

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

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
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

Wednesday, October 5, 2016

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 206—The Health Care Accountability Act (Health Services Act and Health Services Insurance Act Amended)

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): I move, seconded by the MLA for River Heights, that Bill 206, The Health Care Accountability Act (Health Services Act and Health Services Insurance Act Amended).

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Burrows, and seconded by the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), that Bill 206, the health-care accessibility act, health services act and health services insurance act amended, be now read a first time.

Ms. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the history of medicare in our excellent health-care system is very unique and a source of pride for Canadians. The bill intends to preserve those principles already set in Manitoba's health-care legislation with the addition of one principle.

Roy Romanow recommended in his report, Building on values: The Future of Health Care in Canada, that accountability be made a fundamental legal principle in the delivery of health-care services. We as the Liberal Party of Manitoba agree this bill will add the principle of accountability to The Health Services Act, as well as be practised in the delivery of health-care services.

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

Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I am pleased to table the annual report of the Liquor and Gaming Authority of Manitoba, as well as the annual report of the Automobile Injury Compensation Appeal Commission for 2015-2016.

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): I am pleased to table the 2015 and '16 annual report for the ALL Aboard Committee.

Madam Speaker: Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

World Teachers' Day

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake): Madam Speaker, today, October 5th, 2016, is World Teachers' Day. Over 100 countries celebrate today to campaign for increased public awareness for the contributions of the teaching profession.

This year's campaign slogan is valuing teachers and improving their status. This slogan demands a collective need to appreciate and improve the status of teachers globally by recognizing the important contribution they make to society.

It is important for all of us to recognize that education is the foundation of our society. A good teacher has the ability to inspire creativity and to foster the pursuit of knowledge in our young people.

Teachers have an opportunity each time they enter a classroom to shape young people who are ultimately the future of our country and drivers of our economy.

I would like to state that Canada and Manitoba, we value our teachers. A recent study released by the OECD found that Canadian teachers rank fourth in the world in compensation. It noted that Canadians are well educated as a majority of students go on to obtain a bachelor's degree or learn a trade and contribute to society. A student's best memory of school comes often from the teachers that they remember and how they were able to engage them,

challenge them and provide them with the tools they need to meet any challenge in life.

Teachers, Madam Speaker, are at the core of any successful education system. They are the people who day after day, year after year make learning an enjoyable process for millions of students across Canada and the world.

To all teachers who get up every day to inspire the students of our province and our country: I and all the members of the House thank you for your good work you do.

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Larry Morrissette

Mr. Kevin Chief (Point Douglas): Larry Morrissette was an indigenous leader and a tireless advocate for indigenous peoples. Larry passed away on September 19th at the age of 59, and the loss has been felt across the North End, Winnipeg and beyond.

Larry was the founder and executive director of OPK that works one on one with indigenous people involved in gangs. Larry believed in these youth and helped them develop a positive relationship with their community with education, employment and cultural ceremonies.

Just last spring, the Bear Clan Patrol that Larry helped establish celebrated its first-year anniversary. The Bear Clan Patrol has brought community members together to patrol the streets of Winnipeg's North End, providing a stronger sense of safety and pride in our neighbourhoods.

Larry was a co-founder of Children of the Earth High School, one of the first schools in Canada that reflected indigenous cultures and values. Larry was a graduate of the University of Manitoba's Inner City Social Work Program and later taught in both that program and the University of Winnipeg's department of urban and inner city studies, both innovative programs located on Selkirk Avenue. With Elizabeth Comack, he co-authored the award-winning book *Indians Wear Red*.

Larry's contributions to our city are endless, especially when we consider the impact he had on so many young people. He believed in the transformative power of education, and that's why Larry Morrissette Memorial Scholarship has been established in memory at the University of Winnipeg. He created strength and compassion in a community that will carry on his legacy, building a better Manitoba.

On behalf of all members of the Legislature and the good people of the North End, I extend our deepest condolences to his family members and loved ones.

We are grateful for his work.

Miigwech, Madam Speaker.

Battle of Hong Kong—Commemorative Coin

Mr. Jon Reyes (St. Norbert): Madam Speaker, I would like to recognize and remember the Canadian soldiers who fought bravely in the Battle of Hong Kong.

The Battle of Hong Kong, also known to many as the Defence of Hong Kong, was one of the most heroic and tragic moments in the history of Canada's Armed Forces.

* (13:40)

La Bataille de Hong Kong – également connue par beaucoup comme la Défense de Hong Kong – a été l'un des moments les plus héroïques et tragiques de l'histoire des Forces canadiennes.

Translation

The Battle of Hong Kong, also known as the Defense of Hong Kong, was one of the most heroic and tragic moments in the history of the Canadian Forces.

English

Despite their lack of combat experience and being both outnumbered and surrounded by their Japanese attackers, members of the Royal Rifles of Canada and the Winnipeg Grenadiers fought with bravery and tenacity for 17 days before their surrender. When the guns fell silent, however, the terrible cost was revealed.

Of the 1,975 Canadian soldiers who participated in the battle, more than 1,050 were killed or wounded. Two hundred and twenty eight of those killed have no known grave. Of the 532 soldiers taken prisoner by their Japanese attackers, 126 would die in captivity, many of them in—victims of torture and starvation.

The Canadians, the Manitobans, like George Peterson, 95 years young, who is here with us today, fought in defence of Hong Kong, sacrificed much in their efforts to help bring peace and freedom to the people of Asia and the Pacific. Their sacrifice must never be forgotten.

And that is why we thank the Royal Canadian Mint for the issuance of a commemorative coin marking the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Hong Kong last week, so Canadians will always remember the heroism of those who participated in that battle.

And we will always remember the sacrifice of those Canadian Armed Forces personnel who have given their lives in the cause of freedom throughout the world. We are forever in their debt.

So today, we once again say thank you to them, and we ask that God keep them in his loving embrace. We ask that he bless and protect our brave men and women in uniform, and that he continues to bless Canada and all Canadians.

Thank you. Merci. Thank you, George. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Lorraine Nepinak

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): Today is the United Nations International World Teachers' Day, and an opportunity to recognize the amazing work that teachers do. One of those individuals is Mrs. Lorraine Nepinak, who is with us in the gallery today. Mrs. Nepinak has been a fixture at Fort Rouge School for over 20 years where she first volunteered as a crossing guard and in the daycare. Now she works at the school. It's rare to go to Fort Rouge School and not be greeted by her big smile and warm personality, and that warmth helps our students.

For Mrs. Nepinak, it's more than just a job, it's also about being a good role model. She understands that some children face challenges at home, and these students often confide in her and she wants to make sure that they know that someone cares about them. It's hard to imagine our schools without amazing, compassionate individuals like Mrs. Nepinak.

Chaque jour, au sein de nos communautés, les enseignants et enseignantes du Manitoba travaillent pour inspirer nos futurs scientifiques, nos futurs artistes et la prochaine génération de militants et de militantes. Ils sont non seulement des éducateurs et éducatrices, ils sont des entraîneurs, des mentors et, avant tout, des modèles.

Translation

Every day in our communities, Manitoba's teachers work to inspire our future scientists, artists, and the next generation of activists. Not only are they educators, they are also coaches, mentors, and above all, role models.

English

Teaching is a challenging job, but the work they do is invaluable. From Flin Flon to Fort Rouge the impact that teachers and others in our schools have reaches far beyond classroom walls and long after students graduate.

Please join me in celebrating Mrs. Nepinak, and all Manitoba teachers for their dedication and hard work.

Mental Illness Awareness Week

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Madam Speaker, this week is Mental Illness Awareness Week. It provides an opportunity for all Canadians to better understand issues surrounding mental health by promoting awareness that reduces associated stigma.

One in five Canadians will experience some form of mental illness during their lifetime, and the stigma associated with mental illness creates a barrier for those seeking help and those who live with mental illness most of their lives never get the help they truly need.

In recent years, campaigns have raised awareness and made inroads reducing that stigma of mental health issues. However, there are still too many individuals and families affected by mental illness subjected to fear, blame and discrimination in our society. As someone whose mother was institutionalized twice for severe depression, I am familiar with the stigma.

So I want to take a moment to remind Manitobans there are resources available to them that are just a phone call away: the Mood Disorders Association of Manitoba, 786-0987; Postpartum Warmline, 391-5983; the Anxiety Disorders Association, 925-0600; the Manitoba Schizophrenia Society, 786-1616; Clinic Crisis, 786-8686; the Manitoba Suicide Line, 877-435-7170; the Crisis Stabilization Unit, 940-3633; the Mobile Crisis Service, 940-1781; the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre, 958-9660; the Kids Help Phone, 800-668-6868.

All of us need to share these numbers and this information, and remind Manitobans facing mental health issues that they are not alone. Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: At this time I would like to introduce a guest that is sitting in my—in the loge to my right. We have with us today Sid Green, former

MLA for the Interlake—*[interjection]*—oh, Inkster. Sorry, Inkster.

On behalf of all members here we'd like to welcome you here today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Manitoba Workforce Government Relations

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): Before I ask my question, I'd like to, on behalf of my colleagues, truly, truly thank George Peterson for your lifelong devotion and service to our province and to our country. Thank you so much.

Madam Speaker, New Democrats believe in the North, we believe in affordability, and we believe in fair wages and good jobs for Manitobans. Yet, the Premier freezes the minimum wage and picks partisan fights with workers. The Premier is more concerned with settling old political debts and fighting the last election than finding solutions.

In fact, the Premier pledged to create jobs, and he solemnly vowed to protect front-line workers. But since taking office, the North and the workers have taken a hit, and the Premier has broken his promise to protect front-line workers—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Thank you, George. Words are not enough for the contribution that you have made and your colleagues have made, your comrades in arms, for our freedoms, too often taken for granted today, but appreciated by all members of this House. So, George, again I offer my thanks on behalf of all Manitobans for your tremendous efforts on the part of—on behalf of Manitobans and the values that we stand for and the country that we love.

Most certainly, Madam Speaker, our concerns remain with the people of the North at this time, and these challenges that we are going to face together, I hope, are important challenges that were not created in the last half year. They are challenges that have been upcoming for some time. As members opposite know, former members of the Executive Council, the previous government, undertook to solve some of the problems facing some of the communities with subsidization and patchwork solutions that did not work, and we see the results of those failed strategies today in the challenges that we now must face. We are prepared on this side of the House to face those challenges. We do so with integrity, and we do so

with a belief that the North has a tremendous amount to offer and that the people of the North deserve our support, our care and our best actions.

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

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, Manitobans know that you can't build their province without good jobs and an affordable life for workers.

* (13:50)

Manitoba needs steady increases to the minimum wage to keep up with the cost of living. They need good jobs in downtown Winnipeg and in their northern and rural communities. Most of all, they need a plan to grow our economy and make sure there are good jobs. Instead, the Premier wants to divide Manitobans against each other by picking fights with different groups.

Will the Premier, today, stop picking partisan fights with labour and get back to the job of working with all Manitobans?

Mr. Pallister: Madam Speaker, as someone who has, like many of my colleagues on this side of the House, demonstrated in their lives a capability and competence to work and bring people together effectively, whether private or public sector, whether unionized or non-unionized, whether front-line worker or senior manager, we as a government have the competencies to do that, to bring people together, not divide them.

We have inherited a decade of decay, of debt, of decline that was handed to us by the previous government. That decline is the result of a failed ideology they cling to today and of a divisive strategy which saw a consensus emerge on April 19th of this year when a consensus among Manitobans was made obvious with a record election of a government with a record majority.

We will continue to work with all Manitobans to build a stronger future for our province and its people, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, Manitoba has lost 6,000 jobs since the Premier was sworn in. This is not a record to be proud of. That is not the right direction for Manitoba.

The Premier (Mr. Pallister) has no plan to create good jobs close to home or to build an economy that works for the future.

In the midst of mounting job losses in the North, with a region of our province in crisis, will the Premier stop his ideological attack on Manitoba workers?

Mr. Pallister: Well, some things are right and left, some are right and wrong. The member is wrong; we are right, and we are working together with union members.

As a former union rep, I must say, Madam Speaker, I take great offence to the comments of the member opposite. I have stood on behalf of my comrades in the unions that I have worked with. I believe very strongly—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —in the principles of collective bargaining. I have worked and stood on behalf of my colleagues as a worker in this province and will continue to.

The fact of the matter remains, Madam Speaker, that under the previous administration—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —we lost ground. There was a decade of decline. In terms of economic performance we were ranked ninth of the Canadian provinces while the previous administration was in charge.

Now they attempt to shift blame in a partisan and ideological way, when, in fact, the beginning of their healing should be admitting they were wrong and accepting the frailties of their previous approach, and getting on side with our approach which will bring Manitobans together and build a stronger economy and a stronger resolve to achieve better things for this province.

Health-Care Services Government Intention

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Speaking of ideological, Madam Speaker, after spending the summer vacation taking notes on privatization in Saskatchewan, this minister, now, has finally gotten around to issuing a request for proposals for his review of the Manitoba health-care system.

With proposals presumably rolling in and piling up on his desk, can the minister simply tell us who exactly has submitted an RFP so far, and how many of those were from companies based in the United States?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, indeed, we did spend the summer looking at different ideas across Canada and how different things are done in Canada, unlike the isolationist approach of the former government, the NDP, who presided over a decade of debt and weren't able to improve the services.

We decided to actually speak to Manitobans, to Canadians, to other officials and ask them how can we improve the system, because we are dedicated to repairing our services, unlike the NDP who were just dedicated to racking up the debt.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Well, the minister will know the reason Manitobans are asking this question is because the last time his government paid a private company to focus on short-term value for money, they brought in Connie Curran to decimate our health-care system and lay off nurses and front-line workers.

The RFP itself notes that numerous groups working in the health-care system will be impacted by the recommendations made.

So the real question is: Who is this minister listening to? Those numerous front-line workers who are about to be impacted or another private company looking to Americanize our health-care system?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, I don't know why this member is opposed to this government reaching out and listening to individuals. I don't know why he's opposed to this government taking ideas.

Now, I know that that former caucus, when they were in government, not only did they not listen to Manitobans, they didn't even listen to each other, Madam Speaker. They had so many divisions from within.

Those that, of course, they did hire, they hired their friends to give them the answers that they'd already predetermined before they even asked the question. We've decided to ask open questions about how can we improve the system. We look forward to hearing the answers from Manitobans, from

others who are engaging. We actually want to hear creative suggestions. Those will be included through the budget process, the most open and transparent budget consultation process in the history of Manitoba. I don't know why they hate consulting with Manitobans, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wiebe: You know, here, Madam Speaker, is another double standard: a government that talks about transparency, openness, listening to people won't come clean with Manitobans about their own agenda. So I'm going to give the minister one more chance to set the record straight, let Manitobans know his real intentions.

