

Second Session - Fortieth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 9, 2013

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Good morning, everyone. Please be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, good morning, Mr. Speaker. I believe we're willing to proceed with Bill 208, The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act, sponsored by the honourable member for Riding Mountain—still memorizing your names.

Mr. Speaker: So we'll now proceed with second reading of Bill 208, The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act.

Bill 208—The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), that Bill 208, The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, this bill has been introduced in the House in Manitoba here in the Legislature for the fourth time by members from this side of the House.

According to The Hearing Foundation of Canada, approximately six in every 1,000 babies born in Canada have some degree of hearing loss, including profound deafness. Hearing health begins with screening for hearing loss at birth. Without screening, most hearing loss is not identified until

ages 2 or 3, making it difficult for many children to catch up with communication and social skills. Early diagnosis and intervention can profoundly and positively impact a child's success both in the classroom and in life. It is because of this, Mr. Speaker, that I rise in the House today with great frustration, and I am frustrated this government—or that this is the fourth time legislation has to be introduced in this Legislature, and each time it has been refused.

Although more than 2,000 children are born with hearing loss in Canada every year, the NDP government continues to refuse to support this bill. Even though hearing health begins with screening for hearing loss at birth, the NDP has repeatedly refused to support this bill. Even though hearing loss is one of Canada's most common birth defects for which screening is available, the NDP have repeatedly refused to support this bill. We are hopeful on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, that this government will set partisan politics aside this morning and will do what is right. We hope they'll support 208.

I'm going to start my debate with a letter from Hannah Brown. Hannah Brown is a young woman who was diagnosed at an early age with deafness, and she didn't get this diagnosis until she was almost 14 months of age and she's become a strong advocate for universal newborn hearing screening in Manitoba and across the country.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to put a few words on the record from Hannah: I'm looking to you for your support with the introduction of Bill 208, The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act.

I have recently joined Hear for Life Manitoba, a group comprised of people with hearing loss, parents of children with hearing loss and professionals working in the hearing field. We are hoping to lend our support for the passing of Bill 208 to legislate newborn hearing—universal newborn hearing screening in Manitoba, which is currently the standard of care across the United States and many Canadian provinces in the developing world.

Currently in Winnipeg there are high-risk screening programs at both Health Sciences Centre and St. Boniface. While we feel this is a good start, it is frustrating to know that these programs are not

equivalent. As it stands now, the standard of care you receive is determined by geography.

I am someone who has benefited from early-aged identification. A family friend from Ontario diagnosed me as being deaf when I was 14 months old. I am thankful I was discovered to be deaf and hard of hearing when I was young. My parents realized that their friends were right, and they got me in for some tests that led to my path of hearing for life. I was a hard-working child determined to be able to be as close as possible to normal to be able to hear and communicate with those who are around me. I'm a regular teenage girl laughing with my friends, playing sports, getting good grades in school, listening to music and enjoying life in the moment. It would be really great if everyone would get to that—have wonderful opportunities like me to be able to hear in life.

It's been an amazing experience to go through when I look back on it. It is truly a blessing to be able to see how this all happens over the years, to see language development and the way the technology has improved to allow severely and profoundly deaf people to hear. I want babies to be screened when they are born so that none of their potential is wasted. The earlier you are diagnosed, the sooner you can start to learn how to listen, hear and speak, which leads to better language development at an earlier age.

Please vote for Bill 208 and help babies in the province to get screened and get diagnosed sooner rather than later.

We would welcome the opportunity to provide you with our personal perspectives on hearing screening and encourage you to lend your support to the passing of Bill 201.

Thank you for your time. Sincerely, Hannah Brown.

Mr. Speaker, I think what Hannah has shared in her correspondence sums up the need for a universal newborn hearing screening program in Manitoba. I understand that Alberta has looked at this and are putting an initiative forward and are looking at and will be implementing a universal newborn screening program.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many organizations that support this initiative. In the Canadian Paediatric Society, *Are We Doing Enough?* A status report on Canadian public policy and child and youth health, have indicated that Manitoba needs to do more. They

have been strong advocates for a universal program in this country and believe that Manitoba is falling behind other jurisdictions.

* (10:10)

Exceptional Parent Magazine endorses this as well, and they have said, and I quote: Universal newborn screening they wholeheartedly endorse. Moreover, we wish to be clear on this point. Exceptional Parent supports and endorses newborn screening. Universal means all; all newborn babies should receive available test.

Mr. Speaker, we've got organizations in Manitoba who are working very hard to ensure that as many options are available for children to be tested for hearing screening from birth. We know the Lions hearing foundation has done wonderful work in providing equipment to ensure that facilities in rural Manitoba and northern Manitoba are being used. The goal of their program was to develop and implement a universal newborn screening program with the identification of hearing impairment before the months of age and early intervention—before 6 months of age for all children born in rural and northern Manitoba. And they've worked hard at raising money. They've received funding from the hearing foundation in 2008 and received over \$18,000 US in humanitarian services grants.

So there are organizations out there that are pushing so hard to get Manitoba to the levels that should be there with regard to universal screening, but we have a government that has failed to do so.

Mr. Speaker, The Hearing Foundation of Canada has indicated that more than 2,000 children are born with a hearing loss in Canada every year, and making it one of our country's most common birth defects for which screening is available. Approximately six in every 1,000 babies born in Canada have some degree of hearing loss including profound deafness.

We need to ensure that newborns receive this testing. It's gentle, it's non-invasive test that can identify a potential hearing problem at birth or shortly after. Babies identified with hearing loss will then experience early intervention so that crucial communication development in their early years is not compromised.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba Child Care Association also has it as one of its recommendations that this government move forward on. The Canadian

Hearing Society, Canadian peach-peat-'peatriach'-or pip-or-

An Honourable Member: Pediatric.

Mrs. Rowat: Paediatric Society also agree that this is something that we need to be doing, Mr. Speaker—thank you.

So I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that the cost for a test is around \$35 per child. And I believe that there's been studies that have proven that, statistically, the cost by early detection are way stronger than the cost associated with identifying hearing loss.

So, Mr. Speaker, I wish that this government will consider Bill 208 and adopt a universal newborn hearing screening program in Manitoba. It is our responsibility as elected officials to do what we can to assist the most vulnerable members of our society. If detecting hearing loss early in life will lead to better outcomes, then there is no excuse to ignore this legislation any longer. So today is the day that we should put our partisan politics aside and I urge the members of the Legislature to stand up and—for the smallest Manitobans, newborns, and support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I thank the member for her comments. I also thank her for reading the very impassioned letter from Hannah. I know that the member opposite has been an advocate, as has Hannah and other members, for expanding universal newborn hearing screening in Manitoba, and certainly, I share her view in its importance.

