operate on the Bay Line to Churchill and announced its intention to increase capacity to service the busy tourism season, and Calm Air representatives have expressed interest in working with tourism operators there to provide cargo freight services.

Not just with some Manitobans, our government stands with all Manitobans, and as MLA for Thompson representing northerners, I'm happy to announce I recently had the opportunity to share in celebrations with the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation elders, chief, councillors and members, along with the minister of indigenous and municipal affairs and the Minister of Families (Mr. Fielding), honouring their achieving official urban reserve status for their Mystery Lake Hotel property on 4.2 acres of land within the city limits of Thompson.

NCN had been in negotiations with Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada since 1997 to have this parcel of land recognized as official urban reserve, and because of their hard work and perseverance, we celebrated their success 19 years later on September 28, 2016.

This is an opportunity for NCN to generate financial support for their community, create employment opportunities in Thompson and improve the lives of many. This is good for the province and the North, and I look forward to working with

NCN Chief Marcel Moody and council to achieve sustainable economic development, help create real opportunities and build a better, stronger, more inclusive North.

This sustainable development and these sustainable investments will bring prosperity and raise provincial revenues, help to balance budgets and improve essential services and, at the same time, provide opportunities for northerners.

Our government is tremendously optimistic in what the future holds for the North, and we'll continue to work with northerners to create opportunities to achieve that potential.

At the same time, we will continue to repair the Province's finances, restore services and rebuild our economy.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to stand here this afternoon before the House and talk about Bill 4, The Elections Amendment Act.

We all know that fair elections are the cornerstone of any healthy democracy, and today this bill puts forward what the NDP repeatedly refused to do.

These recommendations were refused by the NDP for nearly a decade. In each and every one of those years, the NDP put their political interests and advantage ahead of the public interest.

Today, under the new Progressive Conservative government, we are standing by our commitment to fix election dates in the respect of public interest.

The proposed legislation advocates to amend the fair elections amendment act and puts into practice the restoration of Manitobans' rights. It also levels the playing field. It is a democratic and the right thing to do.

Certainly, we must not lose sight that for nearly 10 years the NDP refused to heed the advice of Manitoba's Chief Electoral Officer to set an election period to do just that. Nearly—for nearly 10 years, year after year, the NDP didn't do what the professionals in the very field of democracy and elections recommended.

*(16:00)

Elections Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, is a non-partisan, independent office with professionals

whose careers are embodied around securing the democratic rights of all Manitobans through the conduct of free and fair elections by enhancing public confidence in and awareness of the electoral process.

Elections Manitoba adhered to their overall missions and goals by providing consistent recommendations to the government to improve our electoral process and serve the public with integrity and excellence.

Elections Manitoba indicated, and I quote: Eliminating the possibility of a variable election period would further level the playing field while also providing clarity for all stakeholders. They went on to say, an election—a set election period would also assist in recruiting election officials and may also assist in the recruitment of volunteer campaign workers. Furthermore, they said a fixed election period would also assist campaigns to better manage expenses incurred in the non-election period, thereby preventing allocation issues of expenses between reimbursable election expenses and non-reimbursable non-election period expenses.

The Progressive Conservative team will do what the NDP wouldn't, and that's provide a better way through our election process by setting fixed election dates for both general and by-elections and providing fairness and predictability for all stakeholders in the process.

And the proposed legislation is clear. It establishes a standard 28-day election period for a fixed date general election. This would eliminate any party from taking advantage of a variable 29-to-35-day period.

Bill 4 also shortens the by-election to between 28 and 34 days from the current 32 to 39 days, which in turn balances the need to provide increased efficiency and fairness in the call of a by-election while retaining flexibility given by-election voting days that do not occur on a fixed date.

We may never know, Mr. Speaker, why these recommendations were never introduced by the previous government. We have ideas, based on their actions. We have the record of their government dismissing the professionals. We have many examples of the erosion of basic democratic rights. But one thing we can certainly be sure of is that our new Progressive Conservative government is moving forward. We do know that if the proposed legislation is passed, the next election day will be set

out in legislation to fall on the first Tuesday in October in the fourth calendar year after election day for the last general election.

