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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

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(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
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ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	N.D.P.
BLAIKIE, Bill, Hon.	Elmwood	N.D.P.
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HOWARD, Jennifer, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 19, 2010

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): It is my duty to inform the House that Mr. Speaker is unavoidably absent. Therefore, in accordance with the statutes, I would ask the honourable Deputy Speaker to please take the Chair.

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

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): On a matter of privilege.

Madam Deputy Speaker: On a matter of privilege.

Mrs. Stefanson: And I know this is one of the first times I've had—I've stood up in this House on a matter of privilege, and I take this issue very seriously, Madam Deputy Speaker.

As we all know, there are two issues with respect to raising a matter of privilege in this House. First of all, we have to raise the matter at the earliest opportunity, and the second test is whether or not a prima facie case of privilege is made to determine whether or not there is a breach of a rule or a privilege in this House.

With respect to the first test, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the earliest opportunity test, I rise on a matter of privilege as a result of the Premier's (Mr. Selinger) comments on CJOB this morning and the misleading information that he shared with Manitobans. So I believe that this is the earliest opportunity that I've been awarded to bring this issue forward within this House.

The second test, Madam Deputy Speaker, with respect to a matter of privilege is whether or not, in fact, a prima facie case of privilege can be made. With respect to Bill 5, the cottage property tax

increase deferral act, the Premier said, and I quote: There is a deferral program that has been brought in by legislation this spring. It allows a cottage owner not to pay their taxes for the next couple of years. The government will do it in the short term, charge a nominal rate of interest and, then, when they decide to get rid of the cottage, dispose it, then they pay the taxes, then, at the time of selling the cottage. End of quote.

In fact, Madam Deputy Speaker, Bill 5 provides temporary tax release for incremental increases, not for all taxes as suggested by the Premier this morning. In the bill itself, the maximum deferrable amount is defined as the difference between the 2009 property taxes and the 2010 and 2011 cottage property taxes. The deferral applies to the amount of the increase in taxes, not the entire tax bill as suggested this morning on CJOB by the Premier of this province, the former Finance minister of this province.

I believe that this false information impedes my ability and the effective performance of my duties as the official opposition critic for Finance in this Manitoba Legislature. I believe that it infringes on the ability of the—of all members of the Legislature to impart information to their constituents when the Premier is making such inaccurate statements in—on—in Manitoba, Madam Deputy Speaker, on the radio.

This bill has not been well received by cottagers. We know that, Madam Deputy Speaker. This bill isn't something that people were looking for. The benefits of the bill are questionable at best. The interest rate that is yet to be determined and it has—the interest rate is yet to be determined, and cottage owners will have a lien on their property if they choose to go the route of this bill. This bill was introduced to give nothing more than the appearance that the NDP are doing something to help cottage owners. In reality, this bill is not providing any relief to cottage owners.

To suggest that this legislation allows cottage owners not to pay their taxes for the next couple of years, which is what the Premier said this morning on CJOB, is completely and utterly false, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Premier was providing improper taxation advice to Manitobans through his comments. Manitobans in this province make

decisions based on information that is presented to them. The Premier's comments—and keep in mind that this is the former Finance minister of this province—keep in mind that he gave Manitobans a false impression of the program and there is a risk that cottage owners will make decisions based on the information that the Premier said on CJOB this morning.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not the first time that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) provided inaccurate financial information to Manitobans. The Premier knew about the problems arising at the Crocus Investment Fund at the time. He failed to warn Manitobans about the security of their investments, and 34,000 Manitobans had investments worth more than 100 million in the Crocus Investment Fund. The Premier actually signed the submission to Cabinet in November of 2000 that outlined problems with the fund.

And Madam Deputy Speaker, for these reasons—the Premier misled Manitobans then with respect to the Crocus Investment Fund. He misled Manitobans again this morning on CJOB. It's the time that this Premier came clean, admitted to the fact that he misled Manitobans this morning on CJOB, that he apologize to the members of this House, that he apologize to Manitobans and start putting accurate information on the record in this province.

I submit to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I have made the arguments for the prima facie case of privilege and look forward to a positive response in a ruling from you.

And Madam Deputy Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik), that this matter be referred to the committee on Legislative Affairs.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Inkster, on the matter of privilege.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, also—

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on the matter of privilege.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Government House Leader): Rising on the matter of privilege raised by the honourable member from Tuxedo.

* (13:40)

I agree with the honourable member that she's met one of the tests of a point of privilege, which is that she has raised it at the earliest opportunity. But I'm afraid I have to differ with the honourable member as to whether or not she has a prima facie case of privilege.

I would suggest to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that there are precedent after precedent after precedent that these kinds of points of privilege being ruled to be matters having to do with a dispute as to the facts. This particular—in this particular case, this is something that was—this is a dispute about statements made outside the House on top of the usual case.

So I would suggest, Madam Deputy Speaker, that a cursory look at the precedents with respect to what actually constitutes a matter of privilege would demonstrate very, very clearly that this is not a matter of privilege.

The honourable member is free to disagree with what the members on this side of the House have to say about particular pieces of legislation. That's why this bill will come up for debate. We'll have second reading, we'll have debate. There'll be an opportunity in committee presumably. If there are witnesses, there'll be plenty of opportunity to sort out whether or not the honourable member's version of what the bill actually does is the correct one and whether or not, you know, she has any point to make with respect to what members on this side of the House have said. That's all part of the legislative process. But it's not a matter of privilege, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Inkster, on a matter of privilege.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, on the same matter of privilege.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I think that the amount of confusion that has been caused as a direct result that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) not necessarily understanding his own legislation or intentionally misleading Manitobans. It's fairly significant in the sense that, you know, if you do not pay your property tax for a two-year period of time, that cottage could actually go onto the auction block. So it's a very serious issue. Manitobans love their cottages.

But referring directly to the matter of privilege, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'll refer you, as the Deputy Speaker, to the bill itself. Every bill that's

introduced—and by the way, this particular bill was introduced back in December of last year. Even though it still hasn't received second reading, it was introduced back in December of last year.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, if you take a look at the 'explanatory' notes, you will see—and this is why it's important—it contradicts what it is that the Premier said on the radio.

So do we go by what we have been provided inside this Legislature or by what the Premier has told Manitobans on CJOB, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Here's what the proposed legislation that's before us right now states in terms of the notes, Madam Deputy Speaker: Under the proposed program, an eligible cottage owner may apply for a deferral of the property tax increase before the tax is due. If the owner and the property—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I just want to remind all honourable members that on a matter of privilege that we want to make sure that you keep in mind that contributions relate to the matter of privilege and that comments should be—deal with whether or not this is a prima facie case of privilege and whether the issue was raised at the earliest opportunity and should not be a debate on the subject matter.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I agree with you, and that's the reason why we have legislation that's before this Chamber right now. At some time point, I'm anticipating the government will call it for a second reading and in preparation for those second readings, we believe that the legislation is proposing to do exactly what it says in the explanatory notes. Yet we have the Premier of this province telling the listeners to one radio program that it's completely different than what we have in front of this House.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I think that there is a responsibility for you, as the Deputy Speaker, to figure out which is true. Is it the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) and the bill that's she's introduced before this Legislature, is that what is actually before the Legislature? And the Premier (Mr. Selinger) was wrong what he told the listeners of that particular radio program? Or was the Premier right in his comments on that radio program and the Minister of Finance is wrong?

One of them is wrong, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I think before we start debating this issue—and that's why it's a privilege—before we debate the issue, we should find out which one goofed. Either the Premier or the Deputy Premier (Ms. Wowchuk), one of the two. And I think that you need to tell us which one—which one's the goof.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: On the matter of privilege raised by the honourable member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), I would like to inform the House that it has been ruled a number of times by Manitoba Speakers that comments made outside the House cannot form the basis from a prima facie case of privilege.

Beauchesne's citation 31(1) advises that statements made outside the House by a member may not be used as the basis for a question of privilege. On page 522 of the *House of Commons Practice and Procedure* states that the Speaker has no authority to rule on statements made outside of the House by one member against another.

Therefore, I must respectfully rule that the honourable member does not have a matter of privilege.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, I challenge the ruling.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The ruling of the Chair has been challenged.

Voice Vote

Madam Deputy Speaker: All those in favour, say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Madam Deputy Speaker: All those opposed, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Madam Deputy Speaker: In my opinion, the Ayes have it—[interjection] I'm sorry, I can't hear you.

I'm sorry, once again, the honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Hawranik: On division.

Madam Deputy Speaker: On division.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Mount Agassiz Ski Area

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

For several decades, the Mount Agassiz ski area, home to the highest vertical between Thunder Bay and the Rocky Mountains, was a popular skiing and snowboarding destination for Manitobans and visitors alike.

The operations of Mount Agassiz ski area were very important to the local economy, not only creating jobs, but also generating sales of goods and services in area businesses.

In addition, a thriving rural economy generates tax revenues that help pay for core provincial government services and infrastructure which benefits all Manitobans.

Although the ski facility closed in 2000, there remains strong interest in seeing it reopened and Parks Canada is committed to conducting a feasibility study with respect to the Agassiz site and future opportunities in the area.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the appropriate members—ministers of the provincial government to consider outlining to Parks Canada the importance that a viable recreation facility in the Mount Agassiz area would play in the local and provincial economies.

To request that the appropriate ministers of the provincial government consider working with all stakeholders, including Parks Canada, to help develop a plan for a viable, multiseason recreation facility in the Mount Agassiz area.

This petition is signed by R. Tereck, B. Bennet, B. Williams and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

Multiple Myeloma Treatments

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Health Canada has approved the use of Revlimid for patients with multiple myeloma, a rare, progressive and fatal blood cancer.

Revlimid is a vital new treatment that must be accessible to all patients in Manitoba for this life-threatening cancer of the blood cells.

Multiple myeloma is treatable, and new, innovative therapies like Revlimid can extend survival, enhance quality of life for the estimated 2,100 Canadians diagnosed annually.

The provinces of Ontario, Québec, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Alberta have already listed this drug on their respective pharmacare formularies.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

That the provincial government consider immediately providing Revlimid as a choice to patients with multiple myeloma and their health-care providers in Manitoba through public funding.

This is signed by D. Holdsworth, M. Harapiak, E. Huska and many, many others, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Medical Clinic in Weston and Brooklands Area

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Community-based medical clinics provide a valuable health-care service.

The closure of the Westbrook Medical Clinic has left both Weston and Brooklands without a community-based medical clinic.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider how important it is to have a medical clinic located in the Weston-Brooklands area.

* (13:50)

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is signed by K. Won, F. Lenarcie and G. Meluyk and many, many other fine Manitobans. Thank you.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Forest Fire Update

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Minister of Conservation): I have a ministerial statement to make to the House.

Today I rise to update the House on the current status of the forest fire situation facing Manitoba communities. To date, there have been 133 fires resulting in over 4,000 burned hectares. This is just above the 20-year average for this time of the year. There is also a significant fire burning 15 miles from the community of Berens River. Conservation ground crews and a tanker group, including two CL-215 water bombers, are actively fighting this fire, and we are closely assessing the situation and monitoring the weather conditions.

Warm weather is expected to continue throughout the weekend, with some possible precipitation on Sunday. And as we approach this Victoria weekend—Victoria Day weekend, there will likely be more people and more activity in the outdoors than usual. For that reason, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'd like to remind Manitobans to be careful with fire at all times, as winds can push flames at a rapid pace, igniting large areas of land and spreading to forests. Open fires are prohibited from April 1st to November 15th annually, except under a burning permit or in enclosed, approved fire pits.

The provincial fleet of seven water bombers and additional single-engine air tankers are being deployed as required. Helicopters are being stationed in fire zones throughout the province, and we will continue to update the public and the House on this matter as necessary. Thank you.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I want to thank the minister for his statement in regards to the update on the fire conditions in the province of Manitoba. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity to rise and put a few words on the record in response to the statement that the minister has made, and particularly in regards to the fire burning in the vicinity of Berens River. Although the media reported this morning that the fire was not posing any immediate threat to the community of Berens River, Conservation officials say it is a sizable fire and one that's burning quite rapidly and is still growing in size.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the recent spate of unseasonably warm weather that we're being celebrated with is certainly going to be keeping

provincial fire officials busy monitoring for and responding to these types of fires. It hasn't taken long for the general drenching of a few weeks ago to dry up the conditions that we're faced with. And I know we had—the minister's indicated 133 fires burning—I know there was 50, roughly, before that drenching that we got a couple of weeks ago, and most of those were under control. So I'm glad to see that we're able to keep that in perspective.

We cannot say strongly enough how much we appreciate the efforts of the Manitoba Conservation staff and the firefighters from local governments and First Nations community as they tackle these blazes. They place themselves at a considerable personal risk in performing these duties, and the importance of their work can't be overstated.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are other types of bombers, as well, than the CL-215s out there today, and I know the government is trying to make efforts in regards to replacing some of those. I also know that there are other alternatives that would provide opportunities for—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable member's time has expired.

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

Madam Deputy Speaker: Does the member have leave to speak to the minister's statement?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable member has leave.

Mr. Gerrard: I welcome the minister's statement and I think it is timely, because we're moving up to a long weekend and people around Manitoba should be cautious and careful in terms of fires. We don't want to have any more than is—than we have at the moment and, certainly, given the conditions at the moment, it's something that we should be careful of.

It's also important in terms of recognizing the people in Berens River and, although they may not be immediately endangered with a fire some 25 kilometres away, that it's certainly a concern and we extend our concern to people there and hope that this fire is contained before it gets any closer. We're heading into the fire season and all of us should be careful. Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Deputy Speaker: At this time I would like to introduce 19 German exchange students who are here with us in the public gallery from Acadia Junior High. They are under the direction of Ms. Stacey Snyder, and they are from the honourable member for St. Norbert's (Ms. Brick) constituency.

We welcome you here to the Legislative Assembly.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Autism

ABA Program Funding Decrease

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): For families with children of autism there's been a great amount of progress of the past 15 years, both in terms of understanding autism but also in terms of the significant proven benefits that come with applied behavioural analysis.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to that end 38 children and their families who are scheduled to exit the program later this year learned today that the rug is being pulled out from under them by this NDP Premier. More than 100 other kids and families are being negatively impacted by this Premier's failure to put priority on ABA for autistic children.

I want to ask the Premier: As he increases spending this year by more than \$500 million, why are the needs of kids with autism and their families such a low priority for this NDP Premier?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Madam Deputy Speaker, services to ABA children and their families are important, which is why this government put the program in place for school-aged children, which was a follow-up on putting a program in place for preschool children, and this week an additional \$200,000 was announced to provide additional clinical and expert support to families whose children are in need of further services and supports after the grade 3 period. There has been an additional \$60 million put into the education budget for special needs children within the school system so that their individual plans can be strengthened and more supports can be made available to them while they're in the classroom, and we will continue to find constructive ways to support children that need special support because of autism issues and other related supports that go along with that.

Mr. McFadyen: Madam Deputy Speaker, the parents of these children have a very different feeling

about this government's decision making and that's been made very clear in the media directly to us and in the debates that have taken place. With 38 children and their families exiting the program later this year, and the proven benefits of ABA, the concern is that some of these kids will end up regressing in terms of the progress that's been made through the program to date.

I want to ask the Premier, who talks about \$200,000, when he's got hundreds of thousands of dollars, millions of dollars to spend on increasing the size of the NDP Cabinet, on spin doctors, on advertising campaigns that have no outcomes: Why are those things higher priorities for him than the needs of autistic children and their families?

Mr. Selinger: Madam Deputy Speaker, let's bear in mind the members opposite would've slashed a half a billion dollars of spending from the budget this year. They would've taken teachers out of the classrooms. They would've reduced funding for ABA. They would've reduced funding in family services. They would've reduced all these supports because they are voting against the additional spending we are putting in this budget to support families, to support education, to support all those people with special needs, and this week, the minister's announced an additional \$200,000 of support on top of the existing supports that are already in the base of the budget through which we are supporting it with our additional half a billion dollars of additional spending.

So the member opposite has to be clear that he would not have had this money in the budget. He would not have been able to 'priorize' that; there's no doubt about that, and the reality is on the specifics, the additional supports will be there for those children and families as they move beyond grade 3, and if additional support is needed, as indicated, it will be—

*(14:00)

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable First Minister's time has expired.