We know, Mr. Speaker, of course, that early interventions of a variety of types can help our children get a better start in life. And I think there's no member of this House that wouldn't agree that we want to, as best as we can, find out what those early interventions are, find the evidence that proves that, indeed, those interventions make a difference, and endeavour to make those investments whenever we possibly can.

It's the reason, Mr. Speaker, why we have made very significant investments in screening newborns for a variety of metabolic disorders. Indeed, it's why we support the Families First screening for every family, and it's why it's standard practice to assess every newborn in Manitoba with a basic hearing test. So these kinds of tests help us to identify problems

early and direct families to get the kind of help that they need.

Now, Mr. Speaker, since taking office, our government has worked very hard to expand and to improve screening for newborns, and we're going to continue in this direction and work to build our capacity, not only in terms of the technology that we're using, but, of course—[interjection]—thank you—but, of course, in terms of the man- and womanpower that we have to perform these different kinds of screens and tests.

We will continue to roll out universal newborn hearing screening across the province. We have a presence of that type of screening referenced by the member in our health regions, including Interlake-Eastern, western and the Northern RHAs, Mr. Speaker.

I would hasten to add that the universal newborn hearing screening, as mentioned by the member opposite, it's not presently standard across the provinces, but we are working to bring it to all regional health authorities here in Manitoba. We are doing this step by step and rolling it out region by region. And I would also hasten to add, Mr. Speaker, that there was no universal hearing screening program anywhere in Manitoba before we took office. So, indeed, we are making progress in this very important area. We funded the launch of the early hearing detection program in Brandon, and the program is establishing universal newborn hearing screening one region at a time.

I would note, of course, that all newborns in Manitoba continue to receive a basic hearing test as part of their assessment, and further hearing screening is performed when medical professionals deem a child to be at risk or deem it to be necessary.

I'm also very proud to say, Mr. Speaker, that we have created a Manitoba cochlear implant and bone-anchored hearing aid surgery program in Manitoba for the first time, reducing the cost and, indeed, the stress for patients who previously had to travel outside of the province for the procedure.

So we are working very hard to provide in—and make investments across the spectrum. We need to take this balanced approach. I understand that members opposite and members of the community would like us to go more swiftly and, indeed, we're going to work very hard to move as swiftly as we possibly can in implementing a variety of screening.

I'd give you an example of what I mean, Mr. Speaker. Last year, we announced that we would be funding cystic fibrosis screening, done with tandem mass spectrometry, at the provincial lab. We're now screening our newborns for—or children for CF and 43 other disorders. Cystic fibrosis screening is only standard in half the provinces in Manitoba—or in Canada, including Manitoba, in partnership with Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and BC. In 2011, the Ontario Ombudsman said that Saskatchewan was a leader in Canada—and we commend them for that—using the tandem mass spectrometry to screen for 28 disorders, but, indeed, that is 16 fewer than we are screening for today.

We have expanded universal screening available to newborns in the area of the prevalence of alcohol use during pregnancy by the mother. This is a critically important tool that we are developing, Mr. Speaker. We want to do all that we can on those kinds of interventions and the education that comes from that to ensure that we're paying very close attention to children that may be affected by FASD. The—that screening was launched in 2003 and has resulted in 97 per cent of all births being screened by public health nurses.

The public health nurses also ask families about 38 biological, social, demographic risk factors using, as I mentioned earlier, the Families First screening.

*(10:20)

And included in that screening, Mr. Speaker, are congenital anomalies, birth weight, multiple births, alcohol use and smoking during pregnancy, mother's age, education, marital status, mental health, family social isolation, relationship distress, so a number of factors that would have a profound and serious impact on that newborn and the newborn's development.

So, indeed, I would say to the member opposite, and to all members of this House, that moving forward with universal newborn hearing screening as stated by the member, we believe to be an important program and that's evidenced by the fact that we have chosen to roll this out in a variety of our regional health authorities and will continue to push forward. We support the expansion of universal newborn hearing screening, but we also support the screening of a variety of other circumstances, Mr. Speaker, as recommended to us by our medical professionals.

We want to ensure that we're making the best possible investments with the resources we have. It's why we are continuing to make as many efforts as possible to drive our regional health authorities to productivity targets, to drive our regional health authorities to implement lean management techniques, and to engage in procurement exercises that result in savings being redirected back into the front line which can continue to help us expand universal newborn screening. It can continue to help us expand training programs for those individuals who will so expertly perform screening and, indeed, intervene when there are situations that arise where interventions have to take place, either for hearing loss or a variety of the other techniques.

And it's why, Mr. Speaker, that we continue to ensure that we have to provide solid investments into our health system, into our regional health authorities and that we don't, by the stroke of a pen, make indiscriminate cuts across the board that takes a direct hit on programs such as this, which isn't good for newborns. It's not good for moms. It's not good for dads. It's not good for grandparents. It's not good for our school system. One could even argue down the road that not having appropriate screening for our babes will have impacts in the justice system later on.

So making sure that we have these early interventions and that we do the work and we make the commitment to make those investments, it's going to be better for all Manitobans. I just wish the members opposite would understand that indiscriminately cutting in departments can have serious effects on the very programs that I know very sincerely the member from Riding Mountain and other members across the way deeply care about. I don't question that for a moment. And it's why we have to have a serious discussion about making our investments across our health-care system and not indiscriminately cutting.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the minister says that she supports newborn hearing screening. She should support this bill, and I hope she will let this bill go to committee and let it move forward. If she feels that she can't start universal newborn hearing screening on July 1st, then you could delay the implementation for a week or a month but at least pass the bill. You know, this is an area where we should be moving forward.

And the argument in terms of cost, you know, here—there is a cost but there's a huge savings, all right, and I think the minister would agree that the savings comes because when a child has had the hearing problem corrected, that's a child who learns well, who learns to speak well, who does well in school, who is far, far less likely to get into trouble as an adolescent, criminal justice system. Just think of all the money that is being saved because you've identified these children and helped them, let alone the help that you've given to a child which should be the fundamental reason why we pass and support this legislation and move on.

I think it's important to think for a moment about the history of newborn screening, right? It started with the recognition that a condition called phenylketonuria, which led to irreversible and very severe intellectual disability and brain damage, could be treated and could be treated effectively so that a child could grow up normally. And then it was found that you could screen for this condition at birth, and so this was implemented and has been implemented in virtually every developed country in the world. And what we have is a very analogous situation here, that when it comes to detecting a child with a hearing problem, we have the capacity now in almost every instance, to intervene, to correct the problem, to enable a child to learn and do well and to prevent all sorts of problems that are lifelong because that child has not been able to hear early on and to learn to speak well and to learn well.

There's an analogy here with a visual problem, a visual problem which is called strabismus, where the eyes don't line up very well. And when this happens it's very important to correct this in the first year of life, in the first few months of life, because if you don't correct it then, you pass the critical developmental step so that the eyes never learn to look together, and you have impaired visual problems for that child for the rest of their life. *[interjection]*—strabismus.