The government has said they'll appoint an advisory board to meet with this consultant, but not who's going to be on the board. Will it include labour, Madam Speaker? Will it include the hard-working, everyday health-care workers who share their on-the-ground perspectives, or will it just be stacked with the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) well-connected, privileged friends looking to privatize our health-care system one piece at a time?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, our real intentions are clear. We want to better the system. We want to shorten wait times. We want to increase accountability. We want to ensure that Manitobans get the service that they deserve. We want to ensure that the government doesn't continue to rack up the debt at record paces, double the debt as the NDP did.

And you know how we want to do this? This is going to come as a surprise to members opposite. We actually want to talk to Manitobans, Madam Speaker, and I have no idea why the member opposite is so scared to talk to Manitobans. We were even going to talk to the good people of Concordia. He might want to do the same.

Minimum Wage Increase Request

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): A person working a full-time, minimum-wage job earns less than \$20,000 a year before taxes. Many of the people who work minimum-wage jobs don't get full-time hours, receive minimum benefits and have to work multiple jobs at odd hours in order to get by.

The government's refusal to increase the minimum wage is going to force families to make

difficult choices between paying rent, buying groceries and other essentials.

Will the Premier admit that his failure to raise the minimum wage is going to hurt Manitoba families? Is he creating a better Manitoba or a bitter Manitoba?

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

As my colleague, the Minister of Health said, we are consulting with Manitobans. We've asked the Labour Management Review Committee to review minimum wage and also look at the possibility of indexing minimum wages into the future.

We've also—the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) is engaging in a consultation process on the budget with Manitobans. We're asking Manitobans to come to the table with their views. We're asking Manitobans to join in online: YourProvinceYourPlan. They can commit to what their ideas are, in terms of the minimum wage, going forward. We are listening to Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows—or, sorry, for the Maples.

Mr. Saran: Mr. Kevin Rebeck and the Manitoba Federation of Labour sent an open letter to the Premier, urging him to raise the minimum wage. Nearly 70 unions signed the letter.

* (14:00)

Has the Premier met with Kevin Rebeck or any other unions who signed the letter to discuss how freezing the minimum wage even for a year will hurt Manitoba workers? Is he creating a better Manitoba or a battered Manitoba?

Mr. Cullen: Madam Speaker, again, I appreciate the question. It's an opportunity for us to talk about affordability.

And if we look at the minimum wage in Manitoba, where is it relative to other provinces? Third. Here's the provinces that have a lower minimum wage than Manitobans: BC, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland, all below the minimum wage here.

Let's talk about accountability and affordability. This was a government that increased the PST on Manitobans on such a number of different goods and services. That, Madam Speaker, is taking

hard-earned—wage earners—taking money out of their pockets.

Mr. Saran: With the rates set to rise under the Conservative government, every penny earned by Manitobans is going to count. Raising the minimum wage helps the people more than a—raising tax breaks, hundreds of dollars more each year.

Will this government just admit it's a mistake and raise the minimum wage?

Mr. Cullen: Madam Speaker, again, I appreciate the question. I appreciate the member bringing this issue forward. Obviously, it's important to a lot of Manitobans.

It's about 5 per cent, actually, of the working class that earn minimum wage. Certainly our job as a Province is to create more jobs, more economic development for Manitobans, get more people back to work and leave more money in people's pockets.

That's why we're indexing the basic tax exemption, something this government previously never did. And they just kept taking more money out of hard-working Manitobans' pockets, especially those at the minimum wage.

Organized Labour Certification Changes

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Madam Speaker, the government has no vision for how they will grow our economy or build our province. Instead, we see job losses in the North and cuts to those on minimum wages. But this government has shown us that they—what they think of organized labour: it's not important.

Does this Premier (Mr. Pallister) respect organized labour? Will this government stand with working Manitobans and help them protect their rights in the workplace?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments here, and more comments than questions.

Certainly, we have had tremendous dialogue with the labour movement across the province, and we certainly respect their concerns, their issues.

Obviously, over the last decade we've had increasing debt in the province, certainly a decay in the environment and in the economy and obviously a decline in the environment and the economy. And that's something that our government's going to fix.

And we're working with the business community, we're working with labour, we're working with all Manitobans to increase the economy here. And it's a time for us to actually stop and rebuild our economy and move forward and getting more people back to work in Manitoba.

Mr. Lindsey: Madam Speaker, over 500 workplaces and thousands of workers have unionized over the past 17 years through automatic certification. Rather than respecting the democratic will of workers, this Premier thinks that procedural roadblocks should be put in place to prevent workers from forming a union.

Will this Premier side with the nearly 70 per cent of workers who have used card check for the past 17 years and those who want to use it in the future?

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate the member's question.

Obviously, we're looking forward to debate on Bill 7 this session—[interjection]—and we will, obviously, we will. We've got a lot of very important legislation that we want to debate in this session. And we think—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cullen: —it'll be interesting to see what people have to say at committee. We're looking forward to that discussion. That's why we brought the legislation forward, to have that discussion.

This is what Manitobans asked us to do. This is an election promise that we ran on, and we are bringing it to the table and we're bringing it to the House for a discussion. We are standing on the side of Manitobans, and we believe a lot of workers want that democratic secret ballot vote.

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

Mr. Lindsey: We know that intimidation and coercion are serious threats to workers and their ability to form a union. We also know that automatic certification can help check these threats. Workers risk their jobs and their livelihoods to form a union, and they need a government that stands with them when they put all of their lives on the line.

Will this government stop picking partisan fights with its enemies and get on with the job of supporting Manitoba workers?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I haven't seen the members in such a hurry to do something since they raised the PST, Madam Speaker.

When the NDP came in to power 16 years ago and began the phase in our provincial history of decline, decay and general debt gathering, they actually took away the right of Manitoba workers to have a secret ballot, something enjoyed by people all over the country, including people in labour unions all over the country.

Many, many people in this country, in this province and in this room understand the value of a secret ballot. It's a protection for workers, for workers when they vote so that their bosses, whether union or private sector, do not have the knowledge of how they cast their ballot. Whether their boss is union or private sector should have the knowledge of how people choose to vote is something it is clear the members opposite have decided—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Macdonald Youth Services Contract Negotiations

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): We heard throughout the election the Premier vowing to protect front-line workers. However, we still don't know exactly what he considers front-line workers to be.

But once again we see the Premier is backtracking on an election promise when he stood by on the sidelines as Macdonald Youth Services went on strike, the first MGEU strike in two decades. But this Premier refused to negotiate or protect them, and eventually they were forced to go back to work without a contract.

How could the Premier not support the Macdonald Youth front-line workers despite him just saying it, not 10 minutes ago, that he supports collective bargaining?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): I very much do appreciate the question.

I can tell you that there is important lines that need to be drawn between government and third parties. They need to be clear, and a part of this—is this an employee-employer relationship that needs to be addressed amongst themselves.

What we've seen over the past number of years is the NDP interfering in so many labour negotiations as we go forward, which is unacceptable

process for us. So we want to take a comprehensive process. This is an employee-employer situation which they're dealing with on an everyday basis.

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

Ms. Fontaine: The Premier had no problem approving a five-year contract with the Province's engineers while Macdonald Youth service workers were forced to go back to work without a contract, and they had to go back to work because the reality is that if they didn't, Manitoba children and youth would be at risk. Front-line workers are nervous and confused by the Premier's outright refusal to once and for all put on the record who constitutes front-line workers.

* (14:10)

Does the Premier honestly believe he can just pick and choose willy-nilly who front-line workers are without putting children and youth at risk in Manitoba?

Mr. Fielding: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the question.

And again, this, what the member's talking about in terms of Macdonald Youth Services, there is a difference. There's drawing a link between government and third-party organizations. This is between an employer and between employees, a part of it. That negotiation's going on.

Too often we've seen from the NDP, on number of years, interfering with labour negotiations. That's a part of this. We need to step back and let the employers and employees make a decision and an agreement that goes forward.

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

Ms. Fontaine: The Premier missed an opportunity to tangibly demonstrate his commitment to front-line workers by supporting Macdonald Youth Service workers in their pursuit, and rightly so, of a fair and equitable contract.

Tragically, the Premier instead chose to kick off his mandate by picking a fight with these very important and much-needed counsellors who work every single day to keep youth and children in Manitoba safe. The Premier has said in the past that he keeps his word, I suppose just to the select few that he favours in his circle.

My question is simple: If the Premier doesn't have the conviction to support Manitoba youth service workers and the incredible work that they do, who does he feel warrants—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): The member makes a choice in her preamble, and she chooses to play identity politics and she chooses to try to pit workers against us and the government, and she chooses to launch into personal attacks on me. This is a choice she has made. We're not responsible for her choices. She is responsible for them.

One thing for sure, though, the member opposite, in her preamble, demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of how collective bargaining works and a complete disrespect for the process of fairly negotiated collective bargaining as it should be constructed to benefit workers and to benefit employers. The difference between the member's position, and apparently the position of her party and ours, is theirs is based on fundamental lack of understanding and disrespect. Ours is based on appreciation and compassion for workers and respect for them and their employers.

Budget for Projects Funding Concerns

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I've received many calls from people whose jobs are on hold while the government continues to ponder on whether or not they will be granted funding. The CBC has reported that decisions on hundreds of millions of dollars are on hold while this government continues to delay.

I heard this morning at our meeting with the AMM that many projects have come to a stop. People are anxious about their future.

Madam Speaker, in June, the Estimates were completed and the budget was voted on and passed. Why is the government still not making decisions on so many items which were already passed and voted on in the budget?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I thank the member and welcome the member back to the Legislative Assembly. And I wanted to say I appreciate him raising the issue of prudent fiscal management, because it is important.

The federal Liberal government is currently under attack for the mismanagement of its money in respect of paying people in Toronto to move to

Ottawa to work. And they will, I'm sure, do their best to weather that storm. That is evidence to some of a lack of management capability and competence.

It is not as bad, however, as paying \$700,000 to people to leave. And that is exactly what the previous administration did. They paid \$700,000 to workers to leave—not severance, a secret, ad hoc payment of three quarters of a million dollars to staffers to leave and not work here but choose to work somewhere else.

So, again, I would encourage the member to work with us in the support of prudent fiscal management and a forward-looking approach to giving the best value to Manitobans—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable member for River Heights, on a supplementary question.

ER Wait Times Establishment of Task Force

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, there are many decisions which are still on hold. Indeed, the government continues to postpone decisions on major commitments. You know, for example, while Manitobans endure long emergency room waits, the Premier delayed for almost six months before even starting the work of a task force on reducing emergency room wait times. The Premier has said he's waiting for the federal government.

But I ask the Premier: How can his government even make a legitimate request to the federal government if his government has not even done its own homework and got a report from the task force with recommendations on specific solutions?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Well, I thank the member, but he could not be more wrong in his assertions. After a decade of debt and decay and decline, now the member is saying we're not proceeding fast enough, but he could not be more wrong.

The work did not start gradually; the work started immediately when this government took power: bringing a budget right away; putting in place a fiscal performance review right away; sending an expenditure management memo right through the system right away; bringing real measures in our budget that will help Manitobans keep more of their hard-earned money.

I assure the member that the work we did is—was conducted right away, it is ongoing and it will bear dividends for all Manitobans.

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

EMILI Project Status Update

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): But still no task force.

Another of the government's major commitments as stated in the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) mandate letter to the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade, is for the minister to champion the Enterprise Machine Intelligence and Learning Initiative, also known as EMILI, which, if it becomes a reality, could bring thousands and thousands of jobs to our province. EMILI is time sensitive, and if we're to have a chance of competing with fast-moving developments elsewhere we need to be working and acting, and yet there's been no announcements since the election.

Is the government actually working with people at EMILI to develop a partnership with the Province and to approach the federal government to ensure this initiative is a top priority?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): I really do appreciate the member's question on this.

Certainly we have mandate letters, and we are working through those mandates. We had 100-day mandates as well and we were very successful in accomplishing those 100-day mandates.

I will say on the EMILI project we have had a very constructive meeting with the EMILI proponents. They're very excited; we're very excited about this project. I am very excited about the possibilities and job—potential job creations on this particular area. I would hope that—and I have had conversations with the federal government in regard to this project—I would hope that the members opposite from the Liberal Party will be talking to the federal government on this so that we can get together and begin the job of rebuilding the economy here in Manitoba.

Political Parties Elimination of Public Financing

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): The NDP and others have claimed that the vote tax is about

supporting smaller political parties, yet the NDP took close to three out of four dollars paid out through their NDP vote tax.

Whose interests are best served by the elimination of the NDP vote tax?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I want to thank my honourable friend for the question.

And, of course, the interests who will be best served as a result of the elimination of the vote tax is, indeed, the interests of all Manitobans. So—and I am very proud, Madam Speaker, to be part of a party and a caucus who chose year in and year out not to accept the vote tax because that's in the best interests of Manitobans.

Madam Speaker, our government is focused on fixing our finances, on repairing our services and rebuilding our economy, and we will not do this on the backs of Manitobans in the way of a vote tax. That's why we have introduced Bill 9, and we are looking forward to doing what is in the best interests of all Manitobans.

Northern Manitoba Communities Meeting with Premier

Mr. Kevin Chief (Point Douglas): Madam Speaker, we know hard-working Manitoba families all across the North are facing some serious challenges: the closure of the Port of Churchill; cut to the rail service by OmniTRAX; Tolko Industries potentially closing its doors; potentially hundreds of jobs lost, affecting thousands throughout the region.

* (14:20)

Manitobans found out about this 73 days ago. This government knew about that long before that, Madam Speaker. The best way to show people you care is to show up.

When will the Premier visit the North?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): I do appreciate the question. I find it interesting, that question, though. We've been visiting northern Manitoba for three years, ever since this Premier took over leadership of this party. And we will continue to consult with Manitobans in the North.

You know, we recognize there's challenges in northern Manitoba. You know, we're dealing with the rail line situation, for instance, in Churchill. And, obviously, you know, because of the decade we've

had here previously under this government, we've had a real decline in relationships.

And, as a matter of fact, we as a government have inherited a lawsuit because of this government's inactions and inability to deal with companies in the North. And we have to deal with that because of their bad messes that left—they left us in, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Chief: You only have to look at the headlines to know how severe these impacts could have—were having on people in the North: Port of Churchill layoffs come out of nowhere, says the town's mayor; it's pretty heartbreaking, a worker says after he and others received layoff notices; nervous times up North in the North region; coming apart at the seams amid a series of economic blows; a northern chill; The Pas fears town's economy will go cold when Tolko closes the mill.