Mr. McFadyen: The families of these children are not going to be impressed with his political attacks on the opposition. You know, those attacks might be effective if they weren't being made by the same person who misled Manitobans this morning on CJOB, if they weren't being made by the same person who was spreading false information about Crocus. Those people were investing in that fund.

But if the attacks were coming from somebody other than the individual who consistently makes false statements publicly, then we'd be concerned about them.

But that aside, Madam Deputy Speaker, the real issue is these kids, their families and the parents, who are waiting for more than political spin and phony attacks on the opposition from this NDP Premier. They made three proposals to the government in order to continue this program for their children. One of them, the most modest of those proposals, they cut in half. They've pulled the rug out from under these kids and their families.

Will he end the phony, made up political attacks on the opposition and will he address the issue at hand which is the needs of these kids and their families?

Mr. Selinger: Madam Deputy Speaker, by putting these additional resources in the budget, it was our very intention to ensure that these kinds of services were continued. The members opposite would not have done that.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable First Minister has the floor.

Mr. Selinger: The reality is that we put an additional half a billion dollars of resources in the budget. Madam Deputy Speaker, 90 percent of those resources are going to support health care, education, services to family and children. Members opposite were very clear that they opposed that.

On the specifics, we are the government that introduced the school-age program. We are the government that introduced the preschool program. This week, we provided additional supports of \$200,000 for experts and people that will help ABA children beyond the grade 3 level, provide additional supports in the classroom, and the core of our educational funding has an additional \$60 million over the last decade, a 50 percent increase for special needs children. I only can, once again, emphasize that we have made special needs children a priority and will continue—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Autism

ABA Program Funding Decrease

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): What we voted against in this budget were the cuts to hearing-impaired children, the cuts to addiction services, and now, the cuts that are being made to children that need autism programming.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this government has been, in this budget, cutting services to vulnerable individuals, including cuts to hearing-impaired children, cuts to addictions programming, and now, cuts to children who need autism programming within the Department of Family Services.

The home program for autistic children complements the program that is run in the education system, and one piece cannot run without the other. Can the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) tell this House today—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable member's time has expired.

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education): I think it's important to put some facts on the record in regards to the intensive ABA program that, quite frankly, Madam Deputy Speaker, was implemented by our government. It was a program that was put in place by our government, the first program of its kind in Manitoba, and that intensive ABA program is there. It is an early intervention program because we know the research tells us that the most important thing that we can do is provide a program for the early years for young children with autism because that is what is most beneficial to those students. We have just made an announcement and had a meeting with MFEAT and told them that we will be expanding this program.

Mrs. Mitchelson: And again, there are factual mistakes in that answer. That program was started in 1997, and it was the member for Emerson that was an advocate for the ABA program that started, and has been expanded over the years, but now the programming is being cut by this government.

Madam Deputy Speaker, can the Minister of Family Services indicate why he's got money for a \$300,000 ad campaign with no outcomes, and he's got no money in his budget for the autistic programming for children that need that service, and there are proven measured outcomes?

Ms. Allan: Well, I would also like to take a moment to correct information that was put on the record in the member's previous question in regards to services that were cut, made by our government in regards to hearing impaired.

I want to make sure that the member opposite knows that our government has made no such cuts into services for children with hearing impairments, Madam Deputy Speaker. Our government is on record in regards to providing improved funding for children with special needs. I would put our record up against their record any day—any day—in regards to the services and the funding that we have put in place for vulnerable children in our school systems.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for River East, on your second supplemental question.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Madam Deputy Speaker, ABA therapy is proven and effective when carried out both in the school system and at home.

Can the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh) justify why his government can find money for an additional Cabinet member and six political spinners for the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) and no money for special needs children that require services and autistic programming? Can he explain that?

Ms. Allan: Well, perhaps the member opposite missed what our First Minister said and what I've already told the members opposite, that this program is in place for the early—and to preschool program is in place. Early intervention is important. This is one of the most comprehensive programs in Canada, right here in Manitoba, and we have just—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable Minister for Education has the floor.

Ms. Allan: We have just expanded the program. We have made a \$200,000 commitment to provide experts to work with the school teams, the—in schools who—to—for those children who are transitioning out of the program, and they will be providing expert—we will be providing expert services to the school teams for those children in school.

Manitoba eHealth

Travel Expenditures Information Request

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Deputy Speaker, many

Manitobans are trying to understand how a government can be running deficits of more than \$600 million, how it can increase spending by more than \$500 million and yet still have cuts to front-line services. And I know after question period today there will be a hallway full of NDP spinners that will provide some insight into where all that money is going, but we have further questions now as a result of a freedom of information request filed by members of our staff with respect to out-of-province travel for eHealth within the Department of Health.

We, just last week, received a response to that request for information in which the department or the WRHA indicated that it would take 126 hours and cost \$3,780 to compile one year's worth of out-of-province travel expenses for in health.

Can the Premier explain why it is that they're stonewalling Manitobans when it comes to their misuse of their hard earned tax dollars?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): The member has just indicated he would prefer money to go to services for ABA children. That's what we support. If he wants to spend thousands of dollars compiling the information, let him be clear about that.

We encourage our RHAs to provide timely information on their travel expenses, the same thing we do for members of the public service, as well as those elected officials, and that should be done. That should be done in an appropriate way, and you will see that more and more of this information will be put on-line, on the Web, on a regular basis as we move forward. But if the member wants to divert resources to an extraordinary effort to compile specific information, let him say so.

We'd rather put our money into the ABA program.

* (14:10)

Mr. McFadyen: I think what we just heard the Premier say is that even as he's cutting services to children with autism, Manitobans have no right to know how much money they spend on travel. What an unbelievable level of arrogance after 11 years in power, Madam Deputy Speaker. The arrogance of this government that they expect Manitobans to believe that it takes 126 hours to compile one year's worth of travel expenses for eHealth and the Health Department. It's no wonder the debt is rising at the level it is and they're cutting front-line services. It's going into travel. It's going into unnecessary waste.

It's going to spin doctors in the hallway after question period.

Why won't he just come clean and give Manitobans the information they have a right to know? They want to know why is he cutting services for autism. Why is he increasing spending for travel and why won't he want to let them know where their money is going, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Selinger: Madam Deputy Speaker, we've just had a rating on the openness of the government. I believe it received a B in terms of its willingness to share information in public, and we have strength in our freedom of information legislation to provide more information to people. The member opposite seems to want to go on a fishing expedition. We have encouraged all of our authorities to make timely—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable First Minister has the floor. I am having some difficulty hearing him. Perhaps those honourable members wishing to engage in private conversations could do so outside the Chamber.

Mr. Selinger: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The reality is that we have actually increased resources this very week with a \$200,000 announcement for the ABA program, which strengthens the program beyond the grade 3 period, which built on the program for preschoolers. So we have put more resources into all of our essential services: health, family services, education. Those kinds of things are where we put 90 percent of our additional resources this year.

Members opposite do not want to have to admit to the fact that they voted against those additional resources. Now the members want to divert resources to go beyond the requirements of our Freedom of Information Act from further information. They want to spend money going on a fishing expedition. We want to spend money on ABA kids and front-line services.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition for his second supplemental question.

Mr. McFadyen: If he wants to spend money on these services, why doesn't he do it? Why is he cutting them? I mean, you know, it's meaningless when he comes into the House and says he wants to do things when his actions are the exact opposite.

Now, we've got serious concerns about ballooning debt, cuts to front-line services, taxes on food, increases in hydro rates, and I think Manitoba ratepayers, taxpayers, families want to know why it is that all of these costs are going up and services are going down under this NDP government. Tuition is up, services are down.

Why doesn't he come clean? Why doesn't he ask one of those spin doctors that's going to be in the hallway after question period to run across to eHealth, spend a couple of hours compiling the information and let Manitobans know how much is being spent on travel in the Department of Health?

Mr. Selinger: You know, it's very clear why the opposition doesn't need additional spin doctors, the Leader of the Opposition does it all by himself. He spins this information every single day.

The reality of the matter is there are increased resources in this budget for children and families that suffer from the ABA condition. There are additional resources in this budget for day care. There are additional resources in this budget for public schools education, as well as post-secondary education, and the members opposite have voted against every single one of those increases. The reality is that the—we have strengthened our freedom of information legislation and we look for ways to provide it, information for the public, in a timely and efficient manner without racking up additional costs which would divert resources from front-line services.

We're in favour of providing front-line services. We're in favour of stimulating the economy and moving Manitoba forward. The members opposite want to go fishing for salacious material that they can then use to justify cuts later on.

Manitoba eHealth

Travel Expenditures Information Request

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I would remind the Premier that his government is spending half a million dollars a year on spin doctors, money that would be much better spent on front-line services.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there's a pattern evolving with this government. We saw it with the Minister of Health when she covered up the truth about Brian Sinclair's death. We saw it when the Minister of Health's department refused to give up information about restaurant and travel expenses—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable member for Charleswood has the floor.

Mrs. Driedger: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. We saw it when this Minister of Health's department refused to give up information about restaurant and travel expenses in Manitoba's lab unless we paid \$8,400. Now eHealth has become part of this fortress mentality. When information seems to be sensitive, they put up hurdles.

So I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to tell us: Why do we have to pay \$3,800 to get a breakdown of travel expenses at eHealth?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Again, as is typical of the member for Charleswood, conspiracy theories abound. I can remind her, as we said in Estimates when we had a conversation, Manitoba eHealth is administratively housed within the WRHA, and as such, it's subject to all of the policies and the procedures concerning their finances, which includes travel.

There's an annual report for Manitoba eHealth. In fact, in '08-09, it notes that approximately 275,000 was spent on travel; 219,000 in '07-08. This particular request is asking for some more detailed information, which goes beyond the two hours of free information they get in addition to the free application. And so, according to the law, they're being charged for it.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, then the minister should be able to provide the breakdown of that spending. If the information is there, it shouldn't take them \$3,800 worth of time to compile the information, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable member for Charleswood has the floor. And I'm going to ask for some decorum in the House, please. We are in front of the viewing public and I would appreciate decorum from all members of the House.

Mrs. Driedger: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for pointing out the rude behaviour from the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak).

Madam Deputy Speaker, all we're asking for from this government is some transparency about eHealth. Red flags go up when we're told that we

have to pay all this money and it's going to take them 126 hours to compile the information.

So if this information is so readily available, why isn't she prepared to table it?

Ms. Oswald: It wasn't that long ago—I think around 45 seconds—but I think I just did give her that information.

There's an annual report, Madam Deputy Speaker, that eHealth provides. Manitoba eHealth is subject to all of the policies and procedures in the WRHA concerning travel. The nature of this request takes more time than the legislation permits for free access to information.

But while I'm speaking, I want to make sure that what we put clear on the record is that the work that Manitoba eHealth is doing to work towards an electronic health record for all Manitobans, that will improve health care for all of us, should not be underrated, and the member opposite is just smearing people again.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Prior to recognizing the honourable member for Charleswood, I just want to remind all honourable members that this is question and answer period and all honourable members who wish to participate in debate will have the opportunity to do so in due course.

Untendered Contracts Information Request

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): We also asked this government for lists of untendered contracts in eHealth. We were told it was going to take them 73 hours to compile this information and it was going to cost us \$2,200 to get that information. So a big red flag starts to wave when we are told that it's going to take them 73 hours to put together a list of untendered contracts in eHealth.

So I'd like to ask the Minister of Health: If there's nothing to hide, why are they stonewalling?

* (14:20)

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): And, you know, again, we will just disregard for now the fact that members opposite are seemingly entirely incapable of acknowledging the excellent work that eHealth is doing to advance Manitoba on the importance of the electronic health record and what that's going to do for patients in Manitoba.

I'll remind members that we asked for a review of the recommendations from the Auditor General of Canada's 2009 report on the electronic health records. We also asked for a review of Manitoba eHealth after the situation that developed in Ontario. We've been advised that Manitoba eHealth is far ahead in meeting very high standards concerning administration and governance structures. We're going to continue to work on this but the member opposite, I suppose, will continue to—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Just prior to recognizing the honourable member for Morris, I just want to remind all honourable members that we are in front of the viewing public. I would ask for some decorum in the House. I would ask that members, if they wish to have private conversations, they can take those outside the House or they can make use of the loge. It's really not necessary to yell across the House.

Post-Secondary Education Tuition Fee Increases

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, and if there's that many untendered contracts, there certainly are red flags going up. So why doesn't she just waive the fees and give us the information and be transparent?

Madam Deputy Speaker, there's no doubt that post-secondary education is one of the keys to ensuring that Manitoba has a knowledgeable work force that can meet tomorrow's challenges. The NDP have let students down time and time again with their failed policies. It's these failed policies and their own—for their own political purposes that have created a crisis in post-secondary education.

Today University of Manitoba students have become aware that they will be facing an average cost of 5 percent and some of them in law and—will be facing increases above 5 percent. When can students at the Asper School of Business, medicine or law be told what their tuition increases will be?

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): Well, and I thank the member opposite for her question.

You know, two weeks ago she was on her feet yelling at me to get out of the way of universities, to deregulate tuition, and here she is today complaining because we have allowed a very reasonable increase of 5 percent—and because—and I also point out that

our tuition today is lower than 19—than it was in 1999.

And I also point out, Madam Deputy Speaker, that during the term in office of the members opposite, tuition for students went up 132 percent—132 percent. This member has nothing to teach me.

Mrs. Taillieu: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am very surprised at this minister but I want to read something she said from Estimates, when I asked her about funding to university. She very arrogantly responded, well I've never met a university president yet who says, I have so much money; please take some back. I'm sure that's comfort to them.

Madam Deputy Speaker, students have many expenses. They have tuition. They have food and shelter and they have a limited income. Many of them are working long hours over the summer, and they really need to know what their resources are going to be for the next academic year. Actually, these students have to budget, unlike this government, so they'd like to know what their expenses are going to be.

So I'm going to ask this minister, again, if she can explain to students who are working hard these summer months, when can they expect to know how much money to set aside for their tuition?

Ms. McGifford: Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, there are many things that I could point to today and one of them, of course, is the income tax tuition rebate has been brought forward, so that there will be 5 percent of that money available within the—within year.

I could also point out—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I just want to remind all honourable members that the honourable Minister for Advanced Education and Literacy has the floor. I am sure all honourable members would like to give her the courtesy of listening to her answer.

Ms. McGifford: Well, thank you. Not only did members opposite raise tuition by 132 percent, they completely annihilated the Manitoba Bursary in 1992-93.

We today have a \$9-million bursary. We've kept tuition lower than it is in 1999. We have the in-year income tax tuition rebate.

Madam Deputy Speaker, our students have the lowest debt in the country, the lowest borrowing rates in the country and the best pay-back record. I think, as I said, the member has nothing to teach me.

Mrs. Taillieu: But I remind, again, it's this minister and this government's failed policies for their own political purposes that have caused a crisis in our education.

Madam Deputy Speaker, many students are well and under way in their summer employment, and professional students just don't know how much they're going to be paying for their fees next year.

This government talks a big game about supporting students, but when it comes to such basic information as to whether—what financial and substantial increases that they're going to be facing, this government is just mute, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I'm going to ask again for the minister to be clear and transparent and give students a plan, a year-after-year plan, so they can plan for their academic futures, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Ms. McGifford: The member opposite might have become a student activist today, but two weeks ago she was for deregulation and during the decade of the '90s tuition went up 132 percent.

Members opposite have nothing to teach us about students running—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am having some difficulty hearing the minister's answer, and so I am going to ask, once again, for some decorum from all honourable members here in the House.

Ms. McGifford: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for your intervention.

The short story is members opposite have no credibility in post-secondary education whatsoever.

Maintenance Enforcement Program Employee Turnover

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): From January 2009 to March of this year, my constituent Ron Archer has had four different Maintenance Enforcement officers in the past 15 months. Through his Legal Aid lawyer, Mr. Archer has requested a stay of enforcement. Instead, this department has garnished his health insurance income because of a

lack of continuity in the department. There's no continuity within this department to handle cases like Mr. Archer on a timely basis.

Why is there such a huge turnover of staff within the department? Mr. Archer has been very forthcoming to meet his obligations only to see the Justice Department drop the ball.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): If the member from Carman will provide me with specifics, I will send it to my department to see if there is something that can be done.