And in this condition, we consider this as a medical emergency to treat that child and correct them surgically early on so that, in fact, their vision and the movement of their eyes can grow up normally like every other child.

What we—what's important to emphasize is that it's considered a medical emergency to make that correction because you have only a short window to do that very early on in life. And what we have with hearing issues where a child is born with a hearing

problem, there is a developmental process that goes on in the brain that that child, because they're able to hear, respond well to their mother, their father, has developed attachment normally, developed speaking and hearing normally so that that critical period in the first few years of life when a child begins to relate to other people, to learn some of those things which are really critical when the child gets to school and can learn in school. And what happens with the hearing process is if that hearing is not corrected very early on in the first year or two, then all too often, you know, there are problems with attachment, there are problems with the development of speech and language, and these develop into learning problems, and these develop then into problems with these children. Too often they may be bullied at school because they're different; they may have problems as an adolescent; they may have problems as they grow up. And so there is an opportunity here, at a really important time, to screen and to catch these children early so that you can help them—their brains to develop normally, to become wired normally.

* (10:30)

I can tell you of a friend of mine whose child, girl, was not identified as having a hearing problem until she was 4 or 5. That child, who is now in her 20s, had problems all the way through school. Her speech is just enough different from other kids that she's sort of singled out. Her ability to learn—just enough difference that she struggled all the way through school. You know, fortunately she had wonderful parents who were able to be helpful and supportive. But, at every step of the way, the parents and the school and others have had to go the extra mile, spend a lot of extra time, to help her to get as far as she is now, which is not—she's doing well but she could have, you know, done better. And I think let's just leave it at that.

There is an opportunity to help these children, to identify this problem before we get past the critical developmental time for the brain, for the development of speech and language. And this is why this is so critical; it is one of the more common, in fact, of problems that we screen for. The learning—hearing problems are much more common than conditions like phenylketonuria, which are less likely.

We now have the technology to do this easily, rapidly and know precisely what the level of the hearing of a child is. If we do it just in a rough way,

without using the test which really tells us how well the child is hearing, we're sort of guessing.

And so it's really critical and, you know, we've talked about this before, but I really think that the minister should consider supporting this. The minister should support it to go to committee. And if the minister needs to delay a little bit on the implementation, to get all the ducks in order to make sure it happens, I think passing this legislation would provide the kind of push to get this done province-wide that—at this point, quite frankly—is needed. Sometimes you need that extra political push to a system which has been a little bit slow to respond in some areas of the province, to just get this done.

And so I would ask the minister to consider supporting this bill, and if you want to delay the implementation, fine, but let's pass it and let's move on, on this very important issue for children.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member for River Heights for putting a few words on the record as well. I certainly respect his expertise in this matter and, being a medical doctor, I know he has a lot of expertise and, in fact, I think brought a very similar legislation to this House in the past. And I believe I've had an opportunity to speak to this particular bill in the past, or very similar legislation as well, and I'm not sure if it was the legislation from the member from River Heights or similar legislation that was brought from the member for Riding Mountain (Mrs. Rowat).

But it's a nice—it's a refreshing change, it's a nice opportunity to talk about something that is so important and something that is such an important issue to families here in this province.

Often I think we get caught up in the day to day, the rigmarole of this House and sometimes the things that we get a chance to debate and talk about aren't quite as important as this issue is. So it's a great opportunity to stand and put a few words on the record with regards to this particular issue.

It's also a great opportunity to talk a little about my own family, and I always enjoy being able to do that. And especially in these long days being here in the Manitoba Legislature, getting an opportunity to talk about my family and the experience that we've had over the past couple of years—with our own children—it's a real joy and it's a real honour.

So I just wanted to begin by saying that—again that this is a very, very important issue and that this

particular position by the opposition is very—is a good one I think. This is exactly the direction that we're moving, in terms of screening in the province of Manitoba. And I think they're bang on, in terms of this being a priority, and that this is something that we want to do as much as possible with.

You know, we're looking at doing this in a responsible way, in a way that rolls this program out. In fact, we're doing this—a lot of screening. We've expanded our screening in Manitoba and we're looking at doing this more as the capacity develops, and I think that's an important point that perhaps hasn't been mentioned yet and I think I'd like to put a few words on the record with regards to that.

I know we've talked a lot in this House about Budget 2013 and some of the priorities that we've made in that budget, and certainly this is one that I think we need to continue to focus on, issues exactly like this. And I think Budget '13 does exactly that.

You know, there was some suggestion on the other side that there should be cuts, cuts across the board, and I would imagine that a program such as this would be something that would be a part of those cuts, and, you know, I don't think that that's the way to go. I think that perhaps there should be more discussion in that caucus on what the priorities of Manitobans really are. And certainly in my constituency, and again, with my own personal experience, you know, expanding screening and expanding health for newborns and for young mothers is a priority, and it's not cuts. Cuts aren't the priority.

So, just to speak a little bit about my own experience, we now have two children. My youngest son is having his first birthday in—I guess next week, and so we're very excited. He was a healthy baby when he was first born. He's had a few health problems since then, nothing too serious, but it really does put it in perspective and just how important it is that, you know, our children are taken care of, that they're healthy and that they can continue to have a productive and healthy life.

And in my own case, again, as I said, there have been no serious issues, but I have appreciated the opportunity that, first of all, the care that we received when we were in the hospital was top-notch, absolutely top-notch. And since then—and I don't want to talk too much. I know the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities (Mr. Chief) wants to put a few words on the record, and I'm sure he's going to talk a little bit about some of the supports

we have for young mothers and for newborns, so I don't want to talk too much about that. But just that feeling of support that parents, new parents, have, which I think is unique here in Manitoba, it's just been a real eye-opener and it's been something that has made us feel more comfortable in our roles as new parents and has certainly made us feel that there is that level of support coming from the government.

So when we talk about screening, this government has made this a priority. This is absolutely something that we have tried to make as available as possible. The Manitoba early hearing detection program, which was formerly known as I HEAR, provides universal screening, diagnosis and ongoing intervention resources, including family support. And this has been an absolute success for those parents who've accessed it. It's—gives that peace of mind, and it identifies those issues early and helps to alleviate any problems that may have arisen.

And we have the Families First screening, which was launched in 2003, and it's resulted in 97 per cent of all births being screened by public health nurses—and again, I don't want to talk too much about this; this is maybe something the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities wants to talk about—but this is exactly the kind of support that I'm talking about. When we're, you know, as new families coming out of the hospital, this has been an absolute joy for us to work with our public health nurse to identify any problems that may exist and then to plug into the larger health-care system where the needs arise. So, I mean, it's been—it's something that we've prioritized and I know we want to continue to prioritize. And again, Budget '13, I think, does some of that.