By not showing up, Madam Speaker, Manitobans are starting to ask: Does the Premier not understand these challenges in the North, or does he simply not care?

Mr. Cullen: I do appreciate the question.

I'm not sure that the members opposite, though, understand the reality of what we've inherited here. These things didn't occur in the last few months. These have been ongoing things and challenges for northern Manitobans, a lot of it because of the 17 years we've had under their watch.

It's clear Manitobans—northern Manitobans said we, as a government, took the right decision. We should not be supporting these companies in short terms. We should be seeking long-term solutions. That's what the federal government is asking for as well. That's what we're asking for. Maybe they should just get out of the road and let us get the job done.

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

Mr. Chief: The member for Thompson (Mr. Bindle) must know the challenges his communities are facing. The member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk) must know the wide-reaching effects this is having on the entire region. I am sure both of these members have asked the Premier to come visit the North. I'm sure both these members know that the Premier visiting the North would represent something very powerful for the families of the North.

So I'm assuming they've asked the Premier. So is he simply not listening to his colleagues, or is he simply ignoring them?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I'm sorry, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much. It is ironic when the member speaks of teamwork in any real sense. It was never exemplified by the members opposite when they were in government.

The member says the best way to show you care is to show up. That's the kind of politics he practises: the politics of photo ops, the politics of handouts, the politics of cheques and subsidies. Getting attention drawn to one's self is not the way to get results for people.

The best way to show you care is to get results. And the best way that we will show we care is to get results. We have had dozens of visits to the communities of the North. Two-thirds of our Cabinet just had personal meetings with representatives from northern communities, indigenous, non-indigenous, all over the North, me included.

And the reality is the member opposite is confusing getting credit for a photo opportunity with getting results. This is the kind of government we have. We'll focus on results; he can continue to focus on photo ops.

Project Labour Agreements Use in Construction Projects

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I'd like to ask another question of the Premier, and now that he's worked himself up to a big lather here I'm sure he'll be able to handle this.

Madam Speaker, the Red River Floodway expansion was finished using a project labour agreement. It was finished on time, under budget. The project was built making use of the project labour agreement.

We know the Premier opposes these agreements. He even tried to scuttle it when he was an MP in Ottawa.

Will this government commit to making use of this important mechanism to complete construction projects?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): Madam Speaker, I would like to start by tabling for the honourable member opposite, for his reading pleasure, the Auditor General's report on the East Side Road Authority.

If I may quote from the Auditor General's report: ESRA set measurable objectives—no, pardon me, that's the—sorry, that's what they should have done—they are missing measurable objectives in ESRA—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pedersen: ESRA did not have a defined risk management process. ESRA—it goes on and on. Read the report.

This is why we are determined to build a meaningful—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable minister for—sorry—the honourable member for Elmwood, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Maloway: Madam Speaker, my follow-up question to the Premier is that project labour agreements save money for Manitoba. These agreements recognize that cheap does not mean good quality.

In fact, Duff Roblin recognized that fact. Premiers throughout Manitoba history have recognized that fact. But this Premier cannot recognize the fact. His proposal is short-sighted and meant to give a gift to big business.

If the government believes in value for money, will they commit to keeping the project labour agreements which save Manitobans money?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, the member demonstrates, as does his party, a failure to understand competition in the marketplace and a failure to understand the unfairness of their previous practices, which limited participation in tendering on government work here in our own province to companies that were unionized and excluded those that were not.

This makes no sense. It's unfair. Workers, whether unionized or not, deserve a chance to work in their own province. They pay taxes here, they raise their children here, they go and they support community causes here. And they deserve to have an equal opportunity to work here. And that's the chance that we'll give those workers, this government will give those workers, which that government refused to give them.

This will give us better value for money. But most of all, Madam Speaker, it's fair to all of the workers of the province, not just some.

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:

(1) 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 compared with 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 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.

And 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

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, on House business, I would like to announce that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Thursday, October 6th, 2016, at noon to consider the process for hiring a new Children's Advocate.

* (14:30)

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Thursday, October 6, 2016, at noon, to consider the process for hiring a new Children's Advocate.

Mr. Micklefield: Madam Speaker, I would like to call, for second reading, Bill 9, The Election Financing Amendment Act.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced by the honourable Government House Leader that this House will now consider Bill 9 this afternoon, second reading of Bill 9, The Election Financing Amendment Act (Repeal of Annual Allowance).

SECOND READINGS

Bill 9—The Election Financing Amendment Act (Repeal of Annual Allowance)

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health, that Bill 9, The Election Financing Amendment Act (Repeal of Annual Allowance); Loi modifiant la Loi sur le financement des élections (suppression de l'allocation annuelle), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Stefanson: I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill 9, and this, of course, is The Election Financing Amendment Act, and the bill to end, finally, after many, many years, the vote tax in Manitoba.

We know, Madam Speaker, from going door to door in the last election, and in prior, previous elections we heard time and time again that this is an NDP government that can—cares more about their own pockets than they do about putting more money into the pockets of Manitobans. We saw that going door to door, and then, of course, the NDP made a promise prior to not this past election, but the previous election, that they would not raise taxes and they would not raise the PST.

And, of course, there was an act and there was—it was in legislation here in Manitoba that required members opposite to call a referendum if they had any major tax increases in Manitoba, yet they chose, instead, to go around that act and still impose an increase in the PST to Manitobans despite having gone door to door, knocked on those doors, talked to those Manitobans, and they heard loud and clear that

they did not want any tax increases. They told them they wouldn't increase those taxes. They turned around and they raised those taxes on Manitobans.

So we see that it—there is a pattern in history, here, Madam Speaker, of a party that is more interested in lining their own political pockets than putting more money back in the pockets of Manitobans.

So now is our opportunity, Madam Speaker, to do the right thing as Manitobans and, of course, members opposite can still do the right thing. They can vote in favour of this legislation because this is what's in the best interest of all Manitobans. We should be putting more money back in the pockets of Manitobans, not taking it out of the pockets of Manitobans.

Madam Speaker, Manitobans expect their government to put the public interest ahead of narrow political interest, to put the public good ahead of political priorities. Under the NDP decade of debt, decay and decline, the NDP high-debt-high-tax agenda saw the NDP direct hard-earned tax dollars taken from Manitoba families to serve the NDP's own narrow political agenda.

Under the NDP, millions of dollars were directed to political friends through untendered contracts, and an additional million was taken by the NDP to fund the operations of their party headquarters.

The NDP vote tax is a tax forced on Manitobans each year for exercising their democratic right to vote. It is an involuntary donation that must make—they must make even if their voting preference has changed. It is an involuntary donation accepted by both the NDP and the Liberal parties in Manitoba and other parties, and it is an involuntary donation only the Progressive Conservatives refused to accept.

The NDP vote tax is part of a long list of ways the NDP have eroded basic democratic rights in Manitoba. The NDP took away workers' democratic right to vote to a secret ballot. The NDP took away the right of all Manitobans to vote on major tax increases. The NDP remain under investigation today for allegations of trading jobs for votes.

From 2012 to '15, the NDP received over three quarters of a million dollars, and the Liberals just over \$250,000. Almost three quarters of the NDP vote tax paid out since 2012 has gone directly to the NDP to fund their political operations; that's almost a million dollars.

Manitobans elected a new Progressive Conservative government committed to fixing our finances, repairing our services—as I can see people are doing now in our Chamber—and rebuilding the economy. This includes putting the public interest ahead of political interest.

I was never more proud of our PC team than when we unanimously agreed to refuse to take the NDP's vote tax. Each and every year when the NDP had their hand out, we stood up for the people in Manitoba.

The Premier (Mr. Pallister) committed to end the NDP vote tax in our first year in office as part of our better plan for a better Manitoba, and this legislation, Bill 9, keeps that promise to the people of Manitoba.

Earlier this year, we cautioned the other parties that in the first sitting of the Legislature a new PC government would introduce legislation to repeal the vote tax. We did so to give them time to reverse their dependence on the vote tax funding.

We are proud to put the public interest first and ensure political parties rely on voluntary support, rather than mandatory taxes, to fund their political operations. Madam Speaker, we are committed to making Manitoba Canada's most improved province, making Manitobans' families safer and stronger and this is all a part of what Bill 9 is all about.

The current vote tax dates back to 2012, as it stands right now, although it was brought in prior to that. In 2012, the NDP was once again fighting among themselves. The reason for their internal dysfunction was again not issues of principle but narrow political interests.

The NDP political insiders and party operatives were upset the NDP government was writing cheques for political friends but was not giving their party a big enough cut of taxpayer dollars. The NDP wanted their vote tax and would not take no for an answer.

The NDP had also just recently raised taxes in their 2012 budget and had already run the number on the NDP PST hike for Budget 2013. The NDP knew they could no longer support themselves through voluntary donations after breaking the promise after promise after promise to Manitobans in the way of tax hikes. They knew Manitobans would be less able and less willing to give voluntary donation to the NDP after back-to-back historic tax grabs.

The NDP solution was to try to make the NDP vote tax more acceptable to Manitobans by setting up

a rigged process. They used the credibility of a well-respected Manitoban, Dr. Paul Thomas, to legitimize or try to their vote tax. Understanding the goal of this process was to legitimize rather than question the merits of the vote tax, the NDP legislation restricted the so-called—the independent allowance commissioner. The NDP wanted their vote tax, so they took the extreme step of prohibiting Dr. Thomas by law from asking questions, consulting on or providing recommendation on whether or not there should be an NDP vote tax.

Dr. Thomas's report reads, and I quote: "It is important to note, however, that the Commissioner is not free to settle the policy disagreement between the governing party and the official opposition party over whether or not annual allowances should be paid. The principle that there will be allowances has been established in the Act. This means that the commissioner is restricted only to such issues as the total amount to be paid, what types of party activities will be supported by the allowance program, how the available funds will be divided among the eligible political parties and what accountability requirements will be attached to the receipt of allowances." End quote.

* (14:40)

So Dr. Thomas may support the concept of the vote tax subsidy; he may not. We don't know because that was never studied. Despite the restriction placed on him, Dr. Thomas's report does provide some guidance relevant to today's debate. Dr. Thomas's report reads, and I quote: "In a condition of severe financial stress, allowance spending can be suspended or reduced by the government through a budgetary bill passed by the Legislature."

The NDP have more than doubled the provincial debt. In a few short years the NDP received two credit rating downgrades. Taxes are among the highest in Canada, and many of our services rank the bottom of political rankings.

The financial situation of our crowns has been compromised by political mismanagement to the point that Manitoba Hydro has been brought to near bankruptcy because—as a result of the previous actions of the NDP government.

Sadly, the NDP have learned nothing from the recent election and continue to put their own political interests ahead of the public interest, political priorities ahead of political good.

I think it's unfortunate, Madam Speaker, that members opposite and both political parties represented in the House have seen fit to accept this kind—these kinds of dollars from Manitobans in the way of a vote tax subsidy. We know that after a decade of debt, a decade of decay and a decade of decline under the NDP, that Manitoban is faced—Manitobans are faced with severe—in a severe economic situation that we're in right now.

Manitobans are tight for money and they don't need to be spending money in the way of a vote tax that doesn't even allow them the choice to be able to donate to a party that they—that they feel that they want to. It forces them to donate to parties that perhaps they don't support, and so that's why we oppose this.

And certainly we know that the interests who are best served by the elimination of this vote tax is, indeed, the interests—is in the best interest of all Manitobans. And so I ask all members of this House to support us in this endeavour today to do what's in the best interests of all Manitobans: to vote in favour of Bill 9. Let's support this; let's get on with doing what's in the best interest of Manitoba.

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): Could the minister advise whether the changes set out in Bill 9 were recommended by Elections Manitoba?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Certainly, these changes as set out the way they are in Bill 9 were as a result of a significant consultation process that has been taking place by our party for the last several, several years since this was first brought in, and we know from going door to door in every single election since this came about that Manitobans were not interested in paying in the way of a vote tax to political parties that they didn't necessarily support. They prefer their own—to donate their own tax dollars to the political

party of their choice. So that is the consultation process that we took place—that took place.

Mr. Swan: Well, the minister, I don't know if she didn't hear my question or didn't understand it. The question's very simple: Were the changes that are now contained in Bill 9 recommended by Elections Manitoba?

Mrs. Stefanson: And I said very clearly in my last answer, Madam Speaker, that these changes that are lined—that are outlined in Bill 9 were recommended by Manitobans themselves. We went door to door; we heard from Manitobans. All of my colleagues went door to door. We heard from Manitobans.

I suspect members opposite went door to door as well and they heard that Manitobans didn't want to be donating to political parties that they didn't choose to support. So that's why we're bringing this forward. This, in fact, puts more money back in the pockets of Manitoba rather than in political parties, and that's what we believe Manitobans want. We've heard that. They are the ones that have recommended this.

Mr. Swan: Well, I, again, the member—or the minister's been unable now twice to answer a simple question, so I think the answer's very clear for this House that, no, this was not recommended by Elections Manitoba.

Now, yesterday, of course, we heard member after member after member getting up and talking about recommendations of Elections Manitoba and how important it was to follow it.

Does the minister then reject the idea of having the impartial third-party experts provide advice regarding best practices for our elections and our electoral system?

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the honourable member for his question and it is an important one. And, of course, we have consulted, you know, several people when it comes to this piece of legislation.

What I would like to know also, though, is why, when the NDP had an opportunity to allow Dr. Thomas to explore this area of the vote tax itself, they denied him the ability to do so in his report. What were they afraid of so much so that they denied him the ability to expand the scope of what his report would include? I wonder if that member could answer that question today.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Swan: If the minister can't answer simple questions, only wants to ask them, we could always switch places, if that's what she'd like to do.

Did the minister refer this matter to Elections Manitoba for their comment on what's proposed in Bill 9?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think if Manitobans wanted the former attorney general and I to switch places, they would have done that and made that choice in the last election. And, in fact, they chose this way, Madam Speaker.

I respect Manitobans' right to vote. I respect how they vote. I have been in this Legislature for almost 16 years now. I've had the opportunity to be through many of those elections and work with many, many people in Manitoba. And I have always, always respected the way that Manitobans vote. They know best how to vote.