If there's a court order which needs to be varied, then I would suggest that his constituent take the necessary steps to get the order varied. The Maintenance Enforcement Program is set up to enforce court orders. If the individual says that he needs a stay of those payments, he should take the steps to do so.

But if the member from Carman wants to give me more specifics, I will certainly do what I can to provide more information to him.

Mr. Pedersen: I can provide some more information.

As part of the stay of enforcement, Mr. Archer issued postdated cheques in January of this year. The department promptly lost the cheques. The new designated officer, officer No. 4, requested more postdated cheques. Mr. Archer's insurance payments were still being garnished despite the stay of enforcement and, on top of this, two of the postdated cheques have been cashed in advance of the due date.

How can Mr. Archer have any confidence in this department with mistakes continuing to happen and yet another maintenance officer about to be appointed and not familiar with this case?

Can the minister give Mr. Archer any assurance his department is capable of correcting the mistakes made?

Mr. Swan: Madam Deputy Speaker, we do believe that the enforcement of a maintenance payment is very, very important to spouses and children in the province of Manitoba. In fact, it's one of our top priorities.

Again, if the member has more information—I just heard him, in his last comment, saying there was a stay of the order, yet, in his first question said there wasn't a stay of the order; he needed a stay. That's why it would be very helpful, in a case of this type, if he could provide me with the information. I will make sure it's sent on to the department.

* (14:30)

But I am pleased, of course, that we have legislation before this government that will continue to improve the enforcement system. And I'm certainly looking forward to the opposition parties standing with us and moving ahead as we keep improving the systems to make sure that spouses and children get the support to which they're entitled.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Carman, on his second supplemental.

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Deputy Speaker, Mr. Archer is present today in the gallery. Four maintenance officers in 15 months, losing postdated cheques, cashing postdated cheques in advance, garnishing insurance payments—the list goes on and on.

Will the minister today commit to at least meet with Mr. Archer? Will he at least meet with Mr. Archer and his department—not only to straighten out Mr. Archer's case, there are many, many more cases within his department? He can give you some insight into the mess that your department is into. Will you at least agree to meet with Mr. Archer today?

Mr. Swan: Again, the enforcement of support payments is something which is of a very high priority for this government.

And again, if the member was aware of an individual situation that he believes could be improved, he has choices. There are other members on the other side of the House, there are members on this side of the House who, if they have an issue, will provide it to the minister, and then I can then go and provide more information from the department.

The member can choose to raise this in the House today. I've given the information that I can to the member. If there are more things that would be helpful, then I am quite prepared to act on that information. But again, there are some other facts that are unclear from what the member has said. There may be some ways to get better information. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Seven Oaks Hospital Emergency Services Reductions

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): It was this Minister of Health that made the decision to cut emergency general services at Seven Oaks Hospital.

Today in the public gallery is Karen Taylor. Karen Taylor had a mother who went to the emergency services at Seven Oaks Hospital and, ultimately, because of that decision that this government made, had to be transferred to another hospital facility. Madam Deputy Speaker, if you ask Karen Taylor, she will tell you that her mother would have likely have lived had she had the general surgery done at Seven Oaks Hospital.

My question to the Minister of Health is: Will she tell this Chamber today that it was, indeed, a bad decision and that that decision will be reversed so that the people that need the Seven Oaks Hospital will have emergency general surgery?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): First of all, I know that the member raised an issue of a case. I've sought more information from him through correspondence. If this is the same case that he's speaking of, of course, we'll be interested in doing the appropriate assessment and evaluation of what happened in this case.

I will say, generally, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the issue to consolidate general surgery was a decision that was made by medical professionals. Specialization has changed over the course of time. We know that medical doctors make recommendations about what is best for patient safety and what is best under the issue of subspecialties. And it behooves me to listen to that advice, and we'll continue to evaluate these changes in the WRHA.

Mr. Lamoureux: As the—as has been pointed out, the Minister of Health has spent a great deal of money on spin doctors. Ms. Taylor's in the public gallery. I'm sure she would be—entertain the opportunity to meet with the minister, or others, to talk about her particular case.

But what I don't like, Madam Deputy Speaker, is the Minister of Health trying to pass the buck. There are general surgeons—there are people with expertise that will tell you that there was a need to have emergency general surgery provided at the Seven Oaks Hospital. It just so happens that this minister made a bad decision and doesn't want to admit to the

bad decision. There are experts on both sides, and it's the residents in Winnipeg north and the residents that are served by that hospital that are being sold short.

Will this minister make the commitment today to restore emergency general surgery at the—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Oswald: We've had this conversation a few times, and I'm going to say to the member, as I have before, that I will continue to take the advice of medical experts. And I've said to the member before that on any number of issues, there can be debate within the medical community, as there is elsewhere in society. I can say that the overriding position from medical experts was on the issue of this surgery consolidation.

I would remind the member—we've talked about this before—that he himself, without information, made recommendations about having cardiac surgery at our community hospitals, which goes in direct contravention to what Dr. Koshal said, and, indeed, I believe, to what his own leader says.

Mr. Lamoureux: Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have medical experts that'll tell you that your decision was a stupid decision, Madam Minister. You know, we can go back and forth; at the end of the day it's about the people that live in Winnipeg's North End. It's the people that are being served by the Seven Oaks Hospital, and, Madam Minister, you made a mistake. It's time that you admit—and there's nothing wrong with saying I made a mistake. Restore the emergency general services to the Seven Oaks Hospital. That's what needs to be done.

We're asking for this minister to do the right thing: admit the mistake, restore it, and if you don't have the ability to admit to making the mistake, I look to the Premier (Mr. Selinger) to demonstrate some leadership.

Ms. Oswald: And I'll say again that the surgery consolidation continues to go through ongoing review. We know, of course, that Dr. Koshal and, indeed, other members of this Legislature, shall we say, don't agree with the member from Inkster about an antiquated view of cardiac surgery. This view is also held about subspecialties, which is why surgery was consolidated.

And as a point of interest, I would remind the member that we're not taking services away from the emergency department. We've added to the Seven

Oaks Hospital a brand new emergency room. We've added dialysis. We've added oncology services.

So when the member stands up and makes a litany of false statements concerning what's happening in Seven Oaks General Hospital, again, I'm obligated to correct the record day after day.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Bill Clement

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): It is with profound sadness that I stand in the House today to mark the passing of Bill Clement, city councillor and friend. Bill will be missed and lovingly remembered by his wife Debbie, son Michael, daughters Shannon, Kelly and Kristin and extended family and friends.

Bill lived most of his life in Charleswood. Bill and Debbie married in 1979. They loved to entertain family and friends in their home and enjoyed travelling. Bill was a devoted husband and father and was most proud of his children and grandchildren. He will be remembered by those who knew and loved him as a caring and generous man whose unconditional love will be forever cherished. His mushy birthday cards to his family showed his deep love for them.

Bill was a man who served his constituents with both honour and passion. His passion was always driven by what he believed was right and best for the citizens of Charleswood who elected him. Many in all walks of life, whether business, political, sports, media, will have been touched by his passion for what he believed to be right and true and in broad best interests. They will have experienced the sometimes stubborn exterior hiding a soft, gentle interior. There was always a twinkle in his eye and a story or at least four stories to be told.

Many Charleswood community organizations have benefited from Bill's dedication. The Charleswood Legion, Charleswood Senior Centre, Michael Komenda Skatepark, Friends of the Harte Trail, they have all benefited from Bill's commitment to make Charleswood a better community.

Charleswood was where Bill grew up and went to school and where he chose to stay and raise his family. He also owned and operated a local business, Aqua Pleasure. Many Charleswood residents also knew Bill from the Charleswood Curling Club. He

and his family were also very active in preserving Charleswood's heritage with the Charleswood—or sorry, the Charleswood Historical Society.

Bill never backed away from challenges, and the cancer to which he finally succumbed was no exception. And yet when he knew the end was near his courage was most personified in the last few and lucid moments with his family. And so Bill has reached his end of his journey leaving us with his memories.

On behalf of my husband, Hal, myself and the constituents of Charleswood, I want to express our deepest sympathy and condolences to his family.

Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Sargent Park School Sports Teams

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Deputy Speaker, it's a privilege to represent Sargent Park School, a West End hotbed of basketball. Sargent Park School won four Winnipeg School Division championships and three provincial school championships this season. In fact, the junior girls team has won the provincial championship three years in a row. The Sargent Park Flames are hardworking, quick, agile and a force on the court.

* (14:40)

This school of 900 elementary and junior high students is home to 14 official sports teams, with more than 150 participating students. These student athletes deserve special congratulations for all their hours of practice, as do the families and the community which have supported them in their success along the way. The biggest challenge now is finding room for all of the banners, pennants and flags Sargent Park teams have won.

Team sports in schools provide our youth with a fantastic opportunity to improve their athletic skills, get in shape, learn discipline and teamwork, and have fun playing alongside their peers. They also allow students to get to know their teachers. Thirty-seven Sargent Park staff give their time outside of regular school hours for the teams. Many others support their athletes by driving them to tournaments and supervising games. I would like to thank the tremendous staff at Sargent Park for their faith in and commitment to their students.

In particular, I want to recognize teacher Larry Marquardson, who's supported student athletics at

Sargent Park School for a long time. He's truly made a kind, caring and positive impression on so many young people through the years.

Madam Deputy Speaker, school sports can be an important part of our students' school experience. The successes of the students, staff and administration at Sargent Park School demonstrates the great capacity in our public schools, and I wish the Flames many more victories in the future. Thank you.

Manitoba Volunteer Awards Recipients

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today to mark the extraordinary contributions of three Manitobans, Channing Lavallée, Ray Johnson and Dennis Dupont. Each are having incredible contributions to their home community of Portage la Prairie and St. Ambrose. The trio was recently recognized for their initiatives at this year's Manitoba Volunteer Awards Ceremony.

Hailing from St. Ambrose, Channing Lavallée, just 23 years of age, was this year's recipient of the Volunteer Service Award in the youth category. Over the past 10 years, she has dedicated countless hours to the St. Ambrose Community Centre, which included volunteering and fundraising, the St. Ambrose Saskatoon Festival and Métis Festival, as well as organizing and conducting numerous children's activities.

Channing also organized the Métis youth cultural celebration in 2008 and 2009 for the benefit of CancerCare and the Children's Wish Foundation. Channing saw the opportunity to help the Children's Wish Foundation as a way to say thank you for granting her sister's wish 10 years ago.

It was most fitting that Mr. Ray Johnson was recognized with Manitoba's Outstanding Leadership Award. A career educator, which included 20 years serving as principal at the Portage Collegiate Institute, Ray's volunteer initiatives include the 2010 Power Smart Manitoba Winter Games, Portage Lions Club, Portage minor baseball, Portage community justice forum, Neighbourhood Watch, Citizens on Patrol and the Heart and Stroke Foundation, and the Community Foundation of Portage and District, which he now serves as president. Mr. Johnson is very proud of his Icelandic heritage, serving the Manitoba Icelandic community as president for the Icelandic National League of North America. Mr. Johnson has, indeed, dedicated

his life to being involved, serving as a stellar example for all of us to follow.

This year's Lieutenant-Governor's Make a Difference Award recipient was Dennis Dupont, a retired Canadian Air Force mechanic, who received his award for incredible work he has done for Central Plains CancerCare Services, the Red Cross, the local Lions Club in Portage la Prairie, and Superannuates National Association for retirees of the military, RCMP and public service.

Channing, Dennis and Ray's contribution to our community is greatly appreciated, and I invite all honourable members to join with me in extending a heartfelt thank you for their service. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Sledge and Wheelchair Hockey Athletes

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Madam Deputy Speaker, every day Manitobans accomplish incredible feats through no means other than their sheer force of will. Manitoba's sledge and wheelchair hockey players have found a way to overcome physical disabilities and engage in these competitive and challenging games, simply for the love of sports.

Last month, my colleague from Assiniboia and I had the pleasure of participating in a power wheelchair hockey demonstration and challenge in the parking lot of the Madison Square Canada Safeway, and the challenge, we discovered, in attempting this activity was a learning experience in itself.

Wheelchair and sledge hockey are competitive group sports that require a great deal of physical dexterity and upper body strength. Power wheelchair hockey came to Manitoba in 2002. Sledge Hockey Manitoba started in Winnipeg during the winter of 2007, thanks to the efforts of Jon Derry and Bill Muloin and strong support from the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities and Hockey Canada.

The sledge hockey team has continued to grow since its inception, expanding from six players to 40 in 2010, with programs for juniors and seniors. About 30 players play on four teams in the Manitoba Wheelchair Power Hockey League.

Sledge and wheelchair power hockey are perfect bonding opportunities for people with disabilities and their loved ones, as they are open to people of all levels of ability. An able-bodied player on the sledge hockey team was drawn in by his brother. Another

player, who has a disability, plays on the Sledge Hockey Manitoba team with his best friend who is able-bodied. The father of another child with disabilities plays on the team.

The Manitoba Sledge Hockey team has also played against able-bodied hockey teams like Kelvin High School, Dakota High School and teams from the RCMP and CFB Shilo. Their level of commitment to the sport remains unwavering regardless of their abilities.

These teams have a long and promising road ahead. Sledge Hockey Manitoba recently won gold at the 2010 Western Canadian Sledge Hockey Tournament. They are hoping to get players on the 2014 Winter Paralympic Games in Sochi. The Manitoba wheelchair hockey team has participated in two national electric power hockey tournaments and the 2008 North American Power Hockey Championship.

I wish them all the best in future games and I am certain we will keep hearing about their successes. Thank you.

Human Rights and Freedom of Religion

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to talk about the importance of individual and minority human rights. Our country and our province have long been based on the practice of the freedom of religion and the rights of individuals to practise their religious beliefs.

From time to time, persons of different faiths in Manitoba and Canada have been discriminated against, and, most recently, we have seen actions and concerns with respect to Muslims in our community and in our country, specifically in some instances, with the wearing of the niqab and hijab. Wearing these are an individual choice made by Muslim women according to their own beliefs. It is important that we continue to allow people of all religious beliefs to continue to practise their beliefs and in this instance to wear the niqab and the hijab.

Those—there has been suggested that this may be—there may be security reasons for banning these, but the reality is that those who wear the niqab will show their face for security or identification purposes and will have their face shown on their driver's licence or passport, so that this is a misunderstanding.

It's been suggested that the niqab should not be worn because of voting but, as I've said, this is a misunderstanding and we have many people who vote by mail, so that this is not a reasonable request.

May 20th was designated by some people as Draw Mohammad Day. This was in response to a South Park episode that depicted the Muslim prophet as a bear. A Facebook group has sprung up supporting the event which is very offensive to Canadian Muslims, and when there are those among us who are badly offended by actions like these, we should all be offended, stand up and make sure that the right to religious freedoms and the right to practise our beliefs are still there.

People like Shahina Siddiqui, president of the Canadian Islamic Social Services organization, have been at the forefront of trying to educate people, and I would encourage members of all political parties, in light of these events, to learn more about the Muslim faith and to consult with members of Manitoba's Muslim community. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Government House Leader): The House will now proceed to second reading debate on Bill 31.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 31—The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

Madam Deputy Speaker: To resume the adjourned debate on proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) the second reading of Bill 31, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, standing in the name of the honourable member for Carman, who has two minutes remaining.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, it kept me awake all night trying to decide how to finish off with two minutes on BITSA. But somewhere in there, I just—I'm going to leave you with two final thoughts on this.

And, being Wednesday, I see, again, that my written question is once again on the Order Paper. The Minister of Finance responsible for Hydro refuses to answer our very legitimate questions about

Bipole III coming through my constituency. I hope that she takes the time to answer these questions.

Secondly, Madam Deputy Speaker, balanced budgets are history in Manitoba now with this legislation, and that's unfortunate. It's a sad day in Manitoba. We now have debt by choice from this government. They choose to go into debt. They have chosen to get rid of balanced budget legislation, and that's very unfortunate. It's a sad day for Manitoba that we are now plunging deeper and deeper into debt and with this government at the helm. It's only going to get worse, and it's time for change.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

* (14:50)

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): A pleasure to speak today to Bill 31, and follow some of the comments, today and yesterday, by my friend and colleague from Carman.