I also wanted to talk very briefly, Mr. Speaker, about the cochlear implant and bone-anchoring hearing aid surgery program, which we've mentioned a few times here but I think it's important to mention again. It's an incredible program. I've actually had a chance to speak with one of the physicians that's come back to Manitoba to be a part of that program, and it's an exciting new development in hearing and specifically supporting those folks who have hearing issues. And I think this is something that we're going to see more of here in Manitoba. We'll become specialists. We'll become better able to address these issues, and this is an exciting program which I know we're going to hear more about here in this House.

*(10:40)

So, you know, we want to continue to increase the screening, and we wanted to increase the amount

of resources that are available to parents and to newborns when there are issues identified, and again, this speaks right to our values as a government in supporting those things that matter to Manitobans.

And we've made it very clear that we're not going to be cutting. We're not going to be hacking and slashing the budget just to meet a number. We're going to make sure that those services that people care about are there. They're available to them and I would encourage that, you know, within this, the opposition caucus, that there is more discussion about what really is important, what really is a priority and that issues such as this, when we get an opportunity to talk about them in the House and to debate them and to actually talk about real solutions, if we did more of this, I think all of us, all Manitobans would be better off. And if we can talk about issues like this, I know my constituents would be happy to know that I'm speaking, you know, on this particular issue.

I know that—I would venture to guess that members opposite, their constituents would appreciate these kind of issues coming to the forefront as well, and if this is the tone of how we're going to move forward in this Legislative session and going forward, I think that's a great thing. The more we talk about important issues to families and to Manitobans, the better off we're going to be. The less bickering there is and the less back and forth there is, I think is a good thing, and I know that there's a lot of other folks on our side, and probably on the opposition side as well, that want to speak to this so I won't take too much more time.

But I just wanted to say that I do appreciate this issue coming forward once again, having the opportunity to put a few words on the record with regards to this important piece of legislation and to say that, you know, I encourage the members opposite to encourage us to make this a priority, to continue to expand programs that we have and continue to roll it out in a responsible way as much as possible and to continue to care as best we can for the most vulnerable in our society.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): It gives me great pleasure to stand up today to speak to Bill 208, The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act, and I commend the member from Riding Mountain putting this bill forward again. As the member from Steinbach had mentioned, hopefully, fourth time's the charm.

According to The Hearing Foundation of Canada, approximately the six in every 1,000 babies born in Canada have some degree of hearing loss, including profound deafness. Hearing health begins with screening for hearing loss at birth. Without screening, the average age of identification of hearing loss has historically been between 2 and a half to 3 years of age, making it difficult for many children to catch up with communication and social skills, Mr. Speaker.

Early diagnosis and intervention can profoundly and positively impact a child's success both in the classroom and in life. I look forward to hearing what other members from the government side has to say in regards to this bill, Mr. Speaker. I know that it has come up, as I've mentioned previously. It's come up in the last few sessions by the member from Riding Mountain and it keeps getting spoken out. So I do hear some good things being said from the other side of the House, the government side, but if they were in support of this, they would let this bill go through and help us pass this.

I'm assuming that because this is in regards to newborn hearing screening, that the minister for child and youth opportunities and also maybe the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan) might stand up and put a few words on the record towards this because, Mr. Speaker, this is another tool in our toolbox in regards to prevention for our most vulnerable people, our assets in the province.

Those are our children and I think in—speaking as a schoolteacher, I think this is another, again, another tool that we could try to prevent some of those learning disabilities or stumbling blocks later on in life because, as you know and as many of the members in this House know, that some of those files that are being made up, whether it's through Manitoba Health or public health nurses, due to the freedom of information act, doesn't always necessarily transfer into the school system. So by the time some more hearing checks are possibly done, it could be grade 2, could be grade 3 and then all of a sudden we find out that the poor child has been sitting at the back of the room and not even be able—being able to hear the teacher at the front of the classroom. And it could've just been simply a hearing check when the baby was born to diagnose, to flag those issues and so that that information could be transferred over into the school system and those adaptations for learning can be—could be made, Mr. Speaker.

Some of the facts that I'd also like to put on the record, Mr. Speaker, is that there's 2,000 children—are born with hearing loss in Canada every year. Again, the screening for hearing loss begins at birth. Hearing loss is also Canada's most common birth defect for which screening is available, and this government, the NDP government, has refused to support this bill. Now they say they're supporting it, but what I mean by supporting it is sit down before the hour hits 11 o'clock this morning, sit down and let the bill go forward.

Now, Bill 208 recognizes the importance of hearing loss—or hearing screening for newborn babies in Manitoba—it recognizes that all parents should have the option of having their newborns screened if they so desire. It should not be a—it should not be dependent on where they live in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. The universal hearing test is so quick that it could easily be done along with the other tests Manitoba currently screens newborns for, such as PKU, congenital hypothyroidism and congenital adrenal hyperplasia. We have the ability to add hearing screening to the myriad of other newborn screening conducted in Manitoba. We have the specialists and we have the technology. We just need the will of this government to support this bill.

Now, in other jurisdictions—I had heard that the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) mention some of the national standards. In Alberta—recently displayed tremendous leadership nationwide by implementing the first universal newborn hearing screening program in the country.

Now, the minister stood up and again patted herself on the back that through jurisdiction throughout the province of Manitoba they are doing hearing screening, but, Mr. Speaker, why do we necessarily have to be last to the table as far as fully implementing this. Let the bill go through. Let's vote on it. Let's pass it so that we're not necessarily going for that 10th spot all the time. This can be something where we can be a leader in the country, and we don't necessarily have to jump up and cheer when all of a sudden we become ninth, Mr. Speaker. It just seems to dishearten me when we do have these great initiatives here in Manitoba and we fail to act on them,

Mr. Speaker, back in—June 23rd, 2001, the Lions hearing foundation had supported the North Eastman RHA to purchase equipment. Now, that goal of the program was to develop and implement a universal newborn hearing screening program with the

identification of hearing impairment before three months of age and early intervention before six months of age for all children born in rural and northern Manitoba.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I do encourage the members on the government side to let this bill go forward, and for that I'm going to thank you for listening and sit down and strongly encourage the government to, again, move this bill forward.

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): Mr. Speaker, I do want to echo some of the comments that the—has already come forward. I do want to acknowledge the member for Riding Mountain (Mrs. Rowat) for bringing Bill 208 forward, the universal newborn hearing screening.

I think it's always important to get many perspectives from all members of the Legislature. I was hearing from the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald). We got to hear from the member from River Heights who has a medical background and getting his thoughts on this, as well as I think it's important to recognize the testimonial, the personal testimonial that the member for Riding Mountain brought forward.

* (10:50)

Those are always important stories. And I think, you know, talking and getting to hear from my colleague, of course, from Concordia. He talked about his family and what this means to his family personally. I got to be with both of his children a few weeks ago, and they're looking great and they—we had a great time together.