And, as a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, just getting back to Bill 9, I think it's very important that members opposite understand that we are a party that believes in putting more money back in the pockets of Manitobans. They are a party that wants to take money out of the pockets of Manitobans. There's a big difference between them and us.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, my question to the minister: I would like to ask how much money was provided by taxpayers to supporters and donors to the Conservative Party in the 2015 year. Many donors who gave, for example, \$100 got 20–\$75 back through a tax credit. This is a provincial funding of political parties, as the minister well knows. I would just like to know how many hundreds of thousands of dollars went to Conservative supporters who made donations.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, you know, I want to thank my honourable friend from River Heights for asking this question, because it is an important question. And it goes to the point of how important it is to go out as a political party and earn your own, you know, donations, from people and from Manitobans.

Manitobans have a choice to donate to political parties. Political parties have a right to put their policies out there and to have—just have members of our province come forward and support our political parties.

And so I think he 'braises' a very important point, that we went out, we asked for donations from Manitobans, we received donations from

Manitobans, and not once did we ever accept a vote tax from people who didn't want to support our party.

Mr. Swan: Madam Speaker, is there anything in this bill that would prevent a political party from using an unelected Canadian senator to manage their political campaign?

* (14:50)

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I want to thank the member for the question. And, you know, I believe, you know, quite frankly, it's beyond the scope of this bill when this bill, of course—but I know that members opposite don't want to talk about this bill. They're very sensitive when it comes to this bill, because they know that Manitobans who did not choose to support their political party do not make—want to make a donation to their party by the way—by way of a vote tax. And that's why they're very sensitive when it comes to debating this issue in—on the floor of this Legislature.

But I'm happy to tell you, Madam Speaker, that again we heard loud and clear from Manitobans. They had a choice in the last election of who they would—who they would vote for. They chose a party that is concerned with—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Swan: Well, again, I think it was a pretty simple question, whether there was anything the bill would prevent a Canadian senator like Don Plett who, of course, co-managed the Progressive Conservative campaigns, all the while, of course, on the Canadian taxpayers' dime. Of course, flying in from Ottawa to spend time in Manitoba with his first-class flights paid for by Manitobans.

Will the minister be agreeable, then, to an amendment that will confirm that no longer will Canadian senators be able to volunteer their time on the Canadian taxpayers' nickel to political campaigns?

Mrs. Stefanson: And, again, I think the member opposite is afraid to debate the merits of this bill.

You know, if he has some suggestions in terms of amendments that he wants to bring forward, he is certainly welcome to do so. He knows the process within this Chamber. He's been here for many years, and I know that he has the opportunity to bring forward any changes that he wants.

We believe that this accurately reflects this bill as it stands right now, accurately reflects what the

wishes were of Manitobans when they voted our open government in in the past election.

Mr. Swan: I was listening to the minister's second reading speech. Can the minister confirm that, indeed, it is open for the government of the day to simply suspend payments if the government believes there are financial reasons not to do so?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I think what—again, I think the bill does accurately reflect what Manitobans wanted and certainly I think that, you know, we've heard loud and clear from Manitobans across the province that they want a bill here that doesn't allow for the ability—for members of political parties to accept monies from people by the way of a vote tax, people who don't necessarily support their political party.

Mr. Swan: Well, I'm sure it was just in the minister's notes that she read from, but we will check Hansard because she did confirm, of course, that it would be open if the minister believes it is appropriate simply to suspend payments.

Did the minister—was she able to confirm, for the purposes of electoral contributions, that once and for all a corporation does not qualify as a person that can donate funds? Could the minister just confirm that because it is very important?

Mrs. Stefanson: I want to thank the member for the question.

I believe that is beyond the scope of this legislation. But it is, of course, something that is very important and, certainly, we abide by the laws of Manitoba. But we've also heard from Manitobans there are certain things that they don't like, and one of the things that they did not like was this vote tax. And that's exactly why we're standing before you today and before all of Manitobans today and supporting the—Manitobans' rights not to have to be forced by way of a vote tax to support political parties that they don't necessarily agree with.

Mr. Swan: Well, again, the question was clear and is entirely was in the scope of this legislation.

I'm asking the minister to confirm that—for the record, for the purpose of electoral contributions—a corporation does not qualify as a person that can donate funds.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, Madam Speaker, I believe it is not within the scope of this legislation that would be changing the scope.

Now, if the member opposite wants to bring forward amendments again, you know, that can be decided later and on whether or not it's in the scope. If he wants to change corporate and union donations and so on, than he's up to—he's—he can do that. Is he suggesting that there should be changes to that? I'm just wondering if that's what the member opposite is suggesting: that there should be changes.

Mr. Swan: I'm glad that—I'm glad the member continues to point out the failings of the bill she's bringing forward. So perhaps we will then bring up some changes.

Does the minister think that any public financing of elections is problematic?

Mrs. Stefanson: This is specific to the vote tax today. This is an extra tax that members opposite, when they were in government, burdened Manitobans with, and we believe that this should not be there. We believe that this is simple thing to do, that this is what Manitobans want, this is what we are doing. And, again, if members opposite—if the member opposite, which he indicated in his previous question, if he wants to make changes to corporate and union donations, I think he should say so today.

Mr. Swan: For the minister I will say so today, I'm very pleased that our NDP government brought in a law to prevent corporate and union donations. I'm trying to make sure there isn't a loophole that the corporate friends of the Progressive Conservative Party will try and get around.

Again, does the minister think any public financing of elections is a problem? I'd like a yes or no answer, Madam Speaker.

Mrs. Stefanson: What we do know, you know, the member, in his preamble to his question stated that, you know, some of the things that they brought in during their time in the last 17 years of a decade of decay and debt and decline, of course, one of the things that they introduced was an increase in the PST that they had to change the rules and the laws of the province in order to make it legal for them to do. And so they took away—while doing so, they took away the rights of Manitobans to vote in the way of a referendum on that tax increase. And I know members opposite are very sensitive about this, Madam Speaker, because they know it was the wrong thing to do. They know—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Gerrard: One of the things about the tax credit program, it is financing which goes to supporters of political parties. If you donate \$100, then you will get \$75 back. That \$75—[interjection]—that's right, if you're paying income taxes—\$75 from the Province, from the provincial government, taken from everybody in the province, right, the money that would come in from everybody.

So the minister refused to answer my question before: How many hundreds of thousands of dollars was the donors to the Conservative Party of Manitoba receive—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mrs. Stefanson: I know that in some Liberal propaganda that was sent out on Bill 9, it said, and I quote: One of the first things the Tory government did was eliminate the allowance, the annual allowance, of registered parties, which will mean a loss of \$63,255 annually for the Manitoba Liberal Party.

And, again, you know, Madam Speaker, obviously, the Liberal Party is more concerned about lining their own pockets than they are about doing what's in the best interests of Manitobans. I guess they stand like they did in the PST hike, they stand with the NDP party. I will tell you that we stand with Manitobans. We put more money back in the pockets of Manitobans; they put—they take money out. We are going to stand with Manitobans every day.

Madam Speaker: The time for this question period has ended.

Debate

Madam Speaker: The floor is now open for further debate.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I think we've had a good discussion today. I am disappointed the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson) couldn't answer what I thought were some straightforward questions, but we can all, I guess, decide for ourselves why she was unable or unwilling to answer them.

* (15:00)

You know, I do—I like the Minister of Justice, quite honestly. I think she's a very decent person. But I've got to admit that I feel sorry for her because here she is, she's been put in her role as the Minister of Justice, and so far, in the five months she's been a minister, we've heard very, very little about anything that would actually have to do with public safety,

anything about building stronger communities in Manitoba, anything about dealing with those issues.

And I know the mandate letter she was given, of course, contained absolutely nothing about building stronger communities in Manitoba. I know that the Throne Speech contained absolutely nothing about public safety or building safer communities in Manitoba. And I know the budget contained a grand total of 17 words about justice and public safety, and one of that was to, as we found out at Estimates, simply to provide for a negotiated increase in one government department.

So I know the minister has had her hands tied by the mandate letter her Premier (Mr. Pallister) has given her, had her hands tied by, apparently, a Treasury Board she formerly wasn't on that wasn't interested, and has been left out of, I presume, a lot of the discussions, because she hasn't actually been able to do anything I would think an Attorney General would want to do, which is to make public safety front and centre.

Now, I suppose that my friend, my colleague, the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum) and I can take credit that perhaps it's that we did such a good job, good job as ministers of Justice, that the minister now knows there's nothing further to do other than what was already in place. And I suppose I should be flattered at that. But I'm frankly disappointed that this minister has had her wings clipped and is only able to deal with a very, very narrow set of issues, which, frankly, are not priorities for the majority of Manitobans, but certainly a priority for the Progressive Conservative Party.

Now, we know, from listening to the Minister of Justice, that she decided to launch into an extremely partisan description of why she believes Bill 9 is appropriate, frankly, a far more partisan second reading speech that I believe I heard in my entire time, my 12 years in this Legislature, with an NDP government. But that's the way it is with this new, hyper-partisan, angry—you will not meet a party that has won a bigger majority that is more hostile, angry and paranoid than this group of people that we face. And it's disappointing.

And it's disappointing because I see some good people that are sitting in the opposition benches, people that I've gotten to know a little bit, and it must be very upsetting and very disappointing for themselves, who've come in, who've been elected, that want to make a difference, and have the Minister of Justice, who, rather than talking about making

their own communities safer, instead wants to talk about just about anything but.

And I know that the member, of course, decided in her partisan tirade to talk about affordability. And, boy, when we've been asking questions about affordability, boy, there is quite a story to be told. And, you know, when I look at what's going to happen when Manitoba drivers get their insurance bill for next year, if it goes up by 4 per cent or 5 per cent or 6 per cent or 7 per cent, but we don't know, because even though it's a couple of weeks before the Public Utilities Board hearing, they wouldn't tell us at committee how much that's going to be. I suppose we'll find out. Boy, they are going to be wishing that they had a Manitoba Public Insurance that was managed the way it was previously, when we were able to bring in increases that were only one third of the average increases of public-of car insurance across the country.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

So, you know, the amount of money that is paid to support democracy that's now being done away with under Bill 9 pales in comparison to the amount of money that is going to be sucked out of the pockets of Manitobans.

And we'll be very interested when we talk about Hydro. I'm going to be fascinated to find out how much the Boston Consulting Group was paid to do their report. And we'll be pointing out in the weeks and months to come how deficient that report is, how limited it was, and we'll find out what the terms of reference were.

I'm going to tell you right now that the amount of money that has been spent on that partisan report is many times the amount that's being paid to the Liberal Party of Manitoba, to the New Democratic Party of Manitoba. And I believe Manitobans will, as they are already, beginning to regret the choices they made just a couple of months ago.

An Honourable Member: But what about the vote tax?

Mr. Swan: And, you know, well, the member for Kildonan (Mr. Curry), who I respect very much, wants to learn more about the history here in Manitoba. And I will take him back—I'm going to take him back about 20 years—about 20 years—when the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba decided to enter into a vote-rigging scheme which involved putting up indigenous candidates with no backing of their own simply to try and split the NDP

vote in a number of ridings such as Interlake and others. And, you know, it took a while for that to become known.

And I just—I hear somebody—I'm not sure if it was the member for Headingley or Morris or whatever it is, talking about the '80s. No, no, this was not the '80s. This was in the '90s. This is the '90s when the Premier (Mr. Pallister), of course, was a member of Cabinet, was a member of the government caucus. And, at that time, the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba decided that they would be the defenders of democracy by putting up a bunch of paper candidates with the sole intention of trying to split the NDP vote in a number of ridings. And, of course, it never actually worked because the NDP won those seats. But, over years, the truth actually came out, and Premier Filmon, of course, did eventually call the public inquiry, and the public inquiry was not very kind to the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba and those who decided to take on democracy in Manitoba.

And Mr. Justice Sinclair, who conducted the inquiry, after hearing testimony of a number of senior Progressive Conservatives, had a conclusion. And he said: I have never heard so many liars in my life. And, you know, there is a book written by Doug Smith, an acquaintance of mine. I will be quite happy to loan the book so many liars to my friend the member for Kildonan, to the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Reyes) or any of my other friends across the way, and they can find out what actually happened within the political party which they joined.

And what happened as a result of the Progressive Conservative fraud to try to manipulate democracy? It was determined that there needed to be much stricter rules on money coming into and going out of political parties in Manitoba. And, as a result of that, because of advice from Elections Manitoba, because of advice from the inquiry report, it was decided there were to be a lot of additional requirements put on all political parties in Manitoba. So, in effect, there were more restrictions put on the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party and all of the other registered political parties because of the fraud that was perpetrated by the Progressive Conservative Party on the voters in Interlake and other constituencies and, truthfully, on the people of Manitoba.

So, if we wind back the clock to look at where we were in 1999, we now have political parties that have a lot of additional requirements. And one of the

things which occurred was that that was seen as a good thing. And I agree it is a good thing to make sure that money coming into and going out of political parties is properly accounted for. As a government, we also made the choice that no longer would big money be able to control elections in Manitoba, and we would ban union and corporate donations. So what this meant is that no longer could corporations be able to make a donation and then write it off on their taxes and use their donations as a tax write-off. And, of course, this is important because back in 1999, the corporate and the small business tax rate was much higher than, of course, it is today because of continual tax relief given by the NDP government from 1999 to 2016 which, again, is an inconvenient truth for members opposite.

And, at that time, there was a recommendation that there should be, effectively, a way to make up the money that's no longer coming in from corporate and union donations. Of course, the Progressive Conservatives at that time said, well, you've got to do away with union donations. And we said, that's fine. Let's make a level playing field. We'll do away with union and corporate donations. All of a sudden, they changed their tune. And, all of a sudden, we heard weeping and wailing and crying and the gnashing of teeth by Conservatives who weren't able to go down to the Manitoba Club and collect their cheques from their corporate pals year after year after year. And I know the member for Morris (Mr. Martin) fell out of his chair; he is so horrified—so horrified—about what happened to the Progressive Conservatives when there was something akin to a level playing field.

* (15:10)

There was one piece of that, of course, that took several years to bring in. That was the idea that to make up for these two changes—No. 1, no corporate, no union donations, no more corporate tax breaks for giving money to a provincial party, and also a much higher standard of reporting, necessary because of the fraud of the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba—that there should be some sort of countervailing measure to try and deal with that. And that's where the democratic subsidy came in and, of course, the Progressive Conservative Party made their choice and that's fine. That is something that they can continue to talk about, and I expect they will for the next four years to come.

There was a decision made by both the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party and other smaller parties to consider that as a way to balance

out the additional requirements they have. Of course, thanks to levelling the playing field but also thanks to the fraud committed by Progressive Conservatives, some of whom still have their fingers in running the party today.