It—I find it interesting that the Government House Leader would decide to repeatedly call only one bill that—I know that it's a bill that's near and dear to all members of the Cabinet's heart, because it protects their salary. It protects them from taking an additional 20 percent reduction in salary. But to be so bold as to continually call only one bill for your own self-interest, as opposed to all the other bills that may have some merit, there may be some other bills that, on the agenda for the session, that may very well warrant some support from all members of this House. And yet they're not being called forward. And they're not being called forward because the Government House Leader, at the whim—at the will of his Premier (Mr. Selinger) and his—other members of his Cabinet and of his caucus, have decided that they're going to prioritize a bill that simply protects their pocketbook.

They're going to—and there are, I'm sure, as there is in every political party, people of different means in a caucus, and I suspect that there are some within the government caucus who are very adamant about ensuring that their wage, their government salaries, isn't cut. And so I expect that the Government House Leader is going to have to explain at some point—at some point—to others who might be sponsoring bills in the Cabinet, or those in the public who might find some of the bills important, to move forward. He will have to explain to them why it is that he made, and he and his government made, their top, their No. 1, their only priority this session, a bill that protects

their salaries. He's going to have to go to them and say, we decided to put, as our No. 1 issue, a bill that's going to keep money in our pockets, instead of a litany of other pieces of legislation that might, in fact, have some merit.

And, like any legislative session, you can go through the 20 to 40 bills that are introduced on average in every legislative session, and find some that are worthy of support, some that actually would make a difference. I've talked to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) about some of his bills, and I suspect that we will support some of those Justice bills because they might, in fact, have some measure of improved safety for Manitobans. And, of course, some of those ideas came from the opposition, so, of course, we would support them. But they're not going to see the light of day as long as the Government House Leader (Mr. Blaikie) and the Cabinet have their will, because they have decided that they are not going to prioritize any legislation other than that which protects their own self-interest, other than that which protects their own pocketbook.

And I wonder if the member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie), who, I think, in many ways, is a gentleman and someone who I personally can find some accord with—I wonder if he goes to his own constituents and says to them, we are going to not bring forward any other pieces of legislation, any other bills, any other pieces of needed legislation, until we get our salaries protected, until we can ensure that every dollar that we're not entitled to, by the current law, flows into my pocket and to the pocket of the colleagues that I share around the Cabinet table.

I wonder if he knocked on those doors around his constituency, if he went door to door in Elmwood this long weekend—and there'll be time and, I understand, there'll be some beautiful weather, Madam Deputy Speaker, so it might be on the agenda for the member for Elmwood. He may already be planning to door knock and, if he does, I encourage him to ask those members that he talks to in his constituency, those individuals who answer the door, to say to them, we have these other 30-some to 40 pieces of legislation and then we have one that's been designed to protect our salaries, that's designed solely to ensure that I don't lose 20 percent of my salary, what do you think I should do? Do you think I should try everything I can in my legislative power to get through the bill that passes—to pass a bill that protects my own salary? Or should we look at perhaps some of the other bills that might be important to Manitobans?

And I—you know, I stand to be corrected. Maybe I'd be wrong. And, if the member does this survey, if he knocks on a hundred doors and asks this of a hundred constituents, and if the majority of them come back to him and say, no, sir, I believe that you should, in fact, protect your salary first; every other bill is a second priority—if that is, in fact, what happens in Elmwood, and I'd be surprised if it does, but if it does, he should come back to the House, report that, and I'll stand under my place, and I'll say, that's not what I expected, I was wrong. I would have expected the majority of his constituents to say that you shouldn't put your self-interest first.

And, in fact, I think if he went a little further, if he spent more time on the doorsteps in Elmwood and explained a little further to them, in terms of why he's protecting his salary—if he said to them, when you look at the legislation, what should have happened is I should have taken a 20 percent—an additional 20 percent—reduction in salary, because of the consecutive deficits. If he said to them, the legislation that was passed by the former Finance minister, the now Premier (Mr. Selinger), indicated that I should have lost 40 percent of my salary, but we need to change that, we need to change that because we've decided to run deficits for the next five years. I suspect that he'd get a lot of questions about that.

I suspect that a lot of people would say to him, well, sir, the member for Elmwood, why is it that you don't want to live by your own legislation? Why is it that you can just change your legislation to suit your own needs? And, in fact, I suspect that if any of the members of the NDP caucus asked that of their constituents, they would be door knocking for a long time. And they'd be door knocking for a long time because they'd be at each doorstep for a very long time explaining this and they'd be getting a lot of questions.

And I suspect that some of the questions they would get are similar to some of the questions I've gotten when I've explained this to residents in Manitoba. They'd say, well, do we have the ability to change the law? If we do something, can we change the law to retroactively protect ourselves?

I wonder if the member for La Verendrye (Mr. Lemieux), for example, if the member for La Verendrye—I'm sure that the good people of La Verendrye, I know, do the best that they can to uphold the law in every circumstance. And I know

many of them as personal friends and I have a lot of great deal of respect for those who live within his constituency.

But, like any of us, there are times when, you know, you might drive a little faster than the posted speed limit allows and you find yourself getting a ticket or photo radar ticket or something like that. I mean, it happens. If it doesn't happen very often, that's something that we would expect. But for everybody, for every general, law-abiding citizen, that's something that happens. And when you get that ticket in the mail—and they're not cheap tickets—not that I'm saying I've gotten any, but when you get that ticket in the mail, it might be between 150 and 250 dollars. It's a significant ticket.

I'm getting confirmation from the member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale). He says it's about \$250. So I appreciate that. And the member for Burrows, I know, is a law-abiding individual. He's certainly—you know, he may make a mistake like anybody.

So you get this ticket in the mail or you get it from the officer when you're pulled over, and, you know, you're frustrated. You realize that you've made a mistake but you have no ability to go back, as an ordinary citizen, and change the law and say, well, the posted speed limit said 100 kilometres an hour on a highway or 60 kilometres or 40 kilometres in the city, so I'll just change the law to change what the speed limit was and then I wouldn't have to pay the ticket.

Nobody has the ability to do that, as an average citizen, and nobody, really, is asking for that ability. They're not saying, when they get the ticket, well, I'd like to be able to go back and change the law to save myself that \$250. And that's a lot of money for a lot of people. For most people, you know, when you get that unexpected ticket, it comes out of your family budget. You have to somehow make up for that by cutting back something else or drawing it from your savings. It's not insignificant.

But what has this government done? They've essentially done that. They've gone faster than the posted speed limit. They've increased the deficit more than the law said that they were allowed to, over a period of time. And so, according to the law as it is today, they should be getting a ticket. They should be getting a ticket that says, you're going to lose 40 percent of your salary.

And the member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) and all of his members from Cabinet, the Minister for

Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick), the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson), the member for La Verendrye (Mr. Lemieux), they've all gotten this ticket, and they've said, well, you know what? Maybe we should just change the law. Maybe the law doesn't apply to us. Maybe we should have some special status and change the law.

*(15:00)

My friend from Arthur-Virden mentions the whole controversy over photo radar, where, about a little less than a year ago, there were thousands of individuals in the city of Winnipeg and Manitoba who received tickets that a court, Madam Deputy Speaker, that a court in the province of Manitoba said those tickets should never have been issued. Those were essentially tickets that were illegal because of the way the law was written. They were issued in construction zones where there were no construction workers and the court said you shouldn't be issuing tickets in a construction zone where there are no construction workers. Sometimes on a holiday, like a July 1st holiday, or late at night when there are clearly no workers—and so these tickets were issued and the court said they shouldn't have been issued.

And I bet you many of those individuals who had received those tickets would've said, oh, I wish I could change the law. I wish I could go back and change the law. In fact, before them, they were even in a worse situation because the law said they shouldn't have gotten those tickets at all. And so they had to pay tickets because of a mistake by this government.

And I remember clearly. I remember clearly, Madam Deputy Speaker, the former minister of Justice, the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), standing in his place in the Legislature—the same place that he occupies today—and saying, we can't. We can't refund this money. We can't give the money back because they've already paid it and the law says if you've paid the money then that's it. You can't get the money back.

Well, I mean, that frustrated a—thousands of Manitobans. I got the e-mails. I'm sure all the members in this House got the e-mails. It was a great deal of frustration for these individuals, and rightfully so, because it was a lot of money for tickets that they should never have been given.

Well, what a great position, you know, the member for Elmwood and others in his Cabinet, they

bring forward a law today that says, oh, we'll just erase the law. We'll just change it. We got caught speeding. We got caught getting a ticket—uh, but we don't want to pay that extra 20 percent so we'll just change the law.

And I would suggest to the member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) and all the members of the Cabinet and his colleagues in the NDP that this is one of those issues. When it's explained to people that a government has decided, only because it has the legislative power—not the moral authority, but the legislative power—to change a law so that they won't be in violation of it to save themselves personal money. When that's explained to individuals and then you compare it to the fact that if they get a ticket or they break the law there'll be no reprieve from this government; there'll be no remorse, you'll have the Minister of Justice stand in his place—the former minister—and say, if you've broken the law or you have to pay the fine, that's the way it is for everybody.

Well, we find out, a few months later, it isn't actually that way for everybody. It isn't that way for everybody in Manitoba. It's only for those who aren't in the NDP Cabinet, because, if you're in the NDP Cabinet, you have a very special place, because all you have to do is change the law and save yourself—and save yourselves that 20 percent.

And I know the hardworking people of Elmwood, the hardworking people in Southdale, the hardworking people of Kirkfield Park, they would say, I'm sure, if this was—and it will be presented to them. They will be told to them—this story will be told to them. They would say, that, we believe, is an abuse of privilege. That, we believe, is taking power that's been granted to you and using it in a way that is abusive of that authority.

And I think that they're going to be concerned about that. Compounded with the notion that this legislation is going to do that is it is the top priority for the Government House Leader (Mr. Blaikie). It's his No. 1 priority. He'll put aside every other piece of legislation. He'll put aside legislation that might actually help those who are victims of domestic violence. He'll put aside legislation that might have some impact in helping us correct some of the gang activity in the province of Manitoba. He'll put all of that aside, put it on the shelf for one reason—for 20 reasons. So that he can save himself 20 percent on his salary, and that's going to be his No. 1 priority.

That's what he's going to ensure happens this session, that this bill that'll save him and his Cabinet colleagues 20 percent. That's going to be what he's going to hang his hat on and he's going to be determined—I was going to use another word that I wouldn't want to use in this Legislature. He's going to be darned and determined to get this bill through no matter what obstacles stand in his way. And, ultimately—I mean, the reality is that this is the government that has the majority, and in our parliamentary system—which we defend every day by virtue of being here—we know that when the majority of a government wants to get legislation through, eventually they're going to get that legislation through. That's how it works, but you also have to go then and defend that legislation. You also have to go back to your constituents at some point and explain it.

Now, I'm sure that, you know, it won't be the first thing when the member for Elmwood, or the member for La Verendrye (Mr. Lemieux), is doing the barbecue circuit. It won't be the first thing they raise. I'm sure my friend from La Verendrye, when he's out in Ste. Anne or in Lorette this summer, or Landmark, he won't go up to the constituents and say, you know what I got done this legislative session? I saved myself 20 percent on my salary. It was my No. 1 priority, and that's what I fought for in the Legislature for you this spring.

I don't think that that'd be what he raises, but I'll raise it. And I think others will raise it, and people will talk about it. And people are going to understand what it is that this government has done, that they've decided to change the law to save themselves.

And then the next natural question, of course, I think the people will be dismayed. I know the people of Ste. Anne, Lorette, and they're going to say: Well, we're hardworking individuals; we work every day to ensure that we can put food on the tables of our family and maybe have a few extras, maybe get out to Falcon Lake once in a while and to bring the trailer out to the Lilac Resort or some other recreational facility. And we work hard to do that. And yet what you did, when you had the opportunity to go to the Legislature and do something for us, to pass laws that were good for Manitobans, what you did was try to save your salary.

And then they're going to ask the next logical question. Well, what is—what law were you breaking? What law were you breaking that you had to change it? You had to fight so hard that every

other law became secondary, that everything else became something that wasn't important. And then they're going to have to tell them, if they're up front, that the legislation that we were changing was balanced budget legislation.

It was balanced budget legislation that in 1999 the then-opposition leader, the Gary Doer, the former member for Concordia, stood with a sign of five promises, and one of them was to ensure the balanced budget legislation was protected. Now, I suspect that that was always somewhat of a notional approval by the then-opposition leader, and who eventually became Premier, but at least he paid lip-service to it. At least he said, well, we believe in the spirit of the legislation, if he—even if he didn't always live up to the—or if he didn't live up to the letter of the legislation, he was at least saying he believed in the spirit of the legislation.

But that was then, and, you know, I had many disagreements with the former premier. There's a lot of policy things we disagreed on, certainly involving agriculture and other things. But I will say this. I think, compared to what he left behind after he left for Washington to work for the federal Conservative government, he left behind a caucus and a Cabinet that is far more out of tune with what it is that Manitobans believe are priorities. There's far more insular—there's more of a tin ear than he ever did, because I do think that he was, at least, trying to be reflective or responsive of what the general feelings of Manitobans were. So I look forward to the member for Elmwood.

I know, Madam Deputy Speaker, you're indicating that my time is running short, but I look forward to the Government House Leader, the member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie), coming back and reporting to this Legislature, after he's knocked on a hundred doors and told those constituents that his No. 1 priority is to save his salary. His No. 1 priority is to save himself 20 percent. What the response of those constituents will be if they say, well, good for you, sir; that's what we sent you to the Legislature to do, it's to save every penny that you could to change the law when we couldn't, but that's why we sent you to the Legislature. I want to hear him report that.

But, if they say something else, if they say, sir, that is not what we expected from you; we expected something better, I also hope that he comes here along with all of his Cabinet colleagues and explains

why it is that he can still make this his one and only priority during this legislative session.

Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Steinbach, to continue your debate.

* (15:10)

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Deputy Speaker, I understand that you've added 10 minutes to my time. I feel like I've gone into overtime and it's like the Stanley Cup playoffs.

I left off—when last you heard from me, I had challenged the member for Elmwood to go within his constituency and to speak to the good people of that constituency about why it is that he's changing legislation simply to protect his salary, and there are many other things that he could ask—*[interjection]* There are many other things he could ask his constituents, Madam Deputy Speaker, as it relates to this particular legislation.

And I would ask him—I know he didn't get a chance to serve with the former premier for very long before he fled to go work for a Conservative government in Washington, which I, you know, I have to think is a good choice. I know the member for Elmwood didn't always agree with the Conservative government when he was in Ottawa. He's trying to change that position. It seems that he left some of those angsts and some of those concerns at the Ottawa airport, and when he boarded the plane to come to Winnipeg to run here for the New Democrats, he seems to have had a bit of a change of position on some of those feelings about the federal Conservative government, and that's good, and I hope that he can change some other positions. I hope that he's able to look at what he's—and, you know, and, again, I think, actually, that in some ways the minister has been led astray by his Premier (Mr. Selinger), who's being told—he's being told that this is something that he needs to do, that he needs to ensure that legislation that guts the balanced budget bill is made a priority and that our salaries are saved, and he's been told that you have to be the front person for this; you have to go forward and ensure that this gets done.

I suspect in the heart of hearts of the member for Elmwood, if he had his druthers, this might not be the first thing that he wanted to do primarily in his legislative career here in this Chamber. Looking back at his track record in Ottawa, and I had the opportunity to look at some of the comments that he

made in Ottawa, and at some point in the future we may be able to digest those further in this House, but, certainly, there were some things in terms of democratic reform that the member for Elmwood brought forward in Ottawa. I know he was one of the proponents for ensuring that private members' bills would come to a vote in Ottawa. That was done—I don't have my notes in front of me, but I think it was done in the '80s, in the mid-80s or something along that line.

Now, he has, then, of course, brought that policy with him into government. That may have been his first priority. He may have come to the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and said, you know, we're not as democratic here when it comes to private members' pieces of legislation as they are in Ottawa, and I led reform in Ottawa on ensuring that private members' bills would always come to a vote and so maybe that's what I should do here in Manitoba.

That may have been his No. 1 priority when he came to Manitoba, and maybe the Premier took him aside and said, well, sir, that may be a laudable goal, but that's not going to be your No. 1 priority. Your No. 1 priority is going to be to gut the balanced budget legislation.

And I suppose, even though the member has a long track record in Parliament, it would have been difficult to say to his Premier: Mr. Premier, that's not the direction we should be going. We should be doing something that means more to the public of Manitoba.