So I think it's great that we're hearing from so many different members and their perspectives on Bill 208. Of course, it's incredibly important. In fact, I am on the record saying many times the importance of early childhood development and all the pieces that come with it.

In fact, just this week, when I was asked clearly what's going on in terms of the demographic in Manitoba with the incredible amount of Aboriginal children, youth and families, how we can make some—maximize that potential. I said, you know, Mr. Speaker, if you want to maximize the potential of children, youth and families in Manitoba, it starts before young people are even born; it starts with investments at the prenatal stage. And I think anytime that we have the opportunity to stand up in the House and talk about early childhood

development and things around that affect new mothers is incredibly important.

I do want to echo some of the comments that we heard from the Minister of Health, that we are doing more screening, not less. Of course, Mr. Speaker, that our government has expanded and improved screening. We continue to further develop that capacity. We roll out universal newborn hearing screening across the province. Now it does have a presence in the majority of the health regions, including the Interlake-Eastern, Prairie Mountain and Northern RHAs. Our government is taking a lead role in newborn health and the positive development in children and youth in our province.

You know, I do want to—I would like to share a story. When my son Hayden was born he—we live in Winnipeg's North End and so, you know, of course, we face a lot of the challenges that many families face living in the neighbourhood. I, of course, grew up facing some of those hardships. And—but I got to tell you, Mr. Speaker, when I became a father, I got to say, you know, it's one of those feelings, it's an incredibly powerful feeling and a wonderful feeling, but at the same time, there's a lot of insecurity, and, you know, you're not as confident as you once thought. And I'm somebody who has access to a lot of resources and a lot of resources in our community.

And one of the visits that we got was from a public health nurse, who came and had asked my wife an incredible amount of questions to get information and to get data, so that we can make sure that we're making good decisions and using the resources of government to its potential. And some of those questions that the public health nurse had asked my wife were incredibly personal and incredibly difficult to ask, I do have to say. And the way in which she asked it, the sensitivity, the care, that she took asking those questions, I got to say, was incredibly impressive.

So when we look at screening and we look at the investments around early childhood development, I do want to say and say some—say for the record, how incredibly professional and hard-working and dedicated and committed many of these people who work on the front lines, for our government and for our communities, how important that is.

When she was done the initial making sure, you know, getting the data she needed, and providing some advice and support, we had an incredible amount of questions for her. We had asked her an incredible amount of, you know—and at one point she

smiled and kind of laughed, and I asked her if I had asked a funny question. She said, no, she says, I remember how you feel and your wife feels being so, you know—it reminded me of having my first daughter, where you're at. And she said, you know, I just want to know that you'll be fine.

And I do want to say, you know, one of the things that—that one of the services that we provide actually starts and it's—I was gladly able to table a report, 2012 report on Manitoba's children and youth, and I talked about the importance of prenatal—some of the financial incentives or financial support we provide to families. Of course, our prenatal benefits serves up to 4,000 women on that. And getting the information that we need from that is really important, and some of the data around supporting women at that prenatal stage. And these are low-income mothers, and we, you know, we heard members put on the record that we want to be able to support our most vulnerable. And we know from the prenatal, from what we know, and we know that from our Families First home visiting, that these are very effective programs. These are very effective investments. In fact, looking at the prenatal benefit, women that are pregnant and getting that additional support carry their babies more often to full term. When their babies are born, they're born at a very healthy baby weight. It increases breast feeding; of course, that has not only social but huge health improvements as well.

We also know that, you know, that not only did we, you know, reinstate the National Child Benefit, that clawback, but we also maintained all of its services and many of the services around screening, including the Families First home visiting. But one of the other programs that we're investing in is our Healthy Baby community support program where families can come together and they can find resources and share with one another. It builds confidence. It improves access to services and resources. It provides a strong network of support. And so, you know, so we see the health benefits, of course, for families around early childhood development and prenatal care and those types of pieces. But also we know these investments, in terms of screening—that's very important—is around school readiness. And there was a family that—that's in the Free Press today that talked about how important education is to her and her family to overcome some of those challenges and hardships. And one of the pieces that we implement is the EDI, the Early Development Instrument.

And I would like to share a quick story on Charlie [*phonetic*]. Charlie's a young Aboriginal boy who's not even—he's about 2 years old, and I got to meet Charlie. And Charlie was—when I met him, he was counting. You know, he'd say, one, two, three, and so I went and asked one of the workers, I said, how old is Charlie? And what I found, Charlie was actually three months younger than my own son, Hayden. And between my wife and I, we have five university degrees, and Charlie's literacy, language and numeracy skills were already at a level above where my son was at.

And so, when we make these kinds of investments, when we—and, you know, that came from the first of its kind in the country, the Abecedarian Approach, an enriched daycare, an enriched child-care centre to support young people. We know when we're collecting this kind of information, we know when we're getting this kind of data that we can make huge improvements. So, when you take someone like Charlie, when he actually enters school now, he is not only going to have an ability to improve his academic achievement and have the same start as most children, but he's actually going to have a deeper sense of belonging in that school. And, you know, Charlie's story doesn't stop there. What was very interesting is that his mom, who comes from a background of trauma and some incredibly difficult circumstances, she had been inspired by her own son to go back to school and actually now is in a literacy program and getting her literacy and eventually going to go down to get her GED.

And so, Mr. Speaker, when we get the opportunity to talk about early childhood development, we get to talk about, you know, things like, you know, the things that we're hearing here this morning, The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act, we understand how important it is, and I was glad to speak on it last year, and we're going to continue to have more screening, not less, and continue to expand our services.

And thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): It's a pleasure to be here to speak to something so important. My niece was born in the early '80s and a—with a hearing difficulty that has certainly made her life much more difficult. And at that time we didn't have the kind of screening available in all kinds of areas that I'm pleased to say that we have now.

I think it's so important that you show your support by actions and I think that's what we've done. That's what we've been doing in this province, showing our support for this kind of thing by what we're doing. We are rolling out, we've led—had a leading role in newborn health and improving newborn health and improving health prenatally as the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities noted—

* (11:00)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Burrows will have nine minutes remaining.

The hour being 11 a.m., it's time for private member's resolution, and the resolution under consideration this morning is the one sponsored by the honourable member for St. Paul titled "Manitoba Hydro Rate Hikes".

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 6—Manitoba Hydro Rate Hikes

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): I move, seconded by the member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Cullen),

WHEREAS Manitoba Hydro's electricity rates increased by 8 per cent over the last 12 months; and

WHEREAS electricity rates are expected to double over the next 20 years due to annual increases of 4 per cent; and

WHEREAS the Public Utilities Board has expressed concerns about potentially larger-than-anticipated costs at Manitoba Hydro which could result in the possibility of more rate increases in the future.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba acknowledge that these rate hikes compound the financial hardship of Manitoba families imposed by the provincial government through tax and fee increases.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for St. Paul, seconded by the honourable member for Spruce—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense? Dispense.