And, Mr. Speaker, when this is passed, the writ would drop 28 days before that day in October.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise and put a few brief words on the record in relation to Bill 4, The Elections Amendment Act. Any opportunity that we have as a Legislature to improve accountability, to improve transparency and, more importantly, to improve fairness when it comes to elections in the province of Manitoba is something that I think all members of this Chamber would be willing to endorse and put positive comments on the record.

I've listened carefully to comments from members across the way, and I've caught some interesting themes, Mr. Speaker. One comment that they didn't make was any reference to some of their own issues that they've encountered during the elections, whether it's their own leadership elections or elections apparently going back several years. A lot of my new colleagues may not be aware, but in the 1999 election, the NDP and the unions were involved in, for lack of a better word, a money laundering scheme, in which they were caught by Elections Manitoba and subsequently plead guilty, repaying almost \$100,000 in ill-gotten monies received from Elections Manitoba. At the time I believe there was upwards of 13 or 14 of the NDP campaigns were involved in this illegal scheme, and it'd gotten so bad that the then-former premier, the MLA for St. Boniface, though he did acknowledge that apparently this scheme had gone back years, that he was not—that he insisted—hello, test, test—

Anyway, he insisted on a letter of exoneration from his party. I have no doubt that there will be—that Elections Manitoba did their due diligence in terms of investigating the situation, and I have no doubt that the NDP obviously saw the writing on the wall when Elections Manitoba comes with them with the evidence that they were involved in this fraudulent scheme, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to receiving rebates that they weren't entitled to, to the tune of some \$76,000.

So the NDP, the members across the way, have a long and unfortunate history of being involved in activities that can dissuade Manitobans as to the sanctity of the electoral process here in Manitoba.

And that's why legislation such as Bill 4 are important, because they allow the Legislature, and they allow all of us, to condemn such activities, to say that those activities and those actions on any political party aren't becoming on any legislator or any individual seeking elected office. And we must condemn those actions in the strongest terms.

And, unfortunately, members opposite didn't learn that lesson, as we saw that more recently during their ill-gotten rebellion. Whether it was staff being let go, removed, severed—I'm not sure what the word of the day that the NDP are using in reference to staff that were assured at the front end that they were allowed to support any candidate of their choosing and their jobs would be safe regardless, because they believed in democracy and they believed in free association.

But, of course, that free association ended up costing Manitobans and taxpayers, again, several hundred thousand dollars, as these individuals were simply all cut cheques to go away because they packed—backed the wrong horse in this case, the MLA for St. Boniface.

One of the most striking, actually, ads from the last election was one of actual news footage, so it wasn't even so much an ad as it was actual news footage of the premier of province of Manitoba, the MLA for St. Boniface, the former premier, literally running down the hall, being chased by, I think, it was Global TV, as they asked him some questions related to some comments about staff who had left and had been paid several hundred thousand dollars, and how the NDP had offset payments despite those contracts ending in March, offset payments until April so they wouldn't appear in the current public accounts, and then they could be—they wouldn't be known, and all those details wouldn't be known until after the election, Mr. Speaker.

So again—and then as well I do recall—and members opposite who rise afterwards and speak on the bill are more than welcome to correct the record if I misspeak or if any of my information is inaccurate, but I do recall in—during—again, during the leadership debate, the former NDP Finance minister, who was supporting the MLA for St. Boniface, getting involved again in a situation where there was allegations that some of the ballots were being filled out directly by this former NDP Cabinet minister in support of the MLA for St. Boniface. And, in fact, I think the party, the NDP

party, had to have a revote in those areas where that fraudulent activity had occurred.

And again, as has been pointed out by a number of my other colleagues, in true NDP fashion, they didn't admonish this individual; they actually promoted and elevated that individual because clearly she was—she proved once again that she was—had their—that way of thinking that they prefer.

I think in—obviously in my own situation, when I think of improvements that can occur to enhance the electoral system here in Manitoba and its direct impact, obviously, on the citizens of Morris, I can go no further than the by-election in Morris, Mr. Speaker, the by-election that you yourself would be well aware of, though the time frame and delay in your instance was much, much shorter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but, nonetheless, you were able to share two of the three points.