It may be that the member for Elmwood (Mr. Blaikie) went to his Premier and said: And I've been hearing about this bipole decision. I've been hearing about the decision to put bipole on the west side of the province instead of the safer, shorter and more environmentally friendly eastern route, and, you know, Mr. Premier everybody makes mistakes and maybe we should review this decision. Maybe we should change it. Maybe it's not good for the future of Manitobans. In fact, I know his seatmate, his—the colleague from Minto, he spoke out about it. He came forward and said we should be looking at the eastern route. That was during a recent leadership race by the New Democratic Party, and at that time the now-Minister of Justice, the member for Minto, he stood on the steps of the Legislature, I believe, on these hallowed grounds and he said I believe that we should move or at least look at having the hydro line on the eastern side of the province, and what a breath of fresh air that was to finally have a member of the

New Democratic Party be able to crack the—and get unshackled and to come forward and say we are doing the wrong thing.

Mr. Mohinder Saran, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

You know, I believe that in the heart of hearts, if you could go into the minds and the wishes of most of the members of the NDP party, they would probably say this is the wrong decision. We're putting it on the wrong side of the province and, if it was up to me as an individual MLA, we would change it.

But they don't have the fortitude to come forward and say that. Even though, I believe, that the vast majority of their constituents would say to them, you should be changing your decision; we have sent you to the Legislature to represent us and, now, in this time of need on this decision, you say nothing. And that would be a concern, I think, for the vast majority of their constituents.

But not the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), because he stood up and said, this is wrong. He reflected what is probably the majority of the will of that caucus. And what happened when he did that? What happened when he do that, Mr. Acting Speaker? He got the knock on the door at 3 a.m., and a shadowy figure—who may have looked something like Eugene Kostyra—yanked him out of the race, pulled him out of the leadership race. Not only, of course, because of the east-side, west-side comments by the minister, but, of course, because they were worried because there was a horse in that race who was running faster than anybody believed he would be running, and that, of course, was the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton). The member for Thompson had put the fear of electoral victory into all of the members of the NDP caucus and Cabinet, except for two—except for two who had decided to stand by him.

And so the combination of the member for Minto's decision to come forward and to speak the heart and the will of what probably is the majority of the NDP caucus—but, of course, they won't speak on behalf of their constituents—the combination of that and the marked speed which with the NDP member for Thompson, his campaign was gathering caused them to send some dark and shadowy figure. We haven't been able to determine who it was. We have our suspicions or some likely suspects in the NDP hierarchy, but somebody knocked on the door and told Mr.—the Minister for Justice to get out of the race. And, ultimately, that resulted, I suspect, in a

chill that went through the caucus, a chill that went through the caucus that nobody else could speak about moving this line from the west side to the east side, because they saw what happened to the member for Minto (Mr. Swan). The warning had been sent. There had been a shot across the bow in terms of what happens when you speak out against a decision in the NDP Cabinet.

And yet I know that when the members opposite go and speak to their constituents, that they know full well the will of their constituents. Their constituents are saying, well, if you have one route that is \$1.7 billion more than the other route, and the other route—the eastern route—is shorter, safer, more environmentally friendly—well, it doesn't make any sense. And that's why the member for Minto came out, because he knew. He's not an unintelligent fellow. We have our debates here, but I certainly respect his intellect. And he knew full well. He knew full well what was going on, that it was the wrong decision. But for some reason, for some ideological reason, because something has been cooked up somewhere in terms of why they're going to ensure that they are going to have to go on the west side, everybody else has been scared into silence. Everybody else has been scared into silence.

Now, I understand—and I see I'm getting my second warning, Mr. Acting Speaker. I'm drawing to my second conclusion on this particular bill and I'm not sure if I should truly wrap up or hope that I might get another extension after this.

But I do want to say to the members opposite, to the Minister for Conservation, the Government House Leader (Mr. Blaikie), that he knows full well in his electoral career that he is elected to represent the people who sent him here and who formerly sent him to Ottawa. He is elected to represent their interests. And to come into this Legislature and simply say, I'm going to follow whatever the Premier (Mr. Selinger) says; my top priority is going to be to save my salary; I'm not going to speak out about bipole, I'm simply going to fall into step. I don't believe in his own heart he believes that that is the democratic thing to do. I don't believe that he believes that that is what his constituents want him to do.

* (15:20)

So I would encourage him to use the great weather we're going to have, to use the four-day weekend we're going to have to go to his constituents and listen to them. And, when he's listened to them,

then come back into this Legislature and do what I know what is in his heart. Do the right thing. Don't just protect your salaries. Don't put the hydro line on the wrong side of the province. Represent those good people who've been so loyal to you for so long. They've been loyal to you. It's time that you be loyal to them, sir.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): And I, too, believe that Bill 31, that was proposed by the government just a couple of short weeks ago, is all about protecting ministers' salaries. It's got nothing to do with much else. It does deal, of course, with amending some of the tax statutes that we have in the budget. And it does implement some of the budget recommendations, and what was—what has occurred in the budget. But, by and large, the first item in Bill 31 happened to be amending the balanced budget legislation once again and, again, protecting salaries of members of the ministry, all the ministers in this government, Mr. Acting Speaker.

Not only did we—by passing this bill, not only will we be increasing the cost to government—of government, but we'll also—witnessed, just before the session started, the Premier adding another minister to his—to the portfolios. And what that has done is it increased costs to the government and also increased costs to taxpayers because now we're—obviously, there's less money to go around, and the deficit goes up as a result.

The NDP campaigned on balanced budgets in 1999. We've heard in the 1999 election, that Gary Doer acknowledged that the balanced budget legislation was a good idea and one that the party would keep. His quote was: We've said all along that we're not going to change the things they got right, said Gary Doer. That's what he said. And what we've witnessed over the last few years is three changes to balanced budget legislation.

And why have we seen those changes? We've seen those changes because of the failure of this government to manage the finances of this province. Without those changes, they would be in contravention of that law. And ministerial salaries, initially, when the balanced budget legislation was passed, ministerial salaries were to be cut down to a dollar. They didn't like that. They knew that—the government didn't like that. They knew that what would happen in each of those three years after legislation was changed, that they would have had to taken—have taken pay cuts. They didn't get it right, so

they wanted to ensure that they, themselves, would not take a penalty.

Secondly, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, the NDP campaigned on balanced budgets in 2007. As late as 2007, that—they campaigned promising to balance the budgets as a priority during that 2007 election. When they referred to spending promises made by other parties, Gary Doer said: They're all going to be running deficits if they keep their election promises; God forbid. That was the quote in the *Brandon Sun* on May the 11th, 2007.

What's changed since then, Mr. Acting Speaker? What's changed is that they've run the finance of—the finances of this province into the ground. They can't control their spending habits. They've spent money foolishly, needlessly, and the biggest increase in this year's budget was actually for debt repayment costs—the cost of interest on that debt. And that's what they've done to the finances of this province.

Over the next four years, we—they project an increase in debt of \$2 billion—more than \$2 billion added to the provincial debt. Our provincial debt is projected to go to almost \$24 billion within the next four years. And it's no secret. There's going to be increases in interest rates across the country. There's going to be increases in interest rates for government. A 1 percent increase in interest rates for government will translate into a \$240-million increase in costs to government. Just a 1 percent increase will do that. Two percent will be \$480 million. And the numbers that is—that are projected in this year's budget, for the next four years, will double, perhaps even triple, with increases in interest rates.

At a time when we were doing well economically across this country, including in Manitoba, during that time we would—we should have been putting more money into debt repayment. That's what all households were doing. That's what responsible Manitobans were doing. Canadians were doing that all across the country, but what we were doing in Manitoba, contrary to what other provinces were doing is we were increasing our debt at a time when there were good economic times, when the revenues to the province were increasing.

What we were doing in Manitoba is spending every nickel and then some. I recall that over—I've been elected since 2002, and I've witnessed eight budgets at this point, and every time the NDP brought forward a budget in this House, they were always out. It's—they would bring in a budget of

seven or eight billion dollars and they would always exceed the spending—every year since 2002, almost a billion dollars of increased spending because they couldn't control their spending habits.

Now, admittedly, some of that overspending would have been necessary, given the fact that sometimes there were fires in the province, more fires than what was budgeted for—more in that in the budgets, but the reality is, how could you overspend by more than a billion dollars in eight budgets from what you budgeted?

That—what that tells me, Mr. Acting Speaker, is that when—obviously, when the next budget comes around, when the 2011-2012 budget rolls out just prior to the next election, the NDP will again underestimate their spending just to ensure that when they go to the polls that they're not criticized for spending. And budgets are just budgets. They're not actuals. The reality is is they're projecting next year a \$448-million deficit for next year's budget. All they have to do, with a stroke of a pen, is come forward with a budget showing a \$400-million deficit or a \$300-million deficit. Budgets are not necessarily reality, and they'll try to spin that during the next election, next year, as being a success story, that they've actually controlled their spending, that they've actually increased their revenues, that they've actually increased services.

The reality is is we won't find out until the following year after that budget is presented about whether they were accurate or not. And I would suggest to you, Mr. Acting Speaker, that it's—that they will, during the next election, run on a—either a balanced budget or one that decreases the deficit from what they've projected this year, claiming success in Manitoba, claiming success with the economy of this province and they will—and they'll again be proven wrong after the following election the following year.

The projected budget shortfalls over the next four years total almost \$1.5 billion; \$1.5 billion of money that really is unnecessary to be spent in this province. Our economy is still growing. That budget is—the projected deficits are unnecessary. The increases to our debt are unnecessary, and certainly much more could have been done, particularly in the last eight, nine years, ten years since they've been in power and since 1999, much more could have been done to trim spending during that period of time, getting more for every tax dollar that comes into government. Much more could have been done to

control the debt by paying down the debt—and that's another matter, Mr. Acting Speaker. All we hear from members opposite is that they paid down the debt. The reality is, they pay—at certain times during the last 10 years, they paid \$105 million toward the debt, but they, at the same time as paying it down, they increased the debt by another \$500 million.

Last year, they—we forced them in—during the session to increase the debt repayment. The reality is, debt went up. So you can, on the one hand, pay \$10 million toward the debt and on the other hand, borrow more money. And then try to get away with spinning to Manitobans and spinning to Manitobans that they paid down the debt. Well, arguably, yes, they paid down the debt. At the same time, the debt increased. So what really happened? There was no payment on the debt whatsoever, Mr. Acting Speaker.

* (15:30)

The—so debt is increased and more than \$2 billion will be added to the debt, be piled onto our total debt of the province in the next four years, and that total debt of the province almost—will be almost \$24 billion within the next four years.

The—I note in 2007 Gary Doer made it a priority to balance budgets. At least that's what he said. Then we had a leadership change, and Gary Doer left, and the old NDP government stepped forward. And I harken back to the years of—when the dark days of NDP rule—dark, dark days of NDP rule under Howard Pawley, and how he got turfed out of the government very, very quickly. And why did he get turfed out of government? Because he was out of control spending. He had a Finance minister who couldn't balance his chequebook—Vic Schroeder—never mind run the finances of this province. And now he's at Manitoba Hydro, running Manitoba Hydro into the ground.

What he did was almost bankrupt the province during the Howard Pawley years in this province. And the Finance minister was right there with him trying to fudge the books. Vic Schroeder fudging the books, as he was told he was doing by the Auditor General in the province, and almost bankrupted the province.

Now that he's with Manitoba Hydro, he's probably going to bankrupt Manitoba Hydro. And I note that—in fact, I know Vic Schroeder a little because I practised law in Beausejour and so did he. And at the time it was very well known he couldn't

even balance his personal chequebook, and when he became Finance minister it really surprised everyone. And I note that after that—that even the NDP MLA from that area was turfed out of government with Howard Pawley—Clarence Baker—because of all the problems that resulted in the finances of this province.

I also note that, even though Gary Doer was touting balanced budget legislation and, 1999, ran on it in the election, touting balanced budget legislation as good legislation in 2007—during the election in 2007, I note that even though he was doing that that—and they committed to abide by balanced budget legislation. All at the same time, between elections, when those promises were made all the time during—between those two elections, in 2003 and 2004 budget the government of the day, this NDP government, ran a \$614-million deficit, but they claimed it was a \$13-million surplus, Mr. Acting Speaker.

And that's—those are the words of the Auditor General at the time. So, even though Gary Doer was campaigning in '07 on balanced budget legislation and claiming to have balanced the budget each and every year, the Auditor General in 2003-2004, in fact, disagreed and said there was a \$614-million deficit.

And I recall, when I was Finance critic at the time and I was questioning today's Premier (Mr. Selinger), who was the Finance minister at the time, we spent quite a bit of time in Estimates on—with regard to that and all he would say the entire—all of the answers to all of the questions I posed to him was that we had a \$13-million surplus. We had a \$13-million surplus. That's all he would say in spite of the fact that the Auditor General called him on it and indicated to Manitobans that there was a \$614-million deficit.

Bill 31 guts the balanced budget law and again is another broken NDP promise. It includes changes to the balanced budget legislation which was amended in 2008. It also was amended in 2009 just to suit the finances of the province and how the NDP were running the finances of this province.

Every time they got into trouble, instead of controlling their spending, instead of getting value for money that was being—that was coming into government because of—under taxation and so on, in spite of getting value for their money, they would not control their spending. They would continue to make changes to the balanced budget legislation—2008,

2009—just to suit their spending habits. And, of course, because they had a majority, we voted against each and every one of those budgets.

We voted against them because of the fact that we weren't getting value for our money. We voted against them for all kinds of reasons. We voted against them for the fact that they didn't increase the numbers of police officers on the streets the way they should of increased them. We voted against budgets because they were running deficits. We voted against the budgets because they increased the debt of this province. There's many, many, many reasons why we voted against those budgets.

Of course, there's always some good in every budget and we acknowledge that, but the reality is that overall this government was taking this province in the wrong financial direction. And as a result of going in the wrong financial direction, what we see is dramatically increased debt. With—and with dramatically increased interest rates as we anticipate, probably within the next two or three years, we're going to see massive, massive deficits.

And, as I said before, Mr. Acting Speaker, next year, I suspect the NDP will come in with a balanced budget or maybe one that has a much smaller deficit, but the reality is is that Manitobans should remember every budget they've had since 1999 has always been overspent. The deficit has always been higher than they projected and we're paying for it here in the province of Manitoba, and while—and we'll be paying for it for years and years to come, including our grandchildren as well.

These are deficits of choice, Mr. Acting Speaker. They're not deficits of necessity like they try to paint them. They're deficits of choice. They could have looked at every line in the budget—budgets they presented. They could have looked at every line of spending and cut a lot of places, including out-of-province travel, including travel budgets that we have continuously not been provided information with in spite of FIPPA requests. There's lots of ways they can deal with overspending, but they chose not to do that. They chose instead just to continue, to continue their old spending habits, and Manitobans, of course, are the loser in that respect.

There are ways, as well, to trim from the budgets, to reduce waste. One of which comes to mind is the decision by the NDP to remove nitrogen from waste water here in the city of Winnipeg. Instead of listening to scientists that have been saying all along that, in fact, even removing nitrogen

from waste water may hurt Lake Winnipeg, instead of listening to those scientists, they instead intend to add hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars to public spending here in the province of Manitoba.

Another one that comes to mind is enhanced drivers' licences and the tens of millions of dollars that have been spent doing that, and nobody seems to be using them. The reality is is that passports are much easier to obtain now. I know when passports were being mandatorily required by the United States, at least initially, there were many lineups to get passports and long waiting—wait times, and that's probably what drove them to deal with enhanced drivers' licences. However, the reality is is the federal government took care of the problem. They dealt with it appropriately and now passport issuances are coming much quicker and within a reasonable period of time.

One way they could decrease spending, too, Mr. Acting Speaker, and perhaps Vic Schroeder should be listening to this one: Don't run the Bipole III line on the west side of Lake Winnipeg. We could save \$1.75 billion—\$1.75 billion. It's a lot of money. And I know, Vic Schroeder, he likes to spend the money, especially if it isn't his.

An Honourable Member: No common sense.

Mr. Hawranik: He has absolutely no common sense. You're absolutely correct. And as I said before, he couldn't even balance his own chequebook, never mind a hundred and seven—\$1.75 billion.