Mr. Schuler: This resolution is very important. I know all members of the House have been getting a lot of pressure from the public on the issues that are raised in this particular resolution. I know for us here

in PC caucus, that we have received thousands, and I mean thousands, of letters from constituents. They are stacked up on the desks of MLAs, of individuals that are downright hostile and angry towards this NDP government for the fact that they have raised the PST to 8 per cent and have raised hydro rates by 8 per cent over 12 months. On top of the thousands of letters, we have received, and I'm sure members opposite have received, thousands of emails from angry constituents, and on top of that, hundreds of phone calls.

Manitobans are very upset because in the 2011 election campaign, the NDP went out and promised that they would not raise taxes—not just not raise the PST, but they would raise no taxes. That was their commitment and Manitobans found out right after—right after the election campaign, all members—all NDP members who got elected on that promise, the public found out that each and every one of them, that the NDP party had lied, and that's very unfortunate, Mr. Speaker.

What they didn't realize on top of that, the PST lie, was that the hydro rates were also going to be jacked up 8 per cent within 12 months. And Manitobans are shocked at this because really when you look at the consumer tax—in fact, a good friend of the NDP, Cosmos, was talking to me the other day and he had indicated to the NDP over the years that when you go to pay the PST, they don't say at the desk, oh, so are you on social assistance? Are you struggling, you know, are you under the poverty line? You know, how are you doing financially? That tax must be paid—everybody has to pay that tax, and the NDP have basically attacked low-income families, single-parent families, struggling middle-class families. They have attacked the bedrock of this province, the working men and women who are struggling to put their kids through sports and music and dance.

We've gotten emails and letters where individuals have indicated that now it's coming down to choices. There is only so much you can squeeze out of a taxpayer, and at some point in time something has to give. And that's where Manitobans are, that's where families are, and the NDP have done that. And what's so shameful is in the 2011 election campaign the Leader of the NDP said: Read my lips, no new taxes. He said that not just would there not be a PST increase, there would be no taxes. The NDP got elected and within their first year they barely had put away the election lawn signs, they had barely cleaned off the dirt off of their election sticks

and put them in their garages, and they were already in this Chamber raising taxes. Over two years they have raised over \$500 million in taxes on weary Manitobans.

The NDP said that the economy is struggling, that there is a slowdown in the economy. Well, I would suggest to this House, Mr. Speaker, that it's families that are bearing the brunt of that slowdown. It's working men and women. It's those who are barely making it by. It's those families, men and women, who are going to food banks, that are being hardest hit by a downturn in the economy.

So what does the NDP do? Taxes them even more, raises their hydro even more. Eight per cent hydro increase in one year is unbelievable; it's unprecedented. But not with the NDP. Within a couple of years of getting elected, they have hammered and hammered the public of Manitoba, hard-working families, single parents. They have hammered each and every one of them with hydro rate increases and PST increases, and PST applied to the house insurance. Now a family that has to decide, you know, should we insure the house, and, yes, they should, or does that mean that our kids can't get into a music program or can't get into a sports program. They have to choose, and in the end they'll choose to protect the home. They're going to have to protect their finances. Often, you can't get a mortgage without showing that you have insurance on the house.

But that doesn't matter—that doesn't matter to the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), the disgraced campaign manager from the 1999 campaign. That doesn't matter to him because he is so, so settled in his ivory tower office here at the Legislature. You know, people are picketing outside and demonstrating and saying, you know, when will the NDP account for the fact that they ran on a lie in the last campaign? And where was the member for Kildonan? He was scurrying out the side door.

This resolution clearly lays out—clearly lays out—that the government is bringing financial hardship on families through tax and fee increases, through hydro rate increases. And we know that members opposite are sensitive about this. We know that. We know that when the rally was held, they were not to be seen. In fact, they couldn't get out of this building fast enough. And when individuals were approaching them on the side doors, there was a—there was phone calls being made—oh, don't go out that door; there—whole bunch of constituents there. So they quickly

scurried out the other door. And then the phone call came to them: oh, there are people at this door. So quickly they would scurry out a different door. They couldn't get out of here fast enough, as long as they didn't have to look in the whites of the eyes of those individuals that are being hurt, that are being penalized and punished by an NDP PST rate increase, by a hydro rate increase that is, for some families, unsustainable, that they can barely handle it.

And if they are reading, if members on the NDP benches are actually reading the thousands of letters that are coming in, the thousands of emails that are coming in, if they're listening to their phone calls—the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), I'm sure he's listening to those phone calls. At least I hope he is, although he didn't have the courage to go out and speak to the individuals who were protesting against his government's decision. And for that matter, no NDP MLA had the courage to go out and speak to those individuals. But they should be. They should be listening to those phone calls, reading those letters and there are some unbelievable cries of help where individuals are saying, this is too much, you are taking too much from us, you are hurting our finances to the point where very painful decisions are being made.

And that's the recourse—and, frankly, the government should at least have the courage, when they make a decision as punitive as what they've been making, at least to have the courage to go out and explain yourself. Go out and explain to individuals what it is that you've done and why you think it's done. And whether people will agree with you or not, that's a different matter. But at least have the courage to go out there and talk to them and explain to them why it is that in the 2011 campaign, the member for Kildonan, the disgraced campaign manager from the 1999 campaign, he should have had the courage—he should have had the courage to go out there and explain to them. He should have said to them why it was that the financial hardship on Manitoba families was imposed by this government through tax and fee increases. He should have had that courage to do it.

* (11:10)

The member for Rossmere (Ms. Braun), she should have had the courage to do it. The member for St. Norbert (Mr. Gaudreau), the member for—

An Honourable Member: Dawson Trail.

Mr. Schuler: –Dawson Trail (Mr. Lemieux) should have had the courage. But he didn't. He did not have the courage to go out there and explain why this was taking place.

We know why. We know why—that they want this tax to go away in three years, that they will try to buy their way into one more campaign. I don't think—I don't think—Manitobans are going to forget this so easily; they are going to be paying for this PST increase and for all the rate increases for the \$500 million in taxes that they have now taken out of the economy out of Manitobans' pockets. They are not going to forget this, and I would ask the House to do the right thing. Each and every one of the NDP members should get up and speak to this resolution and they should pass it and let it go. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I want to just put a few facts on the record.