So I'm glad that the member—*[interjection]* Well, I know the member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) also wants to read the book. I'll ask the member for Kildonan (Mr. Curry) when he finishes so many liars, could he please pass on the book to the member for Emerson? I will leave it—*[interjection]* and I'm sure perhaps the member for Kildonan will want to be switching teams for the next election. If he wants to hang on to his seat, that might be a very wise move. *[interjection]* I don't expect the member for Emerson would, and even if he did, I don't think we'd want him. But I do believe that one of the jobs, of course, in this Legislature—and I'm sure everybody experiences it—is the chance to learn.

And every day we walk into this building and every day we walk into our constituencies, we learn something. And I will heartily—I will heartily—approve the member for Emerson learning more about what happened in the events leading up to the Monnin inquiry, and the—I think the decision not just by New Democrats who, obviously, made it a political issue but also a number of Progressive Conservatives who were horrified, who were honestly horrified by what had happened within their own party and who also agreed that those things should not happen again. I know the member for Emerson was not one of those horrified, because he doesn't even know what I'm talking about right now. But, when he sees the book, I'm sure he will understand.

And, you know, my friend the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) raises a really good point, which I raised in my questions of the minister, and I asked, you know, for all about openness and transparency, is there anything in the act, then, as we're moving ahead, that would prevent a Canadian senator from jetting in, perhaps complaining about the broken crackers and the cold Camembert as he rolls into Manitoba, when he should actually be doing his job, whatever it is as a senator, to be co-managing the Progressive Conservative campaign, which, of course, Senator Don Plett, did not once, not twice, it might have been might have been three times, and I suppose this time they didn't want him around which may have helped them out.

But when, of course, okay—so, when Don Plett, of course, was on the dime with the Canadian Senate getting paid, of course, the amount of money that senators get paid for whatever it is that they do, he evidently had little enough to do and he was able to come here and co-manage the Progressive Conservative Manitoba campaign. And, of course, I know that Don Plett spent a lot of time, of course, preventing the transgender rights bill from going through, but he still found enough time had passed to come out here.

And I asked the member—the minister this in good faith, because I think it's quite clear that if we're going to move ahead on openness and transparency, there can't be anything less open and less transparent than having a Canadian senator being paid by the taxpayers of Canada also working, co-managing a campaign, which sounds to me like a full-time job.

So perhaps—[interjection] I believe the member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) is saying that Senator Plett charged the Canadian taxpayer \$700,000 for the time he was here.

I don't know if that could be the case, but, if that's what the member for Emerson is saying, then I hesitate to accept it. And I'm sure after Senator Plett gets a copy of the transcript, which I might send him, he'll have some further things to say to the member from Emerson.

So I did ask the question to make a point. There were some other questions that I had about whether Elections Manitoba had recommended these changes, and I asked the minister this question for a very good reason. And that is that yesterday, as we were debating Bill 4, we made it very clear that we were not going to be opposed to Bill 4 going ahead to committee and getting on for its committee hearing. And, even after we said that, we had a succession of very, very nervous Progressive Conservative members standing up with their scripts in front of them reading through their scripts, and, in each one of those scripts, we can go back—I'm not sure if it's eight or 10 or 12 or 14 speeches that all said the same thing—and they said: My goodness. We have to accept the advice of Elections Manitoba. They're the experts. They're the experts. So, when I asked the minister did Elections Manitoba recommend the changes in Bill 9, the minister would not answer the question.

And when I asked her, did you refer the matter to Elections Manitoba to get their advice from the

experts that all the Conservatives were promoting yesterday, again she couldn't answer the question.

So now—[interjection] Oh, now the member for Emerson is now suggesting that the people at Elections Manitoba aren't the experts; that they're no different than any other Manitoban. It's like the Minister for Crown Services, when I asked him about road safety and he said, well, I'm as responsible for road safety as any other Manitoban.

Well, he is no expert; we know that. But the folks at Elections Manitoba we know are experts and, strangely enough, yesterday afternoon member after member after member of the Progressive Conservative caucus got up and said: Oh, yes, Elections Manitoba are the experts. Take the direction from them. They say what should happen. And that's—that's not unreasonable, except if you come in the House the next day with another bill and can't answer a question about whether you've talked to Elections Manitoba, it does give people a little bit of concern about the bona fides of this new angry government.

So there are all kinds of questions that are raised by this, and as the minister, of course, said in her own speech on this bill, it is already within the power of the provincial government of the day to say that well, because of financial issues there will not be any democratic subsidy paid in the course of the year.

The minister said that in the course of her speech. I know the member for Emerson will have to read the Hansard just as he's going to read so many liars, but that is what I heard the minister say. Strangely enough, when I asked her the question in the new question and answer period, to allow members to find out more, the minister either couldn't remember what were in her notes from 15 minutes before, or she didn't want to answer the question because she didn't know where it was going to lead.

And I know that sometimes, as opposition members, we can be very, very tricky, but I think it's pretty important that ministers who stand up and give their second reading speeches should at least be able to repeat what was contained in their notes.

And, you know, I realize that the government of the day does not want to recognize the fact that we have the lowest unemployment rate in the country, does not want to acknowledge that we had one of the best rates of capital investment over the past 15 years, and, of course, they don't want to talk about

the performance of our Crown corporations, giving Manitobans the lowest cost for hydro, for public insurance, and for home heating. I know they don't want to talk about that, but I just thought that the minister would be able to at least confirm that if they truly believe the province is in as dire straits as they say, and I guess it is because they're running a bigger deficit this year than we did last year, now that the numbers have come in, now that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) has been proven wrong for the third-fourth-fourth time in his tenure, it would be open to them, and the minister has acknowledged that.

But instead they're going to proceed with Bill 9. Bill 9 not recommended by Elections Manitoba. Bill 9 not referred to Elections Manitoba for comment. Bill 9 not actually recognizing the history in this province, including the fraud perpetrated by the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba; and Bill 9 really not doing anything to advance democracy in this province. There's a lot of reasons to be very suspicious about their reasons.

Well—and the member—I heard a member calling out voluntary, and indeed the Progressive Conservative Party made their choice, and we're not going to object to that, but as the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party would say, if they want to voluntarily not take the money, that is quite open—that is quite open to them.

We'll have more time to debate Bill 9 at committee. We'll have another chance to talk about Bill 9 at third reading, but I am hoping when we get to committee that the minister will be a little bit more prepared to answer questions and, of course, based on a lot of the questions the minister hasn't answered, I expect we'll have some amendments that will perhaps make democracy even stronger in the province of Manitoba, and I'm sure that we'll have the support of all members of this House to make sure that that happens.

*(15:20)

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank this House for the opportunity to put some words on the record about Bill 9, and I do encourage those members of the government who will be speaking to put down the sanitized notes they've been given by their staff and actually engage a little bit. Get off the script and actually talk about things that are important to you. Because I do—I've had a chance to meet a number of the members. They seem like fine people. And I

would like to hear what they have to say, not just what the Premier's office is looking over your shoulder and demanding that you say.

So thank you very much for this opportunity.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): It's a pleasure to rise and put a few words on the record on this bill brought forward by our honourable colleague from Tuxedo. It's—Manitobans made a decision to elect a Progressive Conservative Party for a number of reasons. One of the big reasons was after they found out about the vote tax and then they heard the theme song of the NDP: If I had a million dollars, I wouldn't have to knock on doors anymore.

At any rate, after decades of decline and decay by this NDP government and then hear the rant from the member from Minto when he stands up and puts so many falsehoods on the record. He forgets about the days in 2011 as they went door to door: We will not raise the PST. We will not raise the PST. We will not raise taxes. They went door to door. Only after—only after—they had the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Excuse me. Order. Order. Order.

I'll just caution the member for using falsehoods. Okay? Continue.

Mr. Graydon: Okay.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I just want to clarify it on the use of falsehoods, okay?

An Honourable Member: As a term.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As a term, yes. Continue.

Mr. Graydon: Well, thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for that. I didn't realize that I was out of order with that remark. But, if they went door to door and telling non-truths—non-truths, then, rather than falsehoods. Could we use that term?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Caution your language. Continue.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2011, the NDP, every one of them—every one—went from door to door misleading Manitobans. They misled Manitobans by saying at the door, we will not raise the PST; we will not raise taxes. And we hear the member from Minto stand up—he stands up in here and says, oh, everybody else does everything wrong, and we are saints. Well, I'm sorry; he's not a saint. The NDP are not saints. They misled Manitobans on many, many things.

They weren't—they're not concerned—they were not concerned at all about the poor. They weren't concerned at all about the poor when they raised the PST. And, when they raised taxes, who did they hurt the most? They hurt the poor the most. They hurt the poor the most. And, in fact, it was a Progressive Conservative government that said we would raise the rental, the medium—to the medium of 75 per cent for EIA recipients because so many people—so many people—were having to use the food banks because they were taking their food money to pay their rent.

We encouraged—we encouraged—the NDP government to step forward and do that. We begged them, day after day in this House—we have it on record many, many times—to help the poor. And then we hear the member from St. Johns: no, you don't want to help the poor; you don't want to help the poor; you don't want raise the minimum wage. What we've done is we've indexed the income. We have also raised that and made sure that there—that the EIA is now 75 per cent of the median.

An Honourable Member: No, no, no, you don't know what you're talking about.

Mr. Graydon: I know you don't, but, if you hang around, you will catch on. The member from Minto just doesn't understand where we're going, because we're doing things the right way for Manitobans. We are working for Manitobans. We're doing what they asked us to do. The minister said very clearly today that she brought this bill forward because of Manitobans and what they asked for.

The Manitoba Progressive Conservative government is committed to fixing—fixing—our finances. And when the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) said we have the lowest bundle of rates—we have the lowest bundle of rates—we don't. We have the biggest debt because of the NDP government raiding the Crown corporations. They raided Manitoba Hydro. They raided MPI—every election that came around. And the member for Minto was guilty of this. Oh, we'll give you two rebates this year. We'll give you two rebates just before the election. It was wonderful. And it worked for you. But it finally quit working for you. The people of Manitoba caught on. They caught on to what you were doing: trying to buy votes with Manitobans' own money—buying votes with Manitobans' own money. We did not do that. We said we would fix the finances of this province. We will work diligently towards doing that. It is one deep hole there.

Manitoba Hydro, for example, Manitoba Hydro has a huge debt just because of ideology: we want to have a UNESCO—we can't go through the boreal forest. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was more boreal forest on the west side. Oh, we want reliability. The east side is reliability as well. The west side is in tornado alley. It's in tornado alley. It's in an area that has ice storms, multiple ice storms. It has a history of them. They did no research. Oh, if they did the research, they paid no attention to it. They just want to pass on more bills and more expense to Manitobans. Manitobans own Manitoba Hydro. It wasn't a piggy bank for the NDP party. It wasn't to be used as a piggy bank. The mismanagement that was carried out by this NDP government—they should stand up and apologize to Manitobans.

The decade of debt and decay saw the NDP double the provincial debt and receive two credit down-ratings—two credit down-ratings. What does that mean?—that means that it costs us more money—more money—to service the debt—to service the debt—of this province that they created with nothing to show for it. They have nothing to show for it. They can't stand up and say, hey, we did this. No, no. They stand up and say, how come you're not doing that? They can't stand up and say, we accomplished this, because they accomplished nothing.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Graydon: In fact, what they could do is probably go out and take lessons on how to heckle. They don't even know how to do that properly. Is that okay if I say something like that, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Thank you.

The NDP misled Manitoba families, claiming that their budget, their last budget would be \$422-million deficit when it was, fact, it was double. It was double. Every year they had a deficit—every year. They broke the law by breaking—by breaking—the balanced budget regulations. And then they had to change it, change the law in order to keep themselves from being in a lot of trouble.

*(15:30)

But what did happen is—and thankfully, it did happen—is the wages of the ministers were pulled back. Thank goodness for that. It should have been pulled back the full amount, not just half. But they protected themselves. The ministers protected themselves. But at the same time, some of the backbenchers took offence to that, so then there was unrest within the party. There was unrest within the

party, and I've watched the former leader, and he sits sideways in his chair a lot now because he's not sure who's behind him and what's going to happen. He's not—he doesn't trust an individual that's behind him for good reason—for good reason. Because he put records in—put words on the record in this House, he put words on the record that suggested that the First Minister of the day only had his own concerns, not that of the party, not that of Manitoba. But today, he stands up, and he has seen the light. Hoo, he's been reborn and what, for what? Because he couldn't get a job in real life out in the public. He couldn't get a job there doing what his profession is. That's why.

Well, Manitobans elected a new government focused on fixing the finances and repairing our services. They're not going to be able to—none of us have a magic wand that we can just go like this and fix it all in one day. But it is going to be fixed, a little bit at a time. And \$1 million that they put in their back pocket to fund their political machine on top of the \$700,000 that they paid out in hush money in the leadership campaign—but that \$1 million and that \$700,000 would go a long way to helping the poor. It would go a long way to helping those in the North. It would go a long way with the Children's Advocate. They weren't concerned about that. They were only concerned about their own political career. That's all they were concerned about.

But Manitobans saw through that. Manitobans said to the Conservative Party, please do that. Do what you said you're going to do. And we are doing it, one step at a time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, no government can say yes to everything. The NDP did and they almost bankrupted our province. They almost bankrupted the province as well as our crown jewel, the crown jewel being Manitoba Hydro. Why would they do that? The only reason they did it was to cover their political self. That's what they were doing: protecting their paycheque at the expense of Manitobans, at the expense of my children, at the expense of my grandchildren. The debt that you guys—*[interjection]*—the debt that the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), as the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Chief) points out—he had a lot more to do with it, apparently.

I'm just taking the cue from him. I maybe shouldn't, but at the same time, I have to say that all Manitobans are going to be saddled with this debt for a long time, and the Conservative government has some tough decisions to make, but we will. We said

we would protect front-line services and we are protecting them. We are bringing—we are working at developing and bringing more companies back to Winnipeg. The head companies left this province faster—as fast they could possibly get out of this province.

Our young people: our outward migration of young people for years in this province under the NDP. We hope we can bring them back.

We actually, in this province, have graduated some of the best engineers in Canada, but they don't work in this province. Why is that? You can tell how a province is doing by the number of engineers employed in the province.

You cannot in Manitoba—we have not been able to retain some of the brains that we raised here because the NDP have chased them out of the province because of all of their misguided, mis-managed policies.

See, listening to Manitobans is a key to part of the deliberative democracy. And so, in saying that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, part of democracy is giving people the opportunity to contribute to any party that they so choose.

But what the NDP did, and deliberately did, because I knew when they went door to door suggesting that they were not going to raise the PST, they were not going to raise taxes, they covered themselves with a vote tax. They deliberately—they deliberately—took that democracy away from the individuals in Manitoba to support any political organization that they wanted to because they were forcing them to pay through the vote tax.