Total waste of money, in my view, running it on the west side of Lake Winnipeg. It's farther by far compared to the east-side line. There are more trees, many more trees in the boreal forest to cut down going on the west side. There's more line loss for—and we could—running it down the east side, we could shut down another coal plant in the United States generating electricity, but, no, this NDP government isn't listening.

* (15:40)

Obviously, Ed Schreyer was listening. He came out front and centre. Ed Schreyer, the former premier of this province, NDP premier in this province, he came out front and centre. He wasn't being political about it. He said the east-side option is the route to go. That came from the lips of Edward Schreyer.

And I note that Gary Doer wasn't listening. Gary Doer was not listening. Bob Brennan was, though.

Bob Brennan, he knew better. Manitoba Hydro knew that the line should go on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. They wanted to do that, but the reality is that it was a political decision and the NDP made the decision to go on the west side of the Lake Winnipeg.

I also note that the member from Minto was even listening. When he came forward in his campaign, he made sense. He knew that—even his own NDP members—he knew that most Manitobans would agree with him. That's why he came out and agreed with the east-side line. I also note that even the Lac du Bonnet NDP association agreed with him. They came forward to the convention—and the NDP convention—they came with the NDP convention, and they proposed a resolution at the NDP convention saying that it should go down the east side of Lake Winnipeg. And what happened? What happened? Didn't even come to the floor. Why? Probably because Gary Doer yanked it. That's what happened. Gary Doer yanked it and said this can't come to the floor of the AGM. The reality is that they even understood that it was far too much to pay, to run the line down the west side of Lake Winnipeg.

And it was interesting. I sent out a letter to people in Beausejour and Brokenhead and, in fact, the entire constituency. And I did say, run it down the east-side line—east side. And not one—not one constituent disagreed with me. Not one. The reality is not one person in Lac du Bonnet constituency disagreed with me, but I got hundreds—hundreds of letters and phone calls and e-mails, agreeing that it should go down the east side. That's what they wanted. That's the agreement that they wanted it to go.

The reality is we already have—we already have transmission lines in eastern Manitoba. In case you haven't noticed—in fact, the members opposite should do a little bit of travelling once in a while, and come out to Lac du Bonnet constituency, and find out how many—they should find out how many hydro-generating stations we have along the Winnipeg River. And each one of them has a transmission line coming from it, and it goes to Winnipeg for distribution.

The reality is that there is room for a hydro transmission line on the east side of Lake Winnipeg and, provided it's done in the proper fashion—probably not run over the minister of—or the member from La Verendrye's cottage lot; I wouldn't necessarily advise that. I know he has a cottage in

Lac du Bonnet and he wants to build there. You know, I think it would interfere with his cottage lot so I would recommend that we not put that transmission line and all those lines over his cottage lot, to prevent him from building a two-storey cottage, which I think that's what he wants.

An Honourable Member: Does he want hydro though?

Mr. Hawranik: But he does want hydro. I know he wants hydro, but he doesn't want to bring it down the east side. I know that.

The reality is, there is room in eastern Manitoba, in the constituency. If it's done correctly, you're not going to get any opposition. That's the reality of the situation.

What I notice, too, is that the \$1.75-billion waste going on the west side hasn't even factored in land costs and, clearly, that's got to be factored into the decision; \$1.75 billion could run to \$2 billion. It could run higher than that, if you, in fact, affect businesses negatively, if you affect farms negatively for years to come and if you affect residences.

And the west side—the reality is the west side of Lake Winnipeg is more heavily populated for a greater length of—a greater distance. The east-side line, what we're doing is we're running almost the entire distance through Crown land, land that is owned by Manitobans, all Manitobans, not just a few, but all Manitobans. So there is Crown land there and it's our land. The reality is that we're be a lot less money being used to purchase private land. And that—those land costs, I note, were not factored in.

And I know the members opposite do talk about running a road through the east side to connect the remote east-side communities, and we agree with that. We've never disagreed with that. We know that there's some challenges, lots of challenges there with respect to winter roads, that the winter road system is costly to maintain, increases costs for residents in east-side communities. It makes goods and services more difficult to access, and we're in agreement. We should have an east-side road, an all-weather east-side road, to connect those communities, to bring them closer to services, to decrease their cost of living up north, to bring them closer to services such as hospital services, which the first hospital they would reach coming out of the remote communities would actually be the one in Pine Falls, a very good hospital.

But the reality is is we need the road. There's no argument from myself or anyone within the constituency, or anyone on this side of the House, for that matter. But the reality is is we should be following that road, the road, we have to—there has to be some cutting involved, obviously, in the forest, and bulldozing and dynamiting of rock, and so on, to build this road. In fact, I'm surprised that the member from La Verendrye isn't out there cutting trees as we speak.

But, in any event, they may need some help and—
[interjection]

He's good at it. I noticed it in question period. He's pretty good. He's got the moves down. He's going to have to clear his lot out there in Lac du Bonnet; I know that for sure. That would be helpful if that Hydro line goes over there, but it'll save us some cutting. But I would not recommend that because I know that he needs that cottage lot for development and so on.

But the reality is is that we are running a road straight through the east side, we're cutting trees, we're getting rid of trees, and all it would take is to run a transmission line along that road and save everyone a bunch of forest, a lot of forest on the west side. And make no mistake about it, that boreal forest on the west side of the lake is no different than on the east side. And I've been on both. I've been up the winter roads.

And I also noticed up the winter road that there are transmission lines there already, something that members opposite don't really acknowledge. But somehow they're trying to get away with the argument that we won't get a World Heritage Site if we run a transmission line on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. It's absolutely false—absolutely false. Banff National Park is a World Heritage site; lots of transmission lines going through there. The Highway No. 1, the Trans-Canada Highway runs straight through Banff National Park. It's a World Heritage site; it's got lots of development; it's got hotels; it's got ski slopes; it's got all kinds of development in Banff National Park. But that's a World Heritage site, and that World Heritage site was named when it was developed, not before it was developed. It was named after it was developed and all those roads and transmission lines were built.

So the argument about whether or not there should be—whether or not transmission lines will stop the World Heritage site designation is absolutely

false, and they should be called on it, and they will be called on it.

The reality is, Mr. Acting Speaker, is Bill 31, the effect of Bill 31 changes the law, erases the law with respect to balanced budget legislation that compels the government to reduce ministerial salaries, and that's what this is all about. And I hope that members who are opposite who are not ministers remember that.

Remember, you—they should be taking a penalty. They're responsible for the finances of this province, not you. It's the ministers who are. They're the ones who are spending the money. They're the ones who are overspending the money that is available. They're the ones that are increasing the debt and you don't have a say.

I think we should have a free vote on Bill 31 and I would challenge the Premier (Mr. Selinger) to tell his non-ministerial MLAs to allow them a free vote and allow the Bill 31 to be defeated in this House.

I know my time has expired, Mr. Acting Speaker, and I look forward to hearing the comments from others who may wish to add to what has just been said.

* (15:50)

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Acting Speaker, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak about Bill 31 today. I was a little slow getting out of my chair. I know there's been quite a bit of verbal discussion back and forth across the House here this afternoon on this particular legislation. I just thought the government side would be taking this opportunity to get up and speak about Bill 31.

But it appears the government's going to be pretty quiet on Bill 31 and it's interesting. You know, you look at Bill 31 itself, and there's 146 pages of changes in Bill 31. It's one of the biggest bills we'll be debating in the House this particular session. And it seems quite strange that the government is not prepared to debate this particular piece of legislation. And I guess maybe part of the problem with—the government sees in it, is because a lot of it impacts their salaries. And I think it's been referred to the House here, the gang of 19 that make up the Cabinet, the expanded Cabinet of this NDP government.

Certainly, they're the ones that have the vested interest in terms of getting Bill 31 passed this session. And, obviously, it's very important and near and dear to their heart, because when you look at

Bill 31, the first item on the bill, under Part 1, deals with the income of Cabinet ministers. So, obviously, it's a very, very important document. I think that the government's looking at it and, obviously, the 19 members that now make up Cabinet with the NDP.

And it is quite strange too, when we look at this particular bill, and it's something the NDP do have a habit of, is mixing a bunch of pieces of legislation together and throw it into a bill. You know, there may be some good pieces to Bill 31. You know, we talk about potentially—haven't actually gone word through—word by word or line by line through this 146 pages, but it looks like there could be some documentation, some legislation here that might benefit Manitobans.

But the question I have is why would they throw in the legislation dealing with balanced budgets in this particular document? We're really, you know, we're talking about two separate entities altogether. And the bill says that itself in the title. It says, The Budget Implementation—which is a key component of this particular bill—and the Tax Statutes Amendment Act. Why would the government not bring forward two pieces of legislation in this regard? Then we wouldn't have a 146-page document here all tied together in one. Why wouldn't the government be prepared to discuss the merits of the existing budget—balanced budget legislation versus what they're proposing, and then discuss the tax statutes amendments, you know, the implications of the different taxes that they are proposing in this particular legislation.

I think that would be the logical thing to do, and I think that's what Manitobans would like to, too, as well, is have a debate on the two issues separately. But that's my take on it, and we know that's not historically what the NDP have done. And that's why we're going to be debating both aspects of that over the next few days.

Just to put the budget in context, Mr. Acting Speaker, we're looking at a budget this year of close to \$11 billion, and I think that's important. We have to go back in history to see just how significant an \$11-billion budget is in the province of Manitoba, because when the NDP government came in in 1999, the budget of the province was around \$6 billion. So what we've seen is a significant, very significant increase in the budget of the province of Manitoba. And to me what it signifies is that this particular government has a tremendous spending habit.

They've spent way beyond the level of inflation over the last 11 years. In fact, they're even proposing to spend way above the level of inflation for the next four years.

Not only has the budget increased by—in the area of \$5 billion over the last 11 years, but we've also increased the debt of the province substantially as well, Mr. Acting Speaker. We're looking, now, at a provincial deficit, a total debt of the province nearing \$24 billion. And when we have a \$24-billion debt, all Manitobans realize that you have to pay interest on debt. The interest that we as a—Manitobans are paying, that we as a government are paying, is close to \$800 million a year in interest payments alone. That's \$800 million that cannot go to front-line services. That's money that is gone, right off the top.

And, Mr. Acting Speaker, we're quite fortunate that that figure's not worse, because we're in a period right now of relatively low interest rates. And we know what the newspapers say, and we know what the global economy's like, and we—we're pretty sure where we know where interest rates are headed in the very near future. So we know we're going to be paying more money in interest charges here in the province of Manitoba.

And I'm sure, when we look at the proposed budget, the NDP government are proposing four more years of deficit spending. They're going to be spending more money than they're taking in, in each of the next four years; we know our interest payments are going to go up. And what I'm saying to you, Mr. Acting Speaker, is that very soon we will be paying a billion dollars a year in interest payments. When we take a billion dollars a year straight out of our economy, that is very significant to the province of Manitoba.

And we know, the other thing, if we go back in history, and we talk about what the NDP have put forward and how they've actually missed their mark when it comes to their budget allocations, let's go back to 2007-2008 fiscal year. The NDP overspent their budget by \$264 million. They missed their mark by a quarter of a billion dollars. In 2008-2009, the NDP overspent their budget by \$321 million. They missed the mark by over \$320 million. Mr. Acting Speaker, 2009-2010, they missed the mark by \$421 million—\$421 million they were off, on a \$10-billion budget.

So I'm a little nervous when the Minister of Finance—the new Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk)—says, you know, we're going to spend

\$550 million more than we're taking in this year. And if I go back in past history and realize that they've overspent by—you know, they've missed the mark by close to a billion dollars in the last three years, I don't have a lot of satisfaction that the new minister is going to meet her mark. And she's saying that for the next four years she's going to spend more than she's taking in and, if history is any indication, we're in for a very rough ride here in the province of Manitoba.

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

And the other thing that her budget document talks about is only a 1.9 percent—I believe it is—increase in terms of what they're going to spend year over year. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, it certainly doesn't look that good to me.

And the other thing they're banking on is an income—when their revenue is going to increase, the economy is going to grow in the province of Manitoba by over 3 percent. They're quite optimistic their economy is going to grow, hence, there's going to be more revenue coming forward. But that's not necessarily what some of the economists are saying. So we'll have to wait and see just how things turn out in the future, but if we reflect back in the past, you know, there's some—going to be some challenging times ahead for the new Minister of Finance.

I'm glad to hear the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Struthers) is here with us today, and I look forward to his comments on Bill 31, because he certainly should have a lot to say about what happens in rural Manitoba. And I firmly believe, and I think the people on this side of the House firmly believe, that rural Manitoba can play a very positive role in the future here of the province of Manitoba. We firmly believe there's tremendous economic opportunities in rural Manitoba, and I would challenge the Minister of Agriculture to look at those initiatives that are out there, get his department fired up. Let's let the entrepreneurs do some business in rural Manitoba, because we firmly believe there's opportunities there.

* (16:00)

But it's unfortunate when you look at the budget document to see that the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives—that particular budget has been actually slashed by 3 percent. I would say the NDP government don't believe that rural Manitoba has a role to play in the future of Manitoba. The provincial budget has increased by over 5 percent overall. When we see what I think is in a pretty

important department, of Rural Initiatives, that department being cut, I think that's very significant.

Well, and I hope the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) will get up and debate today Bill 31. Obviously, it's her job to defend her position and her budget here. If she's really interested in not reducing her salary by 40 percent, which the old legislation said, I will certainly look forward to hearing what the Minister of Water Stewardship said—would say about this particular legislation. And we know there's—the water certainly plays an important role in the—in all Manitoba, and we certainly hope that her department would take her job seriously, and there's a lot of issues out there that should be addressed. And I hope the minister will debate Bill 31 and in relation to her department and, in particular, her take on her salary and how this is going to impact her salary going forward.

Now, it's interesting, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we've had an NDP government toying with balanced budget legislation. You know, this is the third year in a row where they've had to change the balanced budget legislation to protect their salaries. You know, back in the '90s, when this balanced budget legislation first came into play, you know, it was pretty tough times back then. And the government of the day had the fortitude to try to work within balanced budget legislation, and they did that. They never went back and tinkered with the legislation. But now we have a government, with spending out of control, realizing that they can't live within their own balanced budget legislation, that they've had to go back and tinker with it again.

And we're simply saying: Why keep tinkering with this particular legislation? Why can't you try to live within your means? You've got increasing revenue from the federal government coming in at unbelievable amounts, new taxes on Manitobans every year, each and every year, when tax rates are going up on each and every area. And they still can't live within their means and they're forced to go back and change the balanced budget legislation.

And the reason they're changing this particular legislation is so that they can leave the perception with Manitobans that they're actually balancing the budget here in the province of Manitoba. The reality is nothing could be further from the truth. We are going to see deficit spending for four more years. We're going to see our debt increase again, over and above the \$24 billion that we're already at. And I

believe it's a sign the NDP government have lost touch with Manitobans.

They keep coming up with excuse after excuse after excuse so that they will spend more money than they're taking in. You know, they use the excuse that we've had a global recession on. That's forced us to spend money. Well, the reality is they chose to spend more money than they take—they're taking in. And they're sending mixed messages out to Manitobans. You know, one day, the economy is great here in Manitoba. The next day—possibly a different minister or maybe even the same minister—you know, the economy is good here in Manitoba. Then it's not so good. You know, they're always looking for excuses, but never really ready to take responsibility themselves.

Eleven years in government: You would think there would be some kind of vision for the future in Manitoba. But I don't see this particular budget document and the budget implementation bill providing any concrete vision for Manitoba and any concrete vision for Manitobans. What they're telling us is they're going to spend more money than they're taking in for four more years, and they're not telling us how we're going to get around that, how that's going to stop. You know, other jurisdictions have said, well, you know, there's—we've got to have a plan for the future; we've got to have a road map; we've got to be able to tell our constituents, our ratepayers, where we're going to go in this province and other provinces so that they can feel comfortable with the vision that the province has. And I just don't see that vision coming forward.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it's time that the government came clean with Manitobans—that they recognize they have a spending habit and it's out of control. And I believe it's time for them to become open and transparent with Manitobans and tell them exactly what's going on in terms of their fiscal accountability here in the province of Manitoba.