*(16:10)

For many of my new colleagues on both sides of the House, I can tell the story of how the Morris by-election had three firsts. It was the coldest by-election in Manitoba history. It was the first time an election actually crossed two calendar years, because for some strange reason the government of the day, the NDP government of the day decided to call the by-election I believe it was on December 27th right between Christmas and New Year's. I'm not sure why they decided that that particular time—point in time was most beneficial to Manitobans in terms of enhancing their democratic access and their democratic rights. But, again, that is for them to respond to.

And, of course, the last third, which will end with these electoral reforms that we, as a government, are bringing forward, and that was that it was the longest delay in Manitoba history. From the vacancy, by my predecessor, Mrs. Taillieu, who left to spend time with her husband, Wilf Taillieu, who, unfortunately, recently passed after a long battle with cancer, and despite catcalls over the years by members opposite of where's Mavis, where's Mavis, that she made that decision that I think all of us would make as husbands and wives and companions to spend that limited time that we have left with an individual by their side, that we would want to share those last moments with that individual.

And yet the NDP chose to use her very personal decision, a decision, I would argue, that no member in this House would make any differently. They chose to use it to make some sort of political gain, whether it was their—like I said, their catcalls in the House, or whether it was their own former premier, who, you know, at the Brandon Chamber of Commerce, specifically noted Mrs. Taillieu's departure as an example of some sort of troubles going on behind the scene with the Progressive Conservative Party, Mr. Speaker, knowing full well, obviously, that actually, probably at that moment, the decision had been realized as to the results or the prognosis—and the very poor prognosis that Mr. Taillieu was facing.

But, again, to me, it just signifies the character, the characteristics of the NDP and the NDP party as a whole, that they really have no shame when it comes to trying to use things to their advantage, whether that advantage is right or wrong, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, though, back to my earlier comments about the delay from Mrs. Taillieu's resignation to the ultimate fulfillment of that vacancy was 360 days, a length of time unrecorded in Manitoba history. I recall, actually, the Winnipeg Free Press having a couple of editorials on it, and this was only maybe four or five months previous, because the average wait time prior to the situation in Morris, and we're talking about the entire tenure of the NDP, including NDP members would resign, whether it was Becky Barrett or Ms. Friesen, or whether it was Conservative members that resigned, the average wait was approximately 100 days, so roughly three months.

And, obviously, in the course of Morris, they waited a full year, 360 days—360 days—that the members opposite, the NDP said, that the citizens of Morris do not deserve electoral representation. They do not deserve a voice in the Manitoba Legislature. Their interests, their priorities are not the priorities of that NDP government. It was an unfortunate—which was an important—unfortunate message to relate to the people.

I remember actually interacting with the former minister of Finance, Jennifer Howard, actually one of the leaders of their rebellion, Mr. Speaker—an event mere months, which would normally, under normal circumstances, even under the NDP, had been the prime time to call that by-election. And I had enquired to this NDP Cabinet minister, jokingly,

when the people in Morris could expect an election and have an opportunity to voice their opinion and make judgment against this government and, more importantly, to make sure that they had representation here within the Manitoba Legislature. And what I was told by that individual was that—that was not a priority of the NDP government, that a political representative, and acquiring a political representative for the people of Morris, for the citizens of Morris, whether they lived in Rosenort or Morris, whether they lived in Ste. Eustache or La Salle, Oak Bluff or Sanford or Brunkild, their ability to have a representative within this Chamber and to be one of the 57 legislators to make rules, to debate, simply wasn't a priority for the NDP. And that surely spoke volumes. And it spoke, again, to the childish behaviour by members opposite. One Winnipeg Free Press columnist actually referred specifically to the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) and the delay in the calling of the Morris by-election and, at the time, I think the delay was only six months, as passive-aggressive on his nature.

And that is a very good and apt example, because the member for St. Boniface didn't appreciate my colleagues holding that NDP government to account over their decision to hike the PST by some 14 per cent, from 7 to 8, despite running in a 2011 election on the very stated fact that the idea that they would raise the PST as ridiculous and total nonsense. And the term ridiculous and the term total nonsense are direct quotes, in fact, by their former premier.