We're going to give democracy back to Manitobans and let them make that decision on a yearly basis, not on every four-year basis as the NDP would like that to happen, and I'm sure after they hear today's speeches that they will be coming around and saying, you know, that Graydon was right.

After the NDP decade of debt, decay and decline, Manitobans have now learned about the costs of the NDP government that didn't listen to them. They learned about that in the election and they haven't changed their mind. They haven't changed their mind in five months. They haven't changed their mind in six months and they're not going to change their mind for 10 or 15 or 20 years. They're not going to forget what this NDP

government did to Manitobans by taking away their right to democracy.

The Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries unnecessary purchase of and plans to renovate an office tower; the Auditor General's condemnation of the lack of oversight and mentorship associated with the community benefits that were to have been created by the East Side Road Authority, the condemnation of that—why would the Auditor General do that? Why would he do that?

An Honourable Member: Stick to Bill 9.

Mr. Graydon: I am sticking to it. You are just not listening to it. You have to understand, democracy—democracy—covers all of Manitoba. Democracy covers it all, you see?

So the Manitobans elected a new Progressive Conservative government committed to fixing our finances and repairing our services and rebuilding our economy, and part of that, of course, is removing an undemocratic vote tax. Would you agree that that is part of fixing it? Would you agree? Would you agree, though?

Our government was elected to listen to Manitobans, and today I heard the minister at least four times tell the member from Minto that she listened to Manitobans. He just couldn't hear what she was saying. I actually offered—I offered him my hearing aid. I wasn't using it at the time. I would have let him use it because then maybe he would have heard what she had to say.

An Honourable Member: You're better when you were singing.

Mr. Graydon: And they want more songs. You're never satisfied when it comes to partying, are you?

* (15:40)

The challenge is large, but together—together—we can work together to master—to master—this task, and so the Manitoba government is committed to making Manitoba the most improved province in all of Canada. We'll do that one step at a time. We'll do that one bill at a time, and we're looking for your support.

I have actually extended the olive branch today to all of you to come across to understand what democracy's all about. So we want to make Manitoba families safer and stronger, but we need money to do that. We need money to do that. What—and we want to leave more money—we want to leave more money—in the families' pockets. We want them to

work together with us to make Manitoba stronger, make it safer for all families, and, if we do not—if we do not take that money out of their back pocket, it might not seem like much, but, to a family with nothing, it's a lot.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would encourage the members opposite to step up to the plate—to step up to the plate—get up and apologize—apologize—to all of Manitobans for what they have done—for what they have done—to Manitobans. What they have done is they have created such a huge debt with Manitoba Hydro that the rates are going to be forced up. There's going to be people, which going to be—have to be a cut in workforce. But the people of Manitoba are the ones that are going to be saddled with the debt of a crown jewel that wasn't necessary. It was wasteful mismanagement that created this decade of decline in the economy of Manitoba.

They also—they also—raised the debt so the servicing of our debt has an impact on all Manitobans. Just the increase in their deficit is \$13-million increase in servicing of the debt—\$13 million. What could that do? Let's see. What would that do if you were putting that into child and family services? Because we need to put stuff in there—we need to put money in there because of what their mismanagement did in that field as well. I don't want to go into that right now, but, at the same time, there's more children in care today under this NDP government—double—almost triple of what it was when they took power. That is another indication of their mismanagement and that they don't care—they do not care—about Manitobans—not at all.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would suggest, if at all possible, that they could rise and apologize to Manitobans today instead of doing what the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) did, a rant that did nothing for Manitobans. Get up and do the right thing. Apologize to them. Apologize to what they have done to Manitobans, what it's done to Manitobans' children, and what they've done to Manitobans' grandchildren. For years to come, we will pay for the mismanagement of this former government.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm not going to take a lot of time, because we have already listened to a whole lot of nothing for the last little while. I'm going to focus on actually what this bill is about, and this bill is about doing away with democracy. People in the North, people who are poor, people who don't have money to contribute still

need to have a voice in what takes place in this province.

With this bill, that takes away that ability. It takes away the ability for people that are running as candidates in the North to even talk to people in the North. It's not the same as running down to the Manitoba Club and holding out your hand and asking for a cheque. When it takes a week just to get to your riding, it needs money to do that, and it's not fair to candidates in the North, what this bill is proposing to do.

Mr. Nic Curry (Kildonan): The honourable member was not wrong about his brevity, and I appreciate that. I thank the member for adding those words to it.

He does talk about the necessity that people should be represented in our democracy. I think we can all agree across this floor that we have a lovely democracy here in our country. I think that it's been said by better people than us that sometimes the democracy we have, it feels like it's not running well, maybe it's the worst thing ever, but it really is better than everything else. We look in so many countries across the world and the way that they handle their politics, countries like Turkey with their violence that they see in their streets. Their leaders, unfortunately, arrest people at random, which is not good. They lock people up with frivolous charges. These are things that we don't experience here in Canada. These degrees of violence and repercussions they suffer is horrible.

But there are means that we can try to improve things. I know we're talking a lot about history, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I don't know if people are familiar with recent history. I myself am relatively new to democracy, relatively new to politics itself, quite new to this Chamber, as with a record amount of new MLAs to this Chamber. And we were brought to this Chamber when Manitobans decided to historically reject a political party that based itself off of double truths, misinterpretations of things and other ways we can talk about, just falsehoods. This is something that was frustrating for many people, very frustrating. And then, previously, again, to—and previous to—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I just want to just tell—ask members here in the House here just to be caution about the falsehood when the—the word falsehood, okay?

So we will continue with the member from Kildonan.

Mr. Curry: And so something that was quite sweet to a lot of people's ears was when we had a former leader of the opposition's party at the time, in 2011, he told all of Manitobans, told all of them: Don't worry. Raising the PST: total nonsense—total nonsense, ridiculous. Never is that going to happen. Total nonsense, ridiculous. Alluding that anyone who would, say, caution Manitobans that the promises the NDP were making, well, it's going to cost more in taxes and they're likely going to raise the PST. Oh, ridiculous, just utter nonsense, utter nonsense.

Well, unfortunately, Manitobans found out very quickly in our recent history that that was not nonsense. In fact, it was quite ridiculous the way that their rights, their democratic rights to vote on tax increases—whether people agree with that law or not, it was law—that was stripped away from them. Was that ridiculous, total nonsense again? It was stripped away. And around the same time, and perhaps this is why the NDP did it at that time, the vote tax already, essentially, in law, it started being collected around the same time that the tax went up. Now, it worked in tandem, almost as if raising the PST were maybe covering the vote tax. It was not. Instead, the NDP collected \$1 million, but they took \$1 billion with the new PST increase, something that they didn't explain in 2011 either. Totally ridiculous.

So these kind of things frustrates many people, that our democracy works off of these principles where people can stand up during elections and, using funds that day—I imagine that there were political dollars spent when the former leader of the NDP, member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), told Manitobans anyone who thought that they'd raise the PST that they're ridiculous. Well, if political dollars were spent that day, then political dollars were spent on some bad news, bad news for a lot of small businesses, small businesses like Curry Industries that my grandfather started in the 1970s. A Polish immigrant who had his name stripped away from him after the Second World War, after serving this country, changed his name from Krakowski to Curry. And he worked hard, worked as a trucker.

* (15:50)

He worked at various other jobs and, eventually, he had ideas, considers himself a real sleeves-rolled-up Edison. And, in many ways, he is. And he has told me, when I told him, Grandpa, I'm getting into politics, said, I've been in small business for 40 years, never have we had harder times than when the PST was jacked up on us.

Ridiculous, total nonsense? Perhaps. Unfortunately, the ridiculous idea was, in fact, that political contributions, I'm sure, went to those ideas that the NDP had. They had meetings, I'm sure, with political contributions and said, I know, let's raise the PST.

Well, maybe not everyone was happy with that, of course. My colleague from Minto was not happy with that. Four other previous members were not happy. And they decided again, perhaps this isn't good times, and they decided that the former leader of their party, the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), well, he should no longer be the leader of their party, something that maybe a few of us thought, you're right, that's a good idea, not ridiculous. Fortunately, it did not work out well.

And we found another trend that happened with the former government at the time, the NDP government, a trend where, when asked why would political staffers who were guaranteed to keep their jobs regardless of who they helped in the NDP's leadership campaign, no matter what happened, whether member for St. Boniface won or Theresa Oswald won—I'm sure many people wanted Theresa Oswald to win, 49 per cent of the NDP delegates did. Democracy in action; it was a close, close race. And some could suspect or speculate that maybe the five members who left the NDP staff also were interested in maybe Theresa Oswald's chances. Many of us were. We were watching with bated breath.

Now, they left, though, the Legislature, as staffers, unfortunately. Maybe they were great workers, maybe they were not. I never met them myself. I'm new to politics, I'm new to all this. What I'm not new to is the headlines I read that almost \$700,000 was spent on people who many of them had not worked in the Legislature for that long, some of them mere months. Why would they have spent any money on people who perhaps were let go because they had disagreements?

Sometimes I've been in situations where disagreed with my family at my family job, and maybe I wanted to leave and start politics. No, that's not the case. But these people certainly did leave. And when asked, the member for St. Boniface assured everyone everybody is protected and looked after when we pay out people like this—political interference in the hallways just that we now occupy.

When people are worried about democracy being threatened, when people are concerned that not enough representation is happening in marginalized

communities, people concerned that people in my neighbourhood, the good member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), where I grew up, he said, Manitoba Housing where got to hear the lovely sounds of sirens, unfortunately, first responders. Not fun times. Lovely community of Valley Gardens, love it still; it's where my parents still reside. But in marginalized communities, they are not served when political dollars are wasted on nonsense, things that are ridiculous. And things that are nonsense and ridiculous are political staff interference here in the hallways of the Legislature. Things are ridiculous when people have fractious leadership contention fights where there was concern, perhaps, that memberships were being signed off, photocopied or other kinds of allegations up in the Interlake region for the NDP's leadership race. And how will the person rewarded for that? Well, as it turns out, they were given a prime spot in the NDP's re-election campaign, perhaps music to our ears.

It may have been a hidden benefit for the new government here that was given a historical mandate: 53 per cent of Manitobans saw headlines and saw a political party that was not working for them, was not working for Manitobans. And 53 per cent of our good friends and neighbours and relatives, well, they decided to bring in new people, people who refused to take the vote tax.

Now, it's a bit of a leap to suggest that's the only reason. Certainly more than once I heard, people asked me, well, wait a minute, Nic, if I've already given you a political contribution, I've given you some of my time, well, it's coming off my taxes too.

And perhaps, yes, only a dollar here or a dollar there, for now. PST was only 7 per cent for a bit, 8 per cent for now. They used to say, maybe in 2013, only for now. I wonder if that PST would have gone up again. Well, luckily, 53 per cent of Manitobans said, we're not going to roll the dice and see if that PST's going up again. I don't think we should roll the dice again to see how high political subsidies might go up again for these kind of frivolous things that we're seeing here. It's quite a frustrating thing.

Now, again, my colleagues across the way might agree or disagree, but I must concur that there are a lot of new politicians around Canada, especially Winnipeg. We have a new mayor with about two years under his belt. We have a new series of federal members of Parliament. We have a few new, say, even federal ministers in the area. We have a new Prime Minister.

Now, we don't always agree with our, you know, colleagues across the way, but I must say, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who has railed against vote subsidies, he's refused to bring them back in.

Now, at first the Liberals were concerned, you know, going down to a third-party status, and then they decided well, wait a minute; maybe we should actually work to gain people's trust. Now, for better or for worse, the federal Liberal Party gained some trust, and my colleagues across the way, well, they were happy. They met with all of their colleagues in Ottawa, and they must have talked about how horrible vote tax is on people, because, of course, their Prime Minister, minister for democratic reform, democratic institutions, both of these members of Parliament, our nation's highest set, they've agreed with former Prime Minister Stephen Harper that vote tax is an obstruction to how we do democratic order. They've agreed with him. Our Prime Minister has finally kind of gotten it right with perhaps one small thing. Although this is an important thing, and that's why we're here today discussing why it is not helpful for our democratic institutions.

One thing that also frustrates many people, as we go along with how money is spent, is that it really is not accountable. When you have subsidies to political parties, it's just a blanket—here's the cheque. We don't know where that is going.

Now, the benefit of having political contributions, again—new to politics myself, is we have to look our donors in the eye and say this is what's going to be. Now, how much coffee you spend on your volunteers, how many flyers you get—these are difficult choices.

Now, the problem being, though, when you don't have to look your donors in the eye, you just look at some blanket cheque you get from everyone, people who, say, they don't even want to participate in anything other than that one day they go and they want to vote. That's the only part they want to have with democracy. That is wonderful. People must be—and should be allowed that the only part they want to play is to cast their vote.

When people are told, at tax point: No, your vote, and also here's \$1.25; thanks for voting. No, no, you're not getting \$1.25; give me \$1.25—thanks for your vote. Okay. Here's—no, wait. Maybe it's going to be more next time; we don't know. It keeps going up incrementally, right? Inflation—who knows how

higher the pay-to-vote will be? Because that, in the end, is what we're talking about. When it is per vote, you are essentially saying: Great, you voted on this; great, you're also a taxpayer. You pay service taxes on the PST. Of course, with NDP, it keeps getting higher. And that's what you're doing. This is pay for tax. This is without any adulteration. You are paying for the privilege of voting.

No, no. This is painful. In our democracy, people must be, and should be, afforded the ability to decide the only time they want to participate in our democracy is for one lovely day, election day, which many countries do not receive. Many countries wish they can have. In my own community, we have refugees from Syria, families that have found a lovely home in Garden City. They get to participate very soon. New sports facilities, and this is a wonderful thing where they see we have this great democracy.

And then I have no doubt if I were to explain to them that tax dollars go to pay for political parties to decide partisan things about raising taxes again, about fighting over who gets to be a leader, because sometimes leaders have more of a desire to hold onto their leadership—and, for the best interests of Manitobans, a very smart woman, Jennifer Howard, was very concerned—that's the leader of the NDP at the time—just could not have any time for them. The poor member of St. Boniface just did not have the confidence of his people to support him in those matters.

But, again, the very expensive election to find a new leader—that is not money that just simply comes out of nowhere. It does not happen in a vacuum. People who get to be refugees and now they get to pay taxes. They get to support their communities. Well, they, with a vote tax, would also get to support partisan things, and the worst part, I think, that many people must take for granted, is that it goes both ways. There's an important reason why I'm very happy to have joined the PC Party in many principles, and one so much is that we did not accept the vote tax at any point. By not accepting it, we rejected this idea on a principled approach.