You know, we had quite a debate today in question period about some of the information that we, as opposition, were seeking from the government, and there seems to be a real reluctance on behalf of government to bring that particular information forward. And we believe Manitobans have a real interest in asking the government how their tax money is being spent. It should be a fundamental responsibility of government to tell taxpayers how they are spending their money. If the government is open and accountable with taxpayers,

it would go a long way to, you know, providing the information that taxpayers are really looking for, so that when election day comes taxpayers know exactly how the government has managed their resources, and we think that's very important.

When we talk about budgets, it's really about priorities and we've got a real indication over the last few months where this NDP government is headed in terms of priorities. We have to bear in mind that the old premier, old Premier Doer, he is now gone. We have a new Premier (Mr. Selinger) in place, a few new Cabinet ministers in place, and they have—looks like a different agenda than possibly the old premier had. So we're starting to see some of the priorities that this particular government has. For instance, this particular government is keen to create backroom deals with third parties.

And let's talk about the stadium deal that they've put together here in the city of Winnipeg. Now, we're certainly in favour of having a new stadium here in the Winnipeg—in the city of Winnipeg. We would love that for the Blue Bombers and whoever else might use that. The scary part for Manitobans and the scary part for us as opposition members is these deals are being made behind closed doors and what are the implications going to be for the taxpayers of Manitoba? You know, if we're talking about \$150-million grant made by the Province of Manitoba, ultimately, the taxpayers of Manitoba are going to be on the hook for that, and taxpayers have to be aware of that.

The other issue that certainly is very interesting here in the city of Winnipeg is the whole idea of nitrogen removal in the water—in the waste-water treatment. You know, we—the government has made that decision. It's over \$100-million decision, and we're not sure that the science—the scientists that are doing the research on that have been listened to. So those are the kinds of priorities that this particular government has. They don't mind spending the money but there has to be accountability at the end of the day.

The other issue that Manitobans are certainly concerned about is the enhanced driver's licence that have come forward over the last several months. And there's a lot of frustration with Manitobans in going through that process, and we know the government has spent at least \$14 million on that particular endeavour. And that's something that Manitobans don't necessarily want because there's been very little take up on that particular issue there in terms of the

enhanced ID and enhanced driver's licence. So it's certainly very frustrating for Manitobans.

* (16:10)

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, the other—the issue here that's a huge issue for Manitobans as they become aware of it—more aware of it—is the decision to run the next hydro line on the west side of the province. Now, this is clearly a directive by the now-Premier (Mr. Selinger), the former minister of Finance, the former minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro. It's clearly government intervention in a Crown corporation and we see this from time to time happening in various Crown corporations and the government will change their mind on those sort of things too.

They'll say one day, you know, we don't get involved. We let Crown corporations do their own thing, and the next day, well, you know, actually we are getting involved in Crown corporations. We are giving them some direction. And this is clearly an area where the government has taken a direct role and made a direct decision on an issue at Manitoba Hydro.

And I think it's time that Manitobans had an open debate about what the options are in terms of the next bipole line. I know the resolution we debated yesterday was all about leaving our options open. And I know the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) yesterday said, well, we're just going to end up in court if we run this hydro line down the east side. Well, why don't we have a look at what's right for Manitobans today and into the future, and I think once he's done the analysis, as the engineers at Manitoba Hydro have done for years—recognize that the east side is the right way to go. Let's keep that option open. Let's give it a go. You know, we're talking about a \$1.75-billion project. At least let's let it go. Let's see who stands up and says we're deadily opposed to a hydro line on the east side.

The government has not come up with any concrete people, any concrete stories, about who is going to be opposed to an east-side hydro line. You know, if they're not prepared to stand by Manitobans, instead be prepared to stand by U.S. environmental interests who are going to tell us and dictate to us what we're going to do in Manitoba, that to me, Madam Deputy Speaker, is not a sign of a responsible government.

And this government is prepared to maybe take the easy way out, run a hydro line on the west side. We're looking at \$1.75 billion, at least that kind of money. The minister can't even tell us what it's going to cost us at the end of the day. In fact, the minister yesterday, was talking about selling hydro into Saskatchewan. I'm not sure if the minister is aware of this, but you can't just build an off-ramp on a direct current line into Saskatchewan. You have to set up a converter station.

The minister had better do her homework here because we're talking about a billion-dollar investment for a converter station, and if she's only going to sell one or two million dollars a year of hydro to Saskatchewan, we're going to be a long time paying for a billion-dollar converter station, let alone paying the interest on a \$1-billion converter station because that is the point I'm trying to make here, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that everything we're doing is with borrowed money. We have to borrow the money to get the job done and what that does, it mortgages us today and into the future and for future generations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are trying to save Manitoba Hydro from the NDP. You know, they're in the process of giving Manitoba Hydro away. Why not let Manitoba Hydro—there's tremendous management at Manitoba Hydro—let Manitoba Hydro manage the issues, keep the politics out of it, let them get the job done. They know what's right and what's wrong, but let's keep the politics out of it.

I think, as my colleague pointed out, too, we're into a tremendous amount of money here on this particular decision to build the west side, you know, \$1.75 billion, and that doesn't even consider the ongoing operating costs and also the cost to acquire right of ways on the west side of the province, because a lot of those right of ways are going to be across private land and there's going to be a substantial cost to that, and we have never seen the figures on that and the minister of Hydro has never shared those figures with us. I think that's because she doesn't really know what those figures are going to be.

You know, we're looking at Crown land on the east side of the province so there will be, you know, very little extra cost. Obviously, we have negotiations that have to take place, that should be taking place with First Nations communities on the east side and, quite frankly, the government has

been—refused to do that in the past, but they should be having those discussions.

And, talking about right of way, Manitoba Hydro already has a right of way from the Riel station—the proposed Riel station—part way up to—towards Lac du Bonnet. So there's already a right of way that Manitoba Hydro has, that already has significant transmission lines coming into the area east of Winnipeg. So that's one hurdle that's already been undertaken. It's already been addressed.

The other thing that we should be recognizing, too, is that a lot of these First Nations communities want to have a hydro transmission line there. You know, if the government was doing their work, they would be having the negotiations to see exactly what it is the First Nations communities want with a hydro transmission line.

And, if the members opposite would take the time to travel on the east side of Manitoba, they would recognize there exist hydro transmission lines there already. Hydro transmission lines run right up to Poplar River already. I went on a tour there two years ago. Manitoba Hydro had bulldozers operating there, clearing the scrub underneath the hydro lines. So their perception they're trying to sell to Manitobans of a pristine boreal forest is not reality. And that's the unfortunate thing we see with the NDP government, is trying to leave a perception with Manitobans and the reality is that much different.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it's really about the future, the future of Manitoba. And the decisions the government is taking today is really about what is good for Manitoba today, what is good for Manitoba into the future, and what is going to be good for Manitobans today and what is going to be good for Manitobans into the future.

And really, what we have today is a bill about protecting the salaries of the 19 ministers of the government. And what we see is a government tinkering with balanced budget legislation just to protect their own salary. Under the old legislation, you know, we would—they would've been facing 40 percent pay cuts in these deficit years that they are forecasting. Now with this particular legislation, they're looking at only a 20 percent pay cut. So obviously it has an interest in their own pocketbooks. Instead of trying to deal with the real issues here in the province of Manitoba, we've got a government and ministers that take the easy way out, that change legislation to protect themselves.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, it's something else, that it should be pointed out, too. If the government was serious about specific issues, they should address those specific issues. Instead, we see a government bringing in legislation and regulation that blankets the entire province, and that's not a sign of leadership by government. That's taking the easy way out.

And I'll just use an example. Let's talk about the septic tank and the sewage ejectors, the regulations that the government tried to propose a few months ago, and they're tinkering with those particular regulations. Instead of going out to dealing with a few people that were making problems, dealing with those one on one, they bring in regulations that cover the entire province of Manitoba and affect thousands of Manitobans' pocketbooks to the tune of 10 to 20 or 30 thousand dollars, not realizing the implications they have with their legislation or their regulations. And that's a sign of a government that's become lazy and taking the easy way out.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is exactly what Bill 31 is. This is a government taking the easy way out, not prepared to make hard decisions that have to be made here in the province of Manitoba, and there's no sign for four years that they're prepared to make any hard decisions on the finances of the province of Manitoba.

* (16:20)

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would hope that the government of the day will be up front with their constituents when it comes election day. What they've done here with the province of Manitoba with their balanced budget legislation—and I'm really looking forward to hear the ministers opposite get up in the next few days, debate Bill 31, and we'll just see if they can defend their actions on Bill 31—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): I hesitated in getting up because usually in this House, there—it go back-and-forth process, where members of government generally get up to speak to something. But, you know, they feel that they don't have to be accountable for the legislation that they bring forward, so they don't speak to it. And at least one or two of them might be encouraged to get up, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I think the whip is on over there and that they will remain silent. Because this bill has to cause some embarrassment for at least some of

those who have been around for a while. Because, over the course of time, many times, members of this government have stood on their places and said, you know, the balanced budget legislation is something that we agree with, and all that was was a political posture to make sure that, at least, they signal to Manitobans that they were supportive of the balanced budget legislation that was brought in by our government in the 1990s.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, unfortunately what has happened over the course of time since this government took office, is that it hasn't been able to live within its means. It hasn't been able to live with the money that has been sent to it from Ottawa. And so, combined with the own source revenues, this government, unfortunately, has made such a mess of the finances of this province that they have, once again, driven us into the death pit, as was done under the administration of their hero, Howard Pawley.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, we on this side of the House believe that Manitobans want us to live within our means. Just as they are expected to live within their own means, they expect their government to do the same. And that's for that reason, that we responded, in the 1990s, to what Manitobans were telling us, and we brought forward balanced budget legislation.

And this legislation had within it penalties that would be assessed to ministers, not MLAs, not backbenchers. The penalties were to be assessed to ministers of the Crown because they were the ones who make the decisions when it comes to the finances of the province. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, we learned that after two years of tinkering with balanced budget legislation, in the third year, they have come to such a bottom-pit position, that they have had to not only impose a smaller penalty on themselves as ministers, but they also had to include in that penalties on MLAs in the Legislature.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, and we'll accept that—we'll accept that because we feel that we have an obligation to show leadership in this province, to show leadership to the people who are out there, on the basis that we are sort of given the responsibility to manage the affairs of the people. In essence, the biggest responsibility falls on the ministers of the Crown.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have seen how they have gerrymandered the balanced budget legislation, because they, quite frankly, didn't want to

take a 20 percent hit on their ministerial salaries last year when they should have. They should have taken that 20 percent hit last year, but they tinkered around with the balanced budget legislation, again, to be able to wiggle themselves out of a position where they had to give up 20 percent of their salaries.

Well, this year, that wiggle room ran out, Madam Deputy Speaker. And so they should have actually taken a 40 percent hit in their salaries, ministerial salaries, this year. Every single minister of the Crown is supposed to give up 40 percent of his salary because they collectively, as a Cabinet, could not manage the affairs of this province.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, but what did they do? They came in with Bill 31. Now Bill 31 is supposed to be what is called a BITSA bill. It is a budget implementation piece of legislation that is only supposed to deal with the implementation issues as they relate to the budget.

It should not be dealing with the substantive issues of balanced budget legislation. If you want to tinker around with balanced budget legislation, then have the intestinal fortitude to bring forward a bill that amends the balanced budget legislation, but this Cabinet doesn't have that. They don't have the courage to do that so they bring it in under the guise of a budget implementation bill.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, that is the NDP way of doing business with Manitobans' money and so now, under Bill 31, this government is not going to do what its obligations would have been under balanced legislation. It is now going to excuse itself from the responsibility by only limiting their penalty to 20 percent of ministerial salaries. Now, I can understand that that can be quite painful, but they knew that long ago. They were spending money in this province over the course of the last 10 years. This government has been spending money in this province like a bunch of drunken sailors, and they have been doing that consistently year after year.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, if—[interjection] Yes, I shouldn't be insulting the sailors, but sometimes when sailors are drunk, they do funny things. And this government's been doing that for 10 years. But when you look at the track record of this government and you look at the fact that they have been receiving billions of dollars from Ottawa on an annual basis since 1999 when they took office, you know, they—the sort of the plug was taken out of the economic pipeline from Ottawa in 1999, and

there's been nothing but money flowing to the coffers of this province since then. But they could not even manage that.

Now, when you look at how they've grown, the expenditure budget of this province in the last 10 or 11 years, it's incredible. I think when we left office in 1999, and my colleague, the member from—no, Bonnie—

An Honourable Member: River East.

Mr. Derkach: —River East, could tell you that we, I think, left the province and the expenditure budget of this government—of the government then, was about 4.8 or 5.4 billion dollars, in that range. Today, under this administration, we have an expenditure budget that is over \$10 billion. Now, out of that, about 30 percent or 34 percent comes from Ottawa. Now, we are one of the provinces that other jurisdictions look at and say, why is it that almost every jurisdiction in Canada can live with its own source revenues and can generate enough activity in the business field to be able to sustain its operations and Manitoba cannot? [*interjection*] And that's the answer, because it's an NDP government. They cannot manage financial affairs.

I think Howard Pawley and his bunch proved it when they were in government. They drove this province into unprecedented debt at that time. And today we see the same thing. Now, it was one Jim Maloway who said to me one time, he said, well, you know, Len, it goes like this. He said, you guys come in and you put the financial house in order and you put up a bit of a surplus, and then we come in and we can spend for a few years, and then the taxpayers kind of get tired—

An Honourable Member: Jim said that?

Mr. Derkach: Yes, Jim said that. And then the taxpayers get rid of us for a few years, and you guys come back and you get finances back in order, and then we come back again and we spend some more. Now, that's exactly the philosophy of the NDP government today.

Now, Jim Maloway has gone to Ottawa, and God forbid that we would ever have Jack Layton and the boys take care of finances in Ottawa because we'd have the same situation as we have here in this province. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, this NDP government campaigned in 2007—in the last election, they campaigned on keeping in place balanced budget legislation. And Gary Doer said in 2007 that

balanced budget legislation was a priority to him. He said that it was an important issue and he would accuse us as the opposition party of running—because we—he said that we didn't have our figures right, that we would be the ones who would be running deficits and God forbid if we ever got elected. Well, God forbid. Well, ladies and gentlemen, and Manitobans understand that, today, under this NDP government, not only can they not manage their affairs—they can't balance the budget—but they have driven this province into, again, unprecedented debt.

* (16:30)

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, perhaps if we would have had Gary Doer at the head of the helm today, perhaps ministers would have had to cough up 40 percent. I would think that he would have tried to hold true to his word and ministers would have had to pay the price for their mismanagement.

It isn't difficult to say, well, you know, we'll take the 20 percent hit this year and then try to at least make it look to Manitobans like they are really doing something in order to be able to address the financial affairs of this province. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, it's not long ago, only about a year ago, when I heard the Premier of this province state to all Manitobans that this province was in far better shape than any jurisdiction in Canada when it came to the recession that we were experiencing; that Manitoba was going to do a better job of living through this recession than any other jurisdiction in the country—than even Canada was. And yes, we were participating in the stimulus package, but the economy of this province was chugging along. We were almost immune to what was happening in the rest of the country as it related to the recession.

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, that was only a short year ago when the last budget was being debated in this House. Now, tell me what has happened in the last short year. Why is it that this house of cards has, all of a sudden, tumbled and fallen down and we have a situation where not only are we running a deficit of over \$600 million, but we have a situation where they now have to change balanced budget legislation in order to keep themselves out of jail?

Madam Deputy Speaker, that's kind of the way this current Premier (Mr. Selinger) has been doing business over the course of time. The minister, the Premier, who was minister of Finance before, played loose with Crocus. We saw what happened with Crocus. And, you know, the last chapter on Crocus,

in my view, has not been written yet. That chapter will be written down the road when we—when Manitobans and Canadians will know, somewhere down the road, what really took place with the Minister of Finance and his buddies when it came to the Crocus fiasco. And we know—although, you know, sometimes it's difficult for the public to grasp some of this, but we know that back as far as 2001, the now-Premier knew exactly what was going on with Crocus, but as a Cabinet they kept it hidden.

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, and if you think that's the only underhanded thing that was done by this government, I want to remind you about what happened with, way back to 1999, with The Elections Finances Act. And, you know—*[interjection]* Way back then. And you tell me that the Minister of Finance then, who is now the Premier, wasn't prepared to address that issue? And then—but—and you're telling me that he didn't know what it was going on when he asked for a get-out-of-jail card from his party?