But, of course, Manitobans saw through—or Manitobans were at the receiving end of that broken commitment, and I am very proud to say that even though I was not in the House at the time, I was with my colleagues in spirit as they held this NDP to account and they showed them the role that an opposition government and an opposition party needs to hold, and that is to hold the government to account for the decisions that they make, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And through that long summer, they did hold this government to account, day after day after day, and they made sure that they had to fight for every inch, that they had to account every single day to the people of Manitoba why they were hiking their taxes by 300-plus million dollars.

And I need to digress a little bit because it is also worth noting that the rationale for that PST hike—originally it was to protect front-line services and for splash pads. When they realized that that concept just wasn't working out in the public, they decided

to frame it around mom and apple pie and infrastructure. And while I mention this, it's that the Department of Infrastructure has recently released a report that shows, actually, the conditions of Manitoba's highways, whether they qualify as good or poor. So against a backdrop of a PST hike of some 300-plus million dollars, against a backdrop of a gasoline tax hike of 2 and a half cents or I think it was probably about a 20 per cent hike in gas tax, a hike in gas tax, actually, Mr. Deputy Speaker, against a situation where I think gas at that time was around \$1.20 a litre. It had actually gotten significantly high, and there was a lot of angst among motorists about the cost and when it would actually end.

And I remember the then-premier, the MLA for St. Boniface, was on the radio and said, you know, this was an outrage, the cost of gasoline, and that he would send a letter to the Prime Minister demanding action. Of course, the NDP never once after that statement actually ever tabled that letter of action. And, in fact, they turned around mere weeks later in the very next budget and hiked the gas tax on motorists. And then they raised the cost of vehicle registration by 35 vehicles—\$35 per vehicle, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And so, despite probably in those three instances—and there are many, many more—they blindsided Manitobans probably to the tune of about half a billion dollars a year. And despite bringing in half a billion dollars a year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and despite being adamant that this was for infrastructure, we find out through a recent report from the department that there has been no quantifiable improvement on the quality of infrastructure during their tenure. I believe the percentage difference in terms of good—what qualifies as good infrastructure moved from maybe 74.8 to 73.7, but I will allow the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Pedersen) to put the correct number on the record. But I believe I'm fairly accurate.

So it makes one wonder, Mr. Speaker, what Manitobans really got for that half billion dollars. I think it's pretty clear what they got. They got snowed. But that's not anything new coming from this government.

* (16:20)

So we have an opportunity today to put on the record to support an Elections Amendment Act that's going to enhance the electoral system here in

Manitoba, that's going to ensure that we have that level playing field, a level playing field that the chief—Manitoba's Chief Electoral Officer has recommended time and time again.

And, despite those recommendations by the Chief Electoral Officer, for some reason, the NDP government of the day chose to ignore the Chief Electoral Officer. But it wouldn't be the first time that the members opposite either ignored the Chief Electoral Officer or simply misrepresented the Chief Electoral Officer. And, again, not to berate the situation, but, again, back to my own by-election, I remember one of the many excuses that the government of the day gave is that they wanted to hold two by-elections simultaneously in order to achieve a cost savings, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I remember—actually, you and I, when we were sitting down in one of the committee rooms as part of our orientation, the class of 2014 orientation, we actually had an opportunity to meet with the Chief Electoral Officer, the Ombudsman as well as a number—the Clerk and a whole host of other individuals, to learn the ropes as new MLAs. And I remember asking that very specific question to the Chief Electoral Officer as to whether or not any cost savings had been achieved by holding the Arthur-Virden and the Morris by-elections simultaneously, and the Chief Electoral Officer said, no, absolutely not. There was no cost differential whether they held them separately, whether those by-elections had been called within the standard three-month period had been the process for the previous 20 years or if they had been called simultaneously at—in the middle of Christmas, which was the ultimate decision by the NDP government.

So, always interesting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the government, the NDP, would put this information on the record and that you'd have a very respected civil servant that I think we as legislative officials should put our trust in can say that absolutely not, that's not true, that was never true, and that was never the situation. And maybe the MLA for St. Boniface can use this opportunity when he rises to speak in support of this legislation to apologize for misrepresenting the situation and acknowledging that the decision to delay democracy for the people of Morris was simply more petty—petty—politics on behalf of the NDP. But I have no doubt that the member had more pressing issues at the time given the situation that was about to unfold within the NDP caucus of several key Cabinet ministers deciding en masse that the then-MLA for St. Boniface, the

premier, couldn't be trusted and that he didn't have the best interests of Manitobans in mind, and that was their exact phrase, that the then-NDP premier did not have the best interests of Manitobans in mind.