The other members fought vigorously in the opposite direction. I wonder if this may have had any inklings to people's ideas at the time. In fact, a lot of NDP, I suspect—in fact, no. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know for certain card-carrying NDP hated the vote

tax because they dropped the party; they worked on my campaign. Perhaps that's why I might be here instead of other members previous to this Chamber, who had sat in the seat Kildonan. I couldn't be more happy that people decided to take principled approaches to the way they thought about how they'd cast their vote and decided that their vote should not come with a price tag.

* (16:00)

Now, the idea of, say, American-style politics, which is often lauded, in many respects, people could suggest, oh, if you don't have a vote tax, millionaires buy elections. Well, I don't know the millionaires who worked on my campaign. I know hard-working individuals, members of my own far regiment, far from my days now, soldiers, other people, teachers, other people worked in CN, other people, small-business owners, amazing people. They gave \$50 here, they gave \$400 there. I found it far more satisfying.

And as we develop, as have many members across the way in opposition—I don't know if they'll be here for their 30-year tenures past, if they have another 30 years ahead of them. But it is satisfying when you can speak to your volunteers, when you can generate an interest in what you're doing, when you can communicate with them and they say, you know what, Nic, I'm going to support your campaign; here's \$50 here, here's \$100 there, here's \$400 there, and you have your family supporting you in other respects, it adds an agency to what you're doing.

If I were to simply just get a cheque from Elections Manitoba, get a cheque from the Lieutenant Governor, just get a cheque from whom-ever in government where you're collecting revenue, if someone were to say I'd be standing by them at the grocery store, they pay for their groceries, they ringed up, they checked, oh, paid some tax on those groceries. I hope you can have more flyers.

I don't think a principled approach democracy is one I could just stand beside my neighbours in the shopping aisle, where I can stand beside my family members at Christmastime. And we spend a lot of money at Christmas. Of course, it's a No. 1 shopping time of the year. Well, think about all of the revenue, all the PST that was received at Christmastime for years past now, and all of that Christmas joy that went to political campaigns.

Either way, in many respects I think the best part about our democracy is we agree to disagree in some ways. But we can agree for certain that we do disagree. And those disagreements where you have a matter that people don't like sometimes what they see from their political parties. They see attack ad here or the words of a former leader there about writing things off or how nonsense raising taxes will be. Some people don't like to see those things, and I don't think that they should be again forced at a tax point that they must, no question, do this.

Well, there was a question. We had that question April 19th. There were many parts of that day, many questions asked at that ballot box. But there was no question that the principled approach we took is something where I can stand for a long time and be happy about why we do not take people's votes with cash. Slipping the vote under the table with cash is exactly how this entire principled system works.

And there are lofty ideas about how we can promote democracy, and the conversation is not over. We are not done talking about democracy with this bill. We're not done talking about improving our province with this bill. The task is far from over. The benefit of discussing this bill here now is that early in our mandate we have decided that the principled approach we've taken for years in the PC Party is one that will be reflected as quickly as we can, and quickly we will do it here.

We'll quickly remove constraints and further burdens of tax revenue placed on people bit by bit, and it is not an easy task. I've yet to have anyone come up to me and say, well, we expected everything to be solved by now. No, no, no. The people who gave me \$50 here or there, the people who said they'd support me at the door, they're people who volunteered in my campaign. These people are more than happy to know that bit by bit we will chip away at this declining decade that we've suffered.

This terrifying amount of fighting that we saw from our political parties, it is unfortunate that we worked ourselves up. It's getting later in the afternoon that my colleagues across the way cannot rejoice in what I'm talking about, this idea of restructure and democracy and turning back something that many people were not very happy about, and many people voiced that.

I know that we will continue to work on these topics. I'm looking forward to how we can improve our democracy further. This is not by any means the last time we are going to work on it. But in most

ways I couldn't be happier that a principled approach finally finds its way into politics. Too frequently, especially with our attack ads, ones that I've mentioned before, political contributions that I helped raise from my family and friends, well, they help pay for—and I had people, they saw those commercials where the attack ads, well, they didn't like them as much. I must say I'm very happy that I stood with a former member of the Canadian forces, the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Reyes).

And then another commercial talking about the diversity that the PC Party demonstrated. Again, I told my family, you guys paid for that commercial with your contributions, that's lovely. You didn't pay for it with your taxes. You didn't pay for that at all. You paid for it with your contributions, and you paid for it without having it stripped from you on your taxes. You were able to make a conscious choice and say, I'm going to give you some money, you're going to put a commercial on TV, and we're going to be happy or unhappy with it. It's not always going to be right. But, when people are unhappy with those things, when they've decided maybe that political party isn't for me, well, the cheques stop coming. That's the unfortunate nature of it. Politics is a collaborative effort. If you cannot continue to find people to collaborate in politics, then you're not able to generate that money. By having something like a vote tax, you essentially strip away the creativity needed and the collaborative effort to find new ways of reaching out to people to continue to change your minds. There are many, say, older views in politics, unfortunately, so I think it's good that members can be of younger age.

I think the age of this Chamber perhaps reduced a bit in this last election. Again, 29 members—it's hard to keep track of. My colleague across the way from Fort Rouge and I, we're both recently married. He has a young family of his own. I'm looking forward to raising a young family of my own with my wife. We have young families who are able to work through these things. But young families are having the hardest time in Manitoba. I'm surrounded by many of my cousins when, unfortunately, a family member passed away. And they look at the hard times across Canada. Many of them worked in the oil industry. And I said to one cousin, well, the oil industry is having hard times, in Saskatchewan and Alberta. Said are—were you perhaps coming back to Manitoba? He said, no, unfortunately, I've seen what's been happening in Manitoba for a bit of time. I'm looking forward that perhaps my cousin now,

with this one more layer of NDP taxation levelled away, maybe my family will come back to Manitoba.

Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I want a few—put a few words on the record on Bill 9. This bill, as we all know, will end the funds provided by the provincial government directly to political parties to ensure that they're in compliance with the elections finances act. The act, of course, has become more complex over the years and more demanding in terms of the reporting requirements. And it was not unreasonable for the provincial government to provide some support to make sure that all parties were able to do this and easily.

Mrs. Colleen Mayer, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

The government, of course, would like you to believe, with this act, that they will no longer be providing dollars in support of provincial political parties. Yet political donation tax credits will not be changing. This mechanism of political tax credits is, in fact, the largest mechanism that the government uses to provide parties support—political party support in Manitoba. It is, of course, one that unfairly works for wealthy donors and for the Conservative Party.

Consider this, Madam Speaker: Donors to the Conservative Party of Manitoba accept, collectively, each year, hundreds of thousands of dollars of Manitoba taxpayers' money in tax credits for political donations. The money provided as tax credits comes from the supporters, the pockets of supporters, of Liberal, of NDP and Green and from non-voters who don't have a choice but to be providing dollars to the supporters of Conservative Party so they can provide dollars to the Conservative Party.

The Conservative Party needs to end its sanctimonious talk on this bill and accept the reality that supporters of all parties are financing the tax credits which provide money for donors who support the Conservative Party and other parties. And it is donors to the Conservative Party who actually benefit disproportionately from this provincial government mechanism of funding.

One of the things that I suggest is important: This bill, as it stands now, disproportionately advantages those who are more fortunate and provides no benefit for those who are less well off so that they can have their voices heard. It's apparent that, by tabling this bill, the Conservative

government is really only interested in supporting those who are already doing well financially.

*(16:10)

As Manitoba Liberals, we call today on the Conservative government to introduce a small amount of fairness into the way the government supports political parties. We ask them to provide individuals who support political parties financially a refund on an equitable basis.

Interestingly enough, this occurs in Ontario but not here, and interestingly enough in Ontario the situation was introduced under an amendment introduced by Mike Harris to provide greater fairness. In the Mike Harris fairness amendment, no matter what your income, if you contribute your first \$100 to a political party, you will receive the full \$75 refund no matter what your income. This amendment has been in place for many years in Ontario, since the government of Mike Harris, and it has worked well.

So the question I ask the government now is this: Will the Conservative Party look at a small change to the way that tax credits are provided to those donating to political parties to make it fairer for people of any income instead of only rewarding those with higher incomes for donations?

Mike Harris had at least some sense of fairness. I ask, today, will this Conservative Party have some, also, small sense of fairness, or is it will it remain only the party for those who are doing well financially?

As the government and the minister knows, the Manitoba Liberal Party cannot introduce this change because it would be considered a money bill. So it will be up to the Conservative Party to consider this and to consider introducing this change.

And we ask, in putting this forward, whether there is an ounce of fairness in the Conservative Party soul or not. Manitobans will find out, yes or no. Many will be quick to say that no the Conservative Party would not ever do that. They don't have an ounce of fairness in their soul.

So I ask the government, is the answer yes or no? Does this government have an ounce of fairness? Will this government introduce the fairness amendment which was first introduced in Ontario by that right winger, Mike Harris, or will they not?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): Well, thank you for the applause, everyone. I think you're all showing off, but whatever.

Mr. Speaker—or, Madam Speaker, this is—the difference between the NDP and most Manitobans is this: the NDP believe in free money; Manitobans believe money should be earned. This is really what we're talking about. The NDP would prefer that by doing nothing that they would receive an annual tax subsidy from the taxpayer without actually doing any work, and that is not a Manitoba value. It's an NDP value, but it's not a Manitoba value.

People who work hard for each dollar they earn want to know that if they are paying in taxes a percentage of that dollar, that that is going to core services like health care, education, infrastructure. The NDP party is not a core service. But yet here we have the NDP putting their needs at the same level as health care, seniors' residence, kids, infrastructure.

Eliminating this tax, or vote subsidy, sends a message to all politicians that we need to work hard to gain people's trust. Now, I know that the NDP philosophically like to rush to the lowest common denominator. So that's usually the laziest person. But we have to work hard. I don't like fundraising. I really don't. I hate it. You know, \$100 here, \$100 there, putting together a coffee for \$25 or the annual pancake breakfast for \$25, and, you know, it takes a lot of work. But all those donations are voluntary. And they are made by people who want to be involved in the political process beyond simply just voting. These are people who have supported the Conservative Party, provincial Conservative Party, ever since the vote tax—or vote subsidy was introduced, because, on principle, the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba said no to the subsidy. So every dollar that has been donated to the Conservative Party provincially is voluntary.

The assertion made that somehow the government, through tax credits, it's giving back money to individuals. It's not technically correct. What tax credit is, it just allows for a modest reduction in taxes owed. It's not the government paying someone or reimbursing someone. It's just—it's quite the opposite, actually.

The other misconception is the fact that my esteemed colleagues, as I look around, you know, perhaps some of the members opposite are sort of slouching in their chairs, wondering how long this is going to take. You know, that kind of body language suggests that they would not be very good

fundraisers. So I understand why they would want the vote subsidy, because how are they going to fund their campaign? They're going to have to work.

And being in opposition is tough, absolutely. I've been in opposition. It's not great. It's important, but it's hard work. And so is fundraising. And it is also telling that if the party can't get people to voluntarily provide a donation of \$25 or \$50, what kind of party is that? What kind of support do they really have? They don't. And this is what makes the NDP, I think, so scared.

* (16:20)

Now, Madam Speaker, my friend from Minto yesterday raised my time—or raised the federal government, the previous federal government, and Treasury Board, and I spent seven years on Treasury Board at the federal level, which is a Cabinet committee. It deals with all the money and regs and stuff, and he challenged a certain decision.

I would submit to that member that he is—he and his party are very, very, lucky that I am bound—that I'm bound by a 30-year rule on what transpires financially between provinces. But what is public is that Manitoba transfer payments have increased by billions of dollars. That's our main revenue source, is from Ottawa.

So then you combine that with the huge amount of debt that we have incurred year after year after year after year, and where does it stop? Where does the spending stop? Well, Manitobans say, and have said clearly, it stops with the political parties. It stops for lazy politicians. It stops, and thank goodness it does, because it sends a signal to everyone that when you work hard you should benefit from the fruits of your labour, and what happens in one's own life carries on to this issue as well. You work hard as a politician, you'll be able to raise the money you need through volunteer donations, one dollar at a time. Is it hard to do? Oh, yes.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

I also recall in 2008, November, just been appointed Minister of State for Democratic Reform. It was a nice day. Two weeks later a budget was introduced and it eliminated a very similar vote subsidy—per vote subsidy, and the opposition parties went bananas and put the country into a chaotic and almost constitutional crisis. You'll recall this is when the NDP and the Liberals and the Bloc Québécois, the separatists, signed an agreement to take down the

government—not on principle, but because they wanted to keep their subsidy.

Now we've heard even from the Liberal members of this Chamber that they have no intention of bringing back the voter subsidy because they realize that Canadians, like Manitobans, do not support a subsidy in the form of, quote, unquote, free money. When you are running an organization, a non-for-profit, a corporation, union, whatever, there is a revenue side of that equation. Money's never free. It comes from the taxpayer. It comes from the citizens. And every dollar that goes to a political party is a dollar that doesn't go to health care or education or reducing our deficit, which is out of this world, thanks to the previous provincial government.

So it is really rich to hear the opposition party fight so hard for this vote subsidy when they blew the bank. It's not like we're in a fiscally healthy situation. They left Manitoba fiscally damaged. And I would submit, if the government did not change, it would have been absolute catastrophe for Manitoba. We would be like Detroit. However, the people of Manitoba made the right decision, and they realized that dollars do matter. They want them focused on their priority social programs. And the NDP is not a priority social program.

I recall, during that time in 2008, people were so outraged that the opposition parties would try to bring down the government over the voter subsidy, over such a self-interested issue. Now we know how it all turned out. The next election there were no more separatists, or very few, and the other parties were reduced in numbers and so on. But—and now, even the current government of the day agrees that a voter subsidy is not appropriate.

Why, I ask, is the NDP so scared? Do they not believe that they can do what the members on this side of the House do, have pancake breakfasts or events like at the curling rink or ask for modest donations? Donations—you can put it on your website, please donate. If we can do it, why can't they? So that is an interesting question, and maybe that is one of the fundamental differences between Conservatives and the NDP. I think it is.

Conservatives work hard, believe in voluntary support, where the NDP tends to focus on government support, on forcing people to support things they don't want to support, to a race to the lowest common denominator. If the members want to raise money, they are on the very same playing field as everyone else. And actually it's also fair for all the

parties, because all parties end up based on what they can muster up. They're not riding on the inertia of what they've earned or what they received in an election, you know, four years ago.