First off, Mr. Speaker, Manitoba has the lowest hydroelectric rates in the country. Manitoba will have the lowest hydroelectric rates in the country. The policy of the opposition is to go to market rates, which would at least double the rates in Manitoba, and that's if they didn't privatize. But I digress. Let me—it was only about a week ago when I read a quote from Saskatchewan talking about Saskatchewan spending \$15 billion to renew coal and to do nuclear. And the member for St. Paul was slinking down; he thought he had us. He said, whoa, this quote—this quote—they're spending \$15 billion to renew something; I've got them. And then when I read it was Saskatchewan that was doing that he slunk lower into his seat and lower—so low I could hardly see him. And they forgot the fact that we are a hydro province. We have the capacity to have production of another 2,500 megawatts of power. And to the east and to the west they are in trouble. In Saskatchewan, they increased their rates 4.9 per cent. The member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler) kind of ignores that. In Ontario, it's been more than that. In Ontario, they're short power; they're looking for Manitoba power. In Saskatchewan, they're short power; they're looking for Manitoba power. Why? Because it's cheap and because it's clean. And it's fact our hydro is considered a premium product as declared by the State of Wisconsin.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to the fundamental issue. Members opposite simply have not built hydro. They don't believe in hydro—

notwithstanding that we're a hydro province. And the problem with the Tory hate on hydro is they don't think past tomorrow. They think just about tomorrow. We have to think 10 years out. Our load is growing at 80 megawatts at least a year. By 2022, we will not have enough power in our system. Now, the member for St. Paul would say, well, just go get it from—get it from where? Do we get it from coal from Saskatchewan? Do we buy it from coal from Ontario? Or perhaps we go to Ontario and get natural gas, as they did, where they're now dismantling two plants at a cost of half a billion dollars to dismantle two plants on bad decisions made 10 years ago to go to natural gas. And I might add the members opposite would be just sort of like someone who goes to a flea market and buys the first thing they see without thinking that the money in their pocket has to pay for the mortgage 10 years down the road. Members opposite would cancel projects that take nine years to develop—nine or 10 years to develop. You can't build a hydro dam in—you can't build a hydro dam by flicking a switch. Indeed, it takes long lead planning, but it lasts for a hundred years.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, we're renewing the plan to Pointe du Bois right now. It was built a hundred years ago, and only now after a hundred years of use are we renewing it. And it costs millions of dollars to do that, but the dam will produce the power for a hundred years. Another misconception and wrong fact—and I don't use the word lie in this House as members opposite do—but another wrong fact put on the record is that, yes, we are selling power on the spot market. That power would be spilled at the dams if we didn't sell it. That is surplus power. It would go nowhere. It would spill over and value nothing. At least we get some money in the spot market. Our power that we're selling to US, if the member would spend any time, and I—reading the presentation given by Manitoba Hydro, would find out that the power we're selling to United States is double or triple the number that the Leader of the Opposition uses every day in the House. So, they confuse the facts, they misrepresent the facts and they don't do justice to a province that's a hydro province.

We're not an oil province. Yes, we have 50,000 barrels a day, but we're not going to have the \$700,000 that they have in the Bakken region of North Dakota, nor the 2 million barrels a day they have in Saskatchewan, nor the 800,000 barrels a day they have—pardon me, the 2 million in Alberta, 800,000 in Saskatchewan. But, Mr. Speaker, we're a

hydro province and our power is considered premium, clean, renewable.

Now, when you build a hydro dam, it might cost—you're amortizing the cost over a 50–30-year period. And, Mr. Speaker, the cost of the power goes down. The cost of the power at Limestone that members opposite called lemonstone and wanted to cancel, has earned us \$6 billion—six times the cost, and that's because we thought ahead.

Our cost for hydro will keep us the lowest in the country, and we've guaranteed that by legislation. And, you know, Mr. Speaker, you have to make a decision. Power and energy is fundamental to an economy. One of the reasons we have one of the—a balanced economy is our hydro. One of the reasons we have companies coming to Manitoba, even though members opposite don't want to create jobs like Canadian Tire, is because of hydro. One of the reasons that members opposite, who brag about all of their companies that create jobs—and, yes, companies create jobs—a lot of those jobs are because of the low hydroelectric rates across this province. A lot of those—and members opposite forget that we equalized the hydro rates across the province. You used to pay more in rural Manitoba than you do in Winnipeg, and we equalized, and members opposite voted against it; every single one of them voted against equalized hydro rates across the province.

Mr. Speaker, we're building not just for tomorrow, but for tomorrow's tomorrow. You can't wake up one day, as they have in provinces beside us, and say, we need the power.

Saskatchewan needs as much power as Manitoba needs. They need as much power as we need, and what do they have to do? They're spending \$15 billion to renew coal, to bring in nuclear and to buy power. Now, we're spending \$20 billion to develop 2,500 megawatts of power that will last a hundred years. Of that we have fixed contracts of \$7 billion, potentially \$29 billion when the contacts will roll over, and we'll be able to provide power not only just to Saskatchewan, but to Ontario. And, Mr. Speaker, not only will it keep our electricity rates the lowest in the country, we'll be reducing greenhouse gas emissions, something members opposite don't acknowledge and don't maintain.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when we developed wind power, members opposite said, oh, more wind power, more wind power—we have to pay for that. But, you know, when it comes to paying for it, members don't want to pay for it. They don't want to

develop hydro. We built the biggest wind farm in Canada in the last two years, and members opposite—we had to pay for that. And members opposite wouldn't proceed with that. You know, they're—they—we would've ended up paying for what, coal? Oh, our—now, members opposite might argue, well, we should use the natural gas bubble.

Yes, natural gas is an all-time low. In the last five years, natural gas has vial—has gone up and down in price by 600 per cent. Do the members want us to hitch our wagon to a fossil fuel that has gone 600 per cent difference in the last five years? That would be foolish when we have hydro, when we're a hydro province. It's no—it is not a—it is not by coincidence that the three lowest high—the three lowest energy costs in the country are the three hydro provinces of Québec, BC and Manitoba. That's because we invested in the past. Members opposite wanted to do coal, they wanted to do fossil fuel—we did hydro, Mr. Speaker.

We have the lowest rates. Now we want to invest in the future so we'll have cheap hydro. We can develop it now. We can use export revenues to help capitalize it, and that's only fair, and our US customers and our Saskatchewan customers and our Ontario customers understand that. And, Mr. Speaker, we can create 2,000 jobs over a four-year period. We can share the revenue with the people that live in that area for the first time, not flood them out like members opposite did—flood out and not pay any compensation to thousands of people.

* (11:20)

And, you know, Mr. Speaker—[interjection] And I want to remind the member for St. Paul, he keeps talking about the '99 election. I know he doesn't go back, but I seem to remember we won that election and the member opposite, particularly St. Paul, keeps wanting to go back to that election, go back to that election, go back to that election.