Well, you know, you'd have to be a fool to think differently, Madam Deputy Speaker, because this individual, the now-Premier of the province, is the only one in the NDP party who got that card, who got that letter. Now, curiously, he lost the letter. Now, it reminded me of John Bucklaschuk, when he was a minister of the NDP government, you know, inadvertently he had lost papers and, all of a sudden, they ended up being shredded and documents were shredded and it was just kind of a—you have that, you know, that brain fart, or whatever you call it and—oops, excuse the language—but you don't remember? It seems like that's what the Premier had, and he lost the document as well.

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, so a lot of curious things have happened under the leadership of this government, and this Premier has proven time and time again that he can get away with things. And, you know, this is another issue, but Manitobans are not stupid. They're keeping track of what is going on, I'm sure. Anybody who is tuned into politics, anybody who understands finances, anybody who understands where our province should be going is keeping track of this, and this current Premier that we have before us today has done some things that Manitobans are going to have some serious questions about.

And Bill 31 is going to be the one that perhaps Manitobans are going to stand up and take note of, because this is a bill that destroys what has been

worked hard for so many, many years by not only government but also by all Manitobans. They want to stand up. Manitobans want to stand up and be proud of their province. They want to stand up and be able to hold their heads high in the face of other provinces who might be facing problems and say: We have legislation in our province that prevents us from falling into debt, that prevents us from not balancing our books. And we used to stand up proudly in front of other jurisdictions in this nation and claim that we had legislation that was fair to us in this province, but also prevented government from playing loose with taxpayers' money.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I don't know, if the member from Thompson had been elected the leader of his party, I think he would have respected that law. You know, I think he would have respected the law. I think he would have forced his Cabinet ministers to fall into line and make sure that either the budget was balanced or that they took the hit that was appropriate. But, you know, as he says, he got the silver medal, but there's not too much glory in that in politics. You know, I think I know something about coming in second place in politics, and there's no second prize in this game.

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, this government, as a whole, has, I think, abandoned Manitobans and what Manitobans stand for. Now, I can talk—you know, I listened to the Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) when she stood up in the House and she's, I know what they would do if they were in government. We'd balance the books, Madam Minister. Yes, we would balance the books. She says, I know what they would do. They would cut services. No. No, we wouldn't cut services. We wouldn't be building a hydro line around the outside of the province here for \$1.7 billion more. We'd be putting it down the east side where it belongs, and use the \$1.7 billion to balance our books and to provide services to Manitobans, and we could provide lots of services to Manitobans for \$1.7 billion, and we wouldn't have to be running a deficit.

But, you know, they have all the answers, don't they? This group has all the answers. You know, the Hydro officials will tell you that it makes no sense whatsoever to be running a line down the west side of the province, no sense whatsoever. But this bunch thinks they're smarter than Manitoba Hydro engineers and people who have spent their careers in Hydro. This bunch thinks they're smarter. Now, you

know what? We're going to launch—their attitude is this: We're going to launch a propaganda campaign, and if we say things many times, somebody will believe us, and we just got to keep repeating them.

You remember the—remember the little—Madam Deputy Speaker, I don't know if it's appropriate—the little lie. Is that appropriate to say? *[interjection]* Untruth, the little lie, that little white lie, the little untruth about—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Derkach: I'll rephrase that. I'll call it an untruth about firing 500 nurses. Now, that was—if you will recall, that all had to do with the boundaries trail hospital, and we had to release some nurses from the Winkler hospital and the Morden hospital and then rehire them for the Boundary Trails hospital. But what was that an opportunity for the NDP to do? That was an opportunity for them to say, you fired 500 nurses. Well—but then time went on and that 500 grew to 1,000, and the last number I heard in this House was 1,500.

* (16:40)

And so you see, Madam Deputy Speaker—so it doesn't matter what the truth of an issue is. The NDP have now decided that you run a little propaganda campaign, and, if you say something enough times, somebody somewhere will believe it.

And, you see—and that's what—well, the Minister of Innovation (Mr. Chomiak), I know, is anxious to get out of here, but, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have a legislative agenda to fulfil. And we have Bill 31 before us, and I know the Minister of Innovation would not want to leave here without passing Bill 31, because then, what is he exposed to?

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, yes, we're going to debate Bill 31. Yes, we'll have our committee hearings on Bill 31, and yes, we'll debate it in third reading. And we will put up all the resistance we can to Bill 31, because this is a bad piece of legislation, because it should not have within it the changes that should belong in the balanced budget legislation. But, and unfortunately, this government does—is not brave enough to bring those legislative changes in under the legislation, under the amendment to the legislation, where it belonged.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the government presented a budget to us this year, and they tried to convince everybody that it wasn't a bad budget. You know, they were running a deficit because they had

to provide services to Manitobans. But they didn't tell you that they had enough money somewhere in their back pocket to pay for a stadium that should be built by private money, in my view. And they're going to build the stadium and they're going to call this a public facility and, yes, Manitoba should probably have a new football stadium. But, you know, it's the deal that's so rotten. It isn't—the rotten part of it isn't the fact that we're building a new stadium. The rotten part of this whole issue is the deal that was concocted by the First Minister of this House.

That's what is rotten. That's what's offensive, and you know, I understand they're going to be turning the sod tomorrow. Well, hallelujah. You know, if they would only be so prompt and so attentive to other facilities in this province like hospitals, like personal care homes, perhaps facilities to house those people who have addictions and, Madam Deputy Speaker, now the Minister of Innovation has just woken up and he's just telling us that we wouldn't know how to do it. Well, I have to tell you that we wouldn't do it like he is with the stadium. We wouldn't do it like he is doing with the hydro line. We wouldn't be spending \$1.7 billion more on a hydro line than we should. We wouldn't be telling Manitobans untruths about the fact that we may not be able to sell our hydro if we ever built a line on the east side. Now, can you imagine anything so—so foolish? Can you imagine anything so foolish, and do you really think that anybody would believe that kind of a foolishness?

But you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, what is interesting is that I communicate with my constituents right through the province, right through the entire west.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable member for Russell has the floor.

Mr. Derkach: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and you know, I haven't had one single—I've had lots of responses, but I haven't had one that said the government was on the right track in moving the line on the west side of the province. Not one.

Now, they talk about sensitive areas. Well, I have to remind the government that the Riding Mountain National Park is a biosphere. It's a UNESCO natural biosphere, designated already, and they're going to—and one of the proposed lines is either just a kilometre or two on the west side of that

facility or that park, and the other hydro line is on the east side of that park. Regardless of which side you go of it, you are going to be infringing on boreal forest. You're going to be infringing on sensitive lands, but that doesn't seem to matter to this government.

Have they had hearings out there? No. They haven't talked to anybody out there and, Madam Deputy Speaker, they talk about a proposed—proposal for a UNESCO site on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. [*interjection*] And, yes, you know—and they're punching a highway through it as we speak. As we speak, they're—those chainsaws are going.

And you know, what I found out—most curious—and we have to dig up *Hansard* from yesterday's concurrent motion because the Minister of Tourism (Ms. Marcelino)—I believe she was in the chair when she said they're going to build this huge road into the—massive road into the boreal forest on the east side of Lake Winnipeg.

Now, if you're going to build a massive road on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, which is more detrimental? Which is more detrimental? Can anybody tell me? Is it a road or is it a hydro line? You know—and anybody in the environmental business will tell you that the most—the more destructive thing that you could do would be to build a road. A hydro line is not as offensive as a road is, but Madam Deputy Speaker, they've—they're trying to convince Manitobans that, you know, it's okay; we got to put that road in because people have to have a way of communicating and a way of connecting with the rest of the province.

We don't disagree with that. Sure, we'll build a road. If we were in government, yeah, we'll build the road, but we'll also put a hydro line beside it, and then we'll have both of best worlds, you know.

But have they ever discussed the west-side line with any agriculture producers out there and the impact that will have on them? Not a soul has been out there. The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Struthers) hasn't been out there. The Minister of Finance (Ms. Wowchuk) hasn't been out there. Well, I can understand why they're avoiding it because they wouldn't be met with open arms with this kind of message to those people.

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, my colleague, the member from Emerson, is asking, have they done

an environmental study? No, they haven't. No, they haven't. But it's a political agenda. That's all it is and they really don't care about how much money of Manitoba taxpayers and ratepayers they will waste. That's the attitude of this government. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. We have to fulfil our dogma. We have to fulfil our objective, and I think Manitobans will have a message for them down the road.

Madam Deputy Speaker, that's why we have a debt today. That's why we have a deficit today because this government doesn't understand what management is about. Fiscally, it is a mess. Now, there are other areas besides this in this budget implementation bill, and whether we look at the issues of Justice, whether we look at the issues of Education, whether we look at the issues of Health, there are issues here that need to be addressed.

When I look at the issues that are prevalent right now in the Department of Justice, and the mismanagement of that portfolio itself, Madam Deputy Speaker, one has to do nothing but shake his or her head. You know, when we have people who are working for the Department of Justice running around buying Slurpees and baseball tickets for people who are on probation and they're not meeting their probation orders, you have to wonder where their heads are at. And, you know, Manitobans aren't foolish. They know that those who are out there who are breaking probationary orders that are supposed to be reporting back to their probation officers and then go out and kill somebody, they have to be dealt with in a different way, but, oh no, this government, not with them.

They are soft on crime. They always have been, Madam Deputy Speaker. That's this government's Achilles' heel is the Department of Justice. They don't understand what it takes to deal with people who break the law, and they have forced all kinds of hardships on ordinary Manitobans, law-abiding Manitobans. This government likes to bring in regulations against businesspeople, against farmers, against people who are making an honest living and are contributing to the economy of this province and we have seen that. The current Minister of Agriculture, when he was the Minister of Conservation, brought all kinds of legislation and regulation onto Manitobans that are going to cost Manitobans down the road and are costing them each and every day.

We have lost the hog industry in this province because this government didn't know how to deal with it. We have lost a livestock industry. A cattle livestock industry has been lost in this province because of this government's mismanagement and, Madam Deputy Speaker, I could go on and on and on but suffice it to say that Manitobans need to be made aware of what is in Bill 31.

* (16:50)

We need to have that debate, Madam Deputy Speaker, where people finally become aware of what this government is up to as it relates to the balanced budget that was passed in this Chamber—Manitobans were proud of. Even Gary Doer, when he was leader of this government, said on many days that he would keep the things that were good, and one of those things that were good was balanced budget legislation.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have seen that because of their mismanagement, because of their inability to manage, they have been forced to bring in legislation that amends it. And what is more offensive this year is the fact that they're bringing it in to save their own hides. They're bringing it in to save their own pocketbooks some money, because if this bill is not passed, it would not only cost them 20 percent of their salaries, it would cost them 40 percent of their salaries.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, self-preservation is what this group is all about, and we will continue to fight them and we—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): I was actually waiting for just a moment to see if any of the other members across the way would get up and use their opportunity to debate Bill 31, and certainly you would think they would want to defend the bills that they are bringing forward. But as the member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) has—the honourable member for Russell has indicated, they have been muzzled and so they will keep on squawking but will not get up and make their comments known. It would be nice to know what their opinion is regarding Bill 31.

The member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) made a very good point in his address this afternoon where—

An Honourable Member: Only one?

Mr. Dyck: Well, he made a number of good comments, but one of them that I thought was something that needed to be repeated was the fact that—are the other—the members from the NDP, are they actually going door to door, knocking on the doors and indicating and asking the question, what do you think of Bill 31, and then explaining it to them, the fact that they're actually trying to retain their salaries, that they're changing a law because it doesn't quite suit them? So how many of the members across the way are going and door knocking—or even if they're doing some polling, are they checking to see whether this is something that Manitobans really want?

As the member for Russell indicated, and I would share that—the comments with him, the fact that when I go in my constituency, I don't hear that. In fact, I hear quite the opposite. They feel that the legislation that was put in place should be adhered to.

The other comment that I've heard a number of times and I've gotten e-mails on are the fact of—the fact that they are just changing the laws to suit their needs. But when you look at photo radar, I've had a number of e-mails about people who in fact were charged for speeding, but the reports that came back from the law when the decision was made was that the money should've been refunded. These people didn't get their refunds. Now, the government of the day didn't go ahead and change the law just to suit the—actually, the requirements put out by the judge.

So here we have a government that's coming forward, that's making changes to the legislation so that they can meet their own needs, so that in fact they will not take that 20 percent reduction in their salaries. They should be taking a 40 percent reduction, according to the law.

Now, the other point which is interesting is that last year, they did change the legislation. That's only a year ago. Now, we would think that, they changed the legislation in order to suit their own needs, that within a year they should at least be able to live by those requirements, but no. How things change.

The other comments that have been put on the record, I think, that are worthy of mention is the fact that, back in 1999—and I think we need to continue to

repeat this, because the then-premier, who was Mr. Doer, who is now working for the PC government in Washington—but he did make the comment regarding the balanced budget, and he said one of the top five election commitments in '99 was to keep balanced budget legislation and to lower property taxes. Now, he was going to keep balanced budget legislation. Now, he did that. He tried. Now, I'd say that, within their accounting systems, they made some changes as time went on, but I would say that he was trying to live up to the commitment that they had made at that time.

He went on to say that, we've said all along that we're not going to change the things that got—that they got right, but we're going to keep them in place. And so, with those comments, he was, in fact, affirming the point that balanced budget legislation was a good thing. And he went on to say that they would continue to retire the debt that the province had.

And, of course, when you look at the debt that the province had, that debt was brought on by the Pawley government. They way overspent the budget in the province of Manitoba, and it took the Conservative government in the Filmon years to get us back to a point where we were on the—we were actually moving in the direction of becoming a have province. And how we have strayed from that, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Also, in 1999, we had a \$6-billion budget that we were dealing with and today, we have an over \$11-billion budget. Now, mind you, I think we need to make a correction on that and indicate that 40 percent of that \$11-billion budget—40 percent of those dollars—come from the federal government. And so here we are pleased and happy to stand out there with our hands out and say, please, give us a little bit more, so that we can keep on spending and keep on running huge, huge deficits.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is continuing as time goes on. Just in going back to 2007, and some of the comments that were put forward at that time. And, again, it's Gary Doer placed balanced budget as a priority in 2007. When referring to spending promises made by other parties, he stated: They're all going to be running deficits if they keep their election promises, God forbid. My goodness, that's what the then premier said. And so, consequently, we have strayed. We have really strayed in our approach

to the way we are handling the finances in the province of Manitoba.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have said, time and time again in this House and, I think, if you would go back and peruse *Hansard*, you would find out that the comments that I have made have been that you make some of your worst decisions during the best of times. And it's not that we haven't warned the government of the day of some of the decisions that they have made. They have made some bad, bad decisions, even though their revenues have increased substantially over the years. And, as Manitobans, we should all be proud of that fact—that our revenues have increased. We have all been the beneficiaries of this, and we have contributed to that as well. And so we need to put credit where credit is—should be placed.

So, with that, Madam Deputy Speaker, I also see that with Bill 31, and the approach that they are taking in trying to just take the—rather, they're trying to take away the balanced budget legislation and move it into something that is befitting—or not befitting, but rather something that they feel they can live with in order to try to make excuses for the spending habits that they have. They're trying to gut this. They're trying to take that and put it through legislation. And, again, as the member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) indicated very clearly, he said that the Bill 31, which is a combination of the budget implementation and the statute—and the tax statutes amendment act, that these should be two separate bills. That's how they should be coming forward. And those are—that would then be two budgets—or rather bills, rather, that we would have to debate on.

And so, Madam Deputy Speaker, I see that the time is moving along. However, I do want to continue and just make the comments that we cannot keep on deficit spending and, again, this is what the Bill 31 is speaking to. They're trying to make excuses for the fact that, within the next four years, they will continue on the spending track that they are on. As a province, as Manitobans, we cannot afford to do that. It does not make sense, and Manitobans are certainly objecting to that.

And I would again indicate, as I said right at the outset, that the members opposite should go from one door to another, knock on the doors, ask them if this is the kind of legislation they want to have put in place. And I would suggest to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that is not what they would hear. That's not

what I am hearing. That's what I am hearing. That's what other members on our side are not hearing. And I cannot see how people in the province of Manitoba and in—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Pembina will have 21 minutes remaining.

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

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