* (16:30)

As we know, and I can provide witness to this, and I think my member—my friend from Elmwood can, as well, that things change over time. Support changes over time. And why should the support at the end of an election cycle, from the taxpayer, be the same at the beginning?

In fact, the way the vote subsidy worked, it increases over time because of indexation. So, to get rid of the subsidy is not only the right thing to do, it's not only consistent with Manitoban values and Canadian values, it's consistent with the way most political thinkers are and it is something that people can recognize as a function of the ability of the politician to do their job. If you can't get people to raise money, you—at a modest level—probably shouldn't be in politics.

And I can also attest, by the way, that elections are just not won on funding alone. I don't mind—I do mind, kind of mind, I spent a little bit more in the last federal election than my opponent. The federal party spent a little bit more than some of their opponents and that didn't turn out in the results and I think that's important to remember. That—and thank goodness in Canada, you can't—it's not like the United States or almost every other jurisdiction in the world—you can't win elections with money alone. You need a ground game, you need supporters, you need people to come out and vote, you need a message and you need to provide a vision of hope for the future.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

And to the credit of the victorious federal party, that's what they did and that's what we did, provincially. And the vote subsidy only exasperates the fact that, or distorts this—these support a party may have. If you can't get that ground game out, you can't win. So the only thing that this affects are the politicians.

Now, all 57 of us are going to have to go out and spend the next four years at pancake breakfasts and curling clubs, raising money. I don't mind that. I don't like the fundraising part but I like meeting the people and it's a way to gauge how people feel about how important the dollar is to them.

We're all going to have a hard time fundraising, make no question about it. We're in tough economic times and it's getting tougher. We are in a province that has had huge amount of debt, with a deficit that is unbelievable and costs that still are undetermined.

So somebody has to pay for it. There's going to be less money out there, less money even for charities. So why would we subsidize a political party and not the million causes that are much better?

We need to recognize that the NDP rely on—they want a free ride. Well, the average Manitoban doesn't get a free ride. This party, on this side of the House, managed to make its case with the Premier (Mr. Pallister) without accepting the vote subsidy, and with the way democracy works, I hope that my friends will be able to do the same because that's good. We're all on the same level playing field, and that makes our democracy stronger. What makes it weaker is when people don't have to work to get the job done. And that goes through everything that we believe in, not as Conservatives but as Manitobans, with the exception of maybe a couple dozen members of the opposition, maybe a couple federal people I can think of.

But, Madam Speaker, from '08, when I was president of the—when I was working with the president of the Treasury Board, who's also from Manitoba, and with the great Jim Flaherty, and we were going through that crisis, the ND—the opposition parties were trying to bring down the government while the world economy was falling apart and people were losing their jobs, their homes. But they wanted their money first. Well, let's set the example. Let's give the taxpayers the money. Let's make the politicians earn it from fundraising activities, and I think it'll work out very well.

And, notwithstanding the partisanship that exists in this House, I think most people here are here for the right reasons. We want a better Manitoba. And I ask those on the other side to look into their souls, if they have, and see if they can do what's right for Manitobans and set an example, work hard for the money, the funding. Work hard, and success will arrive for anyone, because that's the kind of country we live in. Anyone, regardless of who they are or where they come from, has the potential, if they make good decisions, to reach their full potential as human beings. And that's the great thing about Canada. And that example needs to be set here today with this bill.

* (16:40)

I would like to thank the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson) for—and the Finance Minister and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and all the people who were involved, particularly the previous opposition caucus, because that took a lot of hard work. While the government was accepting all this free money plus whatever they could raise, the previous opposition just did it one dollar at a time, one person at a time, one voluntary donation at a time. That is a remarkable achievement, and a massive amount of work. And they deserve a lot of credit for that.

So I'm afraid, my friends across the way, you're going to have to work a lot harder to raise the funds. I empathize, but there's no sympathy. Manitobans work hard for their money. You do not want to subsidize political parties. The NDP is not a social program. The fact is a subsidy, over time in particular, makes political parties lazy and out of touch. And that's—we see that right through and through.

So this is going to be tough medicine probably, especially for those lazy MLAs, but, in the long term, it's going to be good for everyone. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We live in the best country in the world, the best time in human history to be alive, and Assiniboia is the best constituency in the greatest country. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to revert to introduction of bills, due to a procedural error earlier to allow the member for Burrows (Ms. Lamoureux) to reintroduce her bill? *[Agreed]*

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

(Continued)

Bill 206—The Health Care Accountability Act (Health Services Act and Health Services Insurance Act Amended)

(Continued)

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): I move, seconded by the honourable member for Kewatinook (Ms. Klassen), that Bill 206, The Health Care Accountability Act (Health Services Act and Health Services Insurance Act Amended), be now read for a first time.

Motion presented.

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

We now revert back to debate.

I understand that the member can restate her remarks if she wants, but they are already on the record. So she chooses not to? Then we revert back to the earlier debate, and the honourable member for The Maples.

SECOND READINGS

(Continued)

Bill 9—The Election Financing Amendment Act (Repeal of Annual Allowance)

(Continued)

Debate

(Continued)

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): I would like to put a few comments on this bill, and, most of the time, it has been quoted like a vote tax, which is misleading. I think it's a democracy advancement fund, and they are trying to confuse people by saying it's a vote tax and because it's a matter of affordability of democracy. And, to afford democracy, some people have money. Some people—some parties are being backed up by the big businesses. They will be able to get those funds very easily; other won't be.

Therefore, there will be—democracy will be kidnapped by the rich people. And this conspiracy to kidnap—although I don't think I am—can use the word conspiracy—this plan to kidnap democracy is really going on, and if we don't understand that, even people on the other side, maybe they got the opportunity to get elected, but they may not agree with the philosophy of their major role player, so maybe I would ask them to think about that before you vote for this against the democracy advancement fund.

I have come from the country which they call the biggest democracy in the world, but there is no such funds. Because if there is no such funds, slowly, slowly, corruption has set in. And in this situation, we have that potential because some people have money, some people have backing of big businesses. Other people won't have backing up of those businesses. Therefore, people won't have a chance to put forward their ideas. Established parties give that trust to people. So this is kind of kidnapping of democracy.

So I would ask all the members: Think about how democracy, and if it is not properly affordable democracy, how the corruption will set in, how we will go from—just like the Third World countries have corruption, we will have this corruption. This is

one of the best countries. That's people—that's why people are coming from the other countries to over here, because it's affordable democracy, affordable health system, affordable education.

We pay taxes because we can afford health services. We pay taxes because we can—everybody can afford education. Similarly, we pay taxes also because everybody can afford democracy. So I think this misleading and—this misleading plan of the government is going to hurt many people, take away democratic rights of people. Therefore, I would ask the member and the government: Try to understand and stand up against the role play of those big players who want to kidnap democracy

I won't say more than that, but I will leave this idea to think about that. This is not a matter of a plug one party, other party. It's a matter of democracy, which is being kidnapped at this point.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River): I would like to thank you for affording me the opportunity to stand up and speak in the House today on this very important piece of prospective legislation. The—Bill 9, The Election Financing Amendment Act, is one of the many steps that our government is taking to reduce the provincial deficit and extinguish the use of Manitoba tax dollars for partisan political activities.

All Manitobans expect their government to put the public interest ahead of narrow political interest and, furthermore, to put the good—or to put the public good ahead of political priorities. Manitobans trust their government will listen to their concerns and support their needs.

* (16:50)

The vote tax is a tax forced on Manitobans each year for exercising their democratic right to vote. Simply by casting a ballot, they are surrendering their tax dollars for partisan political activities. It is an involuntary donation that must make—they must make even if their voting preference has changed. It is an involuntary donation accepted by both the NDP and Liberals. It is an involuntary donation only the Progressive Conservatives refuse to accept. The key word is involuntary. If you ask the people of Manitoba, I doubt anyone will volunteer their money to finance political parties.

While I was out in my constituency prior to the election in April, many constituents chose to

financially support our campaign through donations. This was because they were frustrated and fed up with the previous NDP government. They wanted a change, a change which supported their choices and put a stop to the decade of debt, decay and decline.

And therein lies the difference, Madam Speaker, the difference being that those individuals chose to make a donation. They chose to support us financially. And the current Election Financing Act does not provide Manitobans with that choice. It is an involuntary donation Manitobans must make even if their voting preference has changed.

When Manitobans cast their ballots, they are automatically providing the party they vote for with financial support. Since its implementation in 2012, this has become the price Manitobans pay to exercise their democratic right.

Bill 9, The Election Financing Amendment Act, gives this choice back to Manitobans. Not only will Manitobans be able to choose whom they vote for, but they will also now be able to choose if and to whom they support financially.

To further illustrate this point, from 2012 to 2015, the NDP were eligible to receive \$1.1 million and the Liberals \$253,000 in vote tax payouts. More than three quarters or 78 per cent of the NDP vote tax paid out since 2012 has gone directly to the NDP to fund their political operations. This is an exorbitant amount of money out of the provincial purse to go towards funding partisan activities.

What's worse is that the citizens of Manitoba did not choose to give these funds to the party they were voting for. There isn't a checkbox on the voting ballot sheet that asks you whether or not you would like to financially support the candidate you are voting for. Financial support for candidates and political parties must be earned by candidates and parties, as well as given willingly by supporters. Let's give this choice back to the Manitoba voters.

Manitobans elected a new Progressive Conservative government committed to fixing our finances, repairing our services and rebuilding the economy. This includes putting the public interest ahead of political interests.

The Premier (Mr. Pallister) committed to end the NDP vote tax in our first year in office as part of our better plan for a better Manitoba. This legislation keeps that promise to the people of Manitoba. And

we all know how important it is to keep our promises.

Earlier this year, we cautioned the other parties that in the first sitting of the Legislature a new Progressive Conservative government would introduce legislation to repeal the vote tax. We did so to give them time to reverse their dependence on vote tax funding. We believe this to be the proper and honourable course of action, so it's not to blindside them with a reduction of funds.

Coincidentally, Bill 9 is attempting to do the same thing, restore honour and trust with Manitobans by giving them back the freedom of choice.

We are proud to put the public interest first and ensure political parties rely on voluntary support rather than mandatory taxes to fund their operations. In addition, we are committed to making Manitoba Canada's most improved province, making Manitoba families safer and stronger, and it is clear that Bill 9 supports these efforts.

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, seeing what is happening south of our border, be it in the absence of universal health care, the numerous large-scale 'tragedy' happening frequently because of the pernicious gun culture, and currently the interesting yet dismaying presidential election campaigning. We, in Canada, should rejoice and be grateful. We should be thankful in Manitoba we live and breathe the principles of democracy, such as the ability of any citizen of good reputation to put his or her name on the ballot.

Sadly, Madam Speaker, this key principle is now in danger of being eliminated with the introduction of Bill 9. The strength of democracy and its proper functioning will depend on the fairness and transparency in financing of political parties, candidates and election campaigns. We have heard what has happened in other countries where only those with gold and guns can win an election. Thankfully, that is not the situation in Manitoba.

In our province we have seen that those who are willing, able, and thoughtful citizens who are bona fide members of established political parties and has heart to serve their community is allowed to run for political office. In Manitoba we rejoice in the full

participation of citizens and residents in supporting a transparent and healthy democratic dialogue.

We believe, on this side of the House, that every Manitoban's vote should count and citizens should decide election outcome, not big business and wealthy party insiders. Public financing limits the unfair influence of big money in politics. It is a pillar of democracy. Choosing representatives to represent everyday Manitobans in the House shouldn't be a matter of who has the wealthiest friends and the deepest pockets.

Unfortunately, Bill 9 aims to change that situation. Just imagine, Madam Speaker, if only those with surplus money or has strong connections with those big businesses were the only considerations and qualifications to run in the Manitoba elections, I and many of my colleagues will not be here in this House today. That will be a sad day for Manitoba.

We're the voices of diversity, where voices of ordinary, everyday Manitobans are absent, when important legislations are deliberated and enacted for the benefit of all Manitobans, for the benefit of everyday Manitobans and not just the select and privileged Manitobans.

Bill 9 will discourage wide and full participation in the democratic process. Bill 9 will ensure that only those with privileged backgrounds, those with strong connections to big businesses and big corporations, can run for public office. Madam Speaker, \$1.75 per vote received by a political party is a small price to pay to allow even those without deep pockets but has lived experience and deep desire to represent the best interests of those who have less in life, the marginalized and the most vulnerable segments of society.

Madam Speaker, \$1.75 per vote to a political party is a small price to pay to ensure a level playing field—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. When the matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 25 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, October 5, 2016

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Introduction of Bills		Organized Labour	
Bill 206–The Health Care Accountability Act (Health Services Act and Health Services Insurance Act Amended)		Lindsey	1867
Lamoureux	1861	Cullen	1867
		Pallister	1868
Tabling of Reports		Macdonald Youth Services	
Stefanson	1861	Fontaine	1868
Fielding	1861	Fielding	1868
		Pallister	1869
Members' Statements		Budget for Projects	
World Teachers' Day		Gerrard	1869
Johnson	1861	Pallister	1869
Larry Morrissette		ER Wait Times	
Chief	1862	Gerrard	1869
		Friesen	1869
Battle of Hong Kong–Commemorative Coin		EMILI Project	
Reyes	1862	Gerrard	1870
		Cullen	1870
Lorraine Nepinak		Political Parties	
Kinew	1863	Graydon	1870
		Stefanson	1870
Mental Illness Awareness Week		Northern Manitoba Communities	
Martin	1863	Chief	1870
Oral Questions		Cullen	1870
Manitoba Workforce		Pallister	1871
F. Marcelino	1864	Project Labour Agreements	
Pallister	1864	Maloway	1871
Health-Care Services		Pedersen	1871
Wiebe	1865	Pallister	1872
Goertzen	1865		
Minimum Wage		Petitions	
Saran	1866	Bell's Purchase of MTS	
Cullen	1866	Maloway	1872

**ORDERS OF THE DAY
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

Second Readings

Bill 9—The Election Financing Amendment Act
(Repeal of Annual Allowance)
Stefanson 1873

Questions

Swan 1875
Stefanson 1875
Gerrard 1876

Debate

Swan 1878
Graydon 1882
Lindsey 1885
Curry 1886
Gerrard 1890
Fletcher 1891

Introduction of Bills

(Continued)

Bill 206—The Health Care Accountability Act
(Health Services Act and Health Services
Insurance Act Amended)
(Continued)

Lamoureux 1894

Second Readings

(Continued)

Bill 9—The Election Financing Amendment Act
(Repeal of Annual Allowance)
(Continued)

Debate

(Continued)

Saran 1894
Morley-Lecomte 1895
F. Marcelino 1896

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>