So, I mean, I know when it came to the people of Morris that it was pretty clear that he did not have their best interests in mind when he delayed that by-election, and we can see by their track record, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whether it's raising the PST, whether it's expanding the PST, whether it's going to, you know, 100-plus not-for-profits at Christmas time and demanding a clawback of funds previously provided, and if they didn't return those funds, they actually had to justify to government why, literally, in the weeks before Christmas, weeks before the end of the fiscal year, why they weren't able to return all these monies back to the NDP coffers. And I remember talking to a number of those not-for-profits who were quite concerned at the time that, you know, what would happen if the NDP decided to come in and complete that clawback. In some instances, those same organizations had to advise them that it is only through the layoffs of individuals would we be able to achieve those fiscal demands of the NDP. But, to me, what really that demand made evident was the financial situation, the true financial situation, that our province found itself under. And the situation that was obviously unveiled by my colleague the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) recently in Public Accounts, what we saw the projected deficit going from, I believe it was 456—\$442 million to \$846 million—\$846 million—and, really, just shy of \$1 billion that this government continued to miss its target.

But the issue at hand is an opportunity for all of us today to say that we need to move past these misrepresentations, that we need to collectively say that we can do better as a Legislature, that we can do better for not only the MLAs at hand but those individuals who are out there in Manitoba today who may decide that they want to put their name forward.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

Because it's not just the 57 MLAs here, but it is all those individuals that decide to do the honourable thing and participate in the democracy or the democratic process by putting their name forward on the ballot, whether it is—and I applaud all of them, whether it is for the NDP or the Liberals or for

the Greens or for the Manitoba Party or those individuals that run as independents.

It is a tremendous opportunity for anyone to be part of the democratic process. And so these—this opportunity to support a bill, the elections—the Elections Manitoba amendment act and to fulfill those recommendations put forward for over a decade by Manitoba's Chief Electoral Officer, I think, is something that we should all embrace, that by shortening the period for a by-election or a general election from—to between 20 and 34 days from the current 33 or 32–39 days, Madam Speaker, I think gives those assurances to those individuals of predictability. That's one thing I think that everyone agrees is an opportunity to enhance the democratic situation: predictability.

So whether it's predictability in terms of when an election is going to be called, a general election, so that individuals can take leave from work, they can maybe get their family situation in order. Because it's a huge commitment, Madam Speaker, to run for office, a huge—it's a financial commitment; it's a personal commitment; and it's a time commitment.

But, of course, even with the legislation putting forward specific set election dates, we found that the previous administration would ignore those as well. The past and most recent April 19th provincial general election should have actually been held six months earlier in the fall, but, again, the previous NDP administration felt that that if only they had six more months to drive the car off the cliff, then maybe Manitobans would forget that they were careening out of control to begin with. But, hopefully, all of us today will have that opportunity to say—and as legislatures that we can support electoral reform, that we can make those enhancements to ensure that transparency, accountability and fairness should be a hallmark of our legislative process.

And maybe, Mr. Speaker, I'm hoping that my colleagues across the way maybe even give me leave

for an extra, you know, 30-some-odd minutes, because I don't think there's ever an opportunity that we should shorten our comments when it comes to fairness and accountability in electoral process.

So, Madam Speaker, with those few words, I would allow the opportunity for anyone else to rise and put on the record and voice their support for this amendment, an amendment, again, that's been called for by the Chief Electoral Officer for over a decade and that the situation has finally come that we have a PC government that—with its historic mandate from the people of Manitoba, is able to fulfill those recommendations put forward by the Chief Electoral Officer. And I have no doubt that there'll be other recommendations that have been ignored by the previous administration, whether it was from the Auditor General or a host of other civil servants that have put forward reform ideas to make sure that situations and fraudulent activities that occurred under the NDP do not occur.

So, with those few comments, Madam Speaker, I appreciate it. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further speakers on the debate?

Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 4, The Elections Amendment Act.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, we'd like to find out if it's the will of the House to call it 5 o'clock.

Madam Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call it 5 o'clock? *[Agreed]*

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, October 4, 2016

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