The point is, Mr. Speaker, we're developing Hydro for the future in a common sense way. We want Hydro to keep Manitoba of the lowest long-term rates. We want to reduce the risk of drought. We want to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We want to provide 22,000 person-years of employment. The best way to do it—and we're doing an NFAT on that. We'll see what happens at NFAT. I hope the member for St. Paul goes and makes a presentation about how he's going to prepare for the future and deal with our energy shortage by 2022. I want to hear the Conservative option, other

than privatizing or going for coal, what they're going to do for energy in this province to build this province, keep businesses coming in, companies like Rolls-Royce, companies like Canadian Tire, companies like Pratt & Whitney, worldwide companies that are coming to Manitoba because they know it's the best place in the country to do business and has the lowest hydro rates in the country, both residentially and commercially.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for St. Paul.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to enter into a debate on this resolution brought forward by the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler). Always interesting to have a resolution brought forward, so we can have an open and honest discussion and debate this morning about electricity and Manitoba Hydro.

And I say open and honest debate because when you follow the member for Kildonan, he was all over the map here this morning and throwing on all kinds of innuendos and rewriting history and all the things that he's so good at doing, Mr. Speaker. So there's certainly a lot of things that stand to be corrected here this morning.

Clearly, hydro rates are going up, electricity rates, 8 per cent here in Manitoba and over the course of a year. And I think the fact remains, as the member pointed out this morning, that it—impacting a lot of—some of Manitoba's most vulnerable, and I talk about people on low incomes and I talk about seniors on fixed incomes. Certainly, an 8 per cent increase in the electricity rates are going to have an impact on those people. It's going to be quite dramatic.

Now, I know most of the members opposite here, they—they're probably okay. They're heating most of their houses with natural gas or some form of propane or gas and it's—they don't have to—they're not impacted as much by the 8 per cent increase in electricity rates, but for those of us in rural Manitoba that don't have accessibility to natural gas, we're forced to heat our homes with straight electricity. So, Mr. Speaker, clearly, those people in rural Manitoba will be impacted even greater by those that have the ability to have their homes heated by natural gas. So it will impact negatively a lot of rural customers as well, and certainly customers in some of the small towns that don't have access to gas. So I wanted to make sure that the members were aware of that.

Now, clearly, I think we, as government, should be making our decisions based on good public policy. What is good for the province of Manitoba in the long term?

And we believe in Manitoba Hydro. We believe in Manitoba Hydro, and we believe there's good managers at Manitoba Hydro. The issue we have with the NDP government, Mr. Speaker, is these ministers over here in this government getting involved in the day-to-day operations of Manitoba Hydro. They're making political decisions and not basing them on sound business decisions which is best for the province of Manitoba. And that's where we have an issue with the government, where they're interfering with the good management at Manitoba Hydro. Now they're making decisions, political decisions, that aren't in the best interest, the long-term best interest of Manitobans.

I think it's important to look at why we're being faced with these 8 per cent increase in rates. Now, clearly, the Public Utilities Board is—act as the regulator in terms of prices, have asked Manitoba Hydro for information, information from the past, information going forward. And for some reason, the NDP have decided to tell Manitoba Hydro, don't supply that information to the Public Utilities Board.

What is the NDP government trying to hide? What is Manitoba Hydro trying to hide from the Public Utilities Board, Mr. Speaker? It's—some—that information should be available to the Public Utilities Board so they can make accurate assessments in terms of what our hydro rates should be into the future. So it's very important.

So, Mr. Speaker, you know, the minister goes on talking about hydro and how it's so good for the development of Manitoba. Well, where have they gone with it? We're at a record level of debt here in the Province of Manitoba. We've got more Manitobans leaving the province than ever before, and we're paying the highest—highest—amount of debt-servicing cost ever.

Mr. Speaker, we had a Public Accounts meeting last night. The debt-servicing cost at the end of 2012, for Manitoba Hydro alone, were \$423 million a year; \$423 million a year is what Manitoba was paying for interest costs back at the end of 2012. That doesn't include the \$815 million that we, as a Province, were paying.

Mr. Speaker, we were paying \$1.2 billion a year in debt-servicing cost at the end of 2012, and you

know where that's going to go if you have a look at this budget? It's going higher. We are going to be forced to pay more and more money just to service the debt.

And, Mr. Speaker, if you look at what Manitoba Hydro is proposing, or maybe the NDP government is proposing, is another \$21-billion investment. But all that money that has to be spent will have to be borrowed. So if we're going to borrow and add another \$21 billion of debt to the Province of Manitoba, that is a substantial amount of money that's going to be paid for by our children and their children. So—very important that we have an open and honest discussion about where we're at now and where we're going into the future.

Now, the other point I just want to close with, Mr. Speaker, is it's pretty clear this government has used Manitoba Hydro as a bit of a cash cow as well. You know, back in 2012, the Province charges Manitoba Hydro a—to guarantee their debt. That cost Manitoba Hydro ratepayers \$86 million in 2012, \$86 million that the NDP took out of Manitoba Hydro just to guarantee their debt. At the same time, during that year, the NDP charged Manitoba Hydro \$111 million just to use the water resource here in Manitoba—\$111 million. If you add those two figures up, that's almost \$200 million the NDP took out of the pockets of Manitoba ratepayers just for those two fees alone, so it's a pretty dramatic amount of money.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on at length, but I'm certainly interested to hear what the members opposite have to say on this good resolution. And really, I think it's up to the government just to acknowledge that these fee increases will have a financial hardship on many Manitoba families across our great province. Thank you.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Mr. Speaker, and it's interesting to note that historically, the Conservatives have always been on the losing side of the hydro argument in this province. The fact of the matter is that it's—they actually have no coherent platform on hydro. As a matter of fact, we can only put together what we get, in terms of pieces, here and there from them. One of their previous leader—their previous leader was wanting to raise hydro rates to market rates, and then they complain when the rates go up like 4 per cent, when their former leader wanted to jack up the rates through the roof.

In fact, this party, the Conservative Party, has been known in the past as the mothball party. I recall the Hydro expansions of the 1970s, and to give them

some credit, they—the—one of the original plants was built by Duff Roblin back in the 1960s, but beyond that, there's been no real construction programs supported by the Conservatives. So it was the Schreyer government, the eight years in the Schreyer government, where we had a huge building program up in the north.

Now, when it came to 1977, the plan was, at that time, to build the Limestone generating station which, by the way, is still the largest in Manitoba, at 1,340 megawatts of capacity. And you know, it was Sterling Lyon who, when he became premier, under his program of acute, protracted restraint, that mothballed Limestone—shut it down. This is a dam that we have made, we had made, came in on time, on budget, and since the time it was constructed has made the people of Manitoba \$6 billion. They shut it down, and the Liberal leader at—of the day, back in 1981 and '82, when Howard Pawley became the premier and started to construct Limestone, the Liberal leader called it lemonstone. And the Conservatives no—were no better. They went along with her characterization at the—so it was the NDP—the Howard Pawley government—the NDP government of Howard Pawley who actually built Limestone.

* (11:30)

Now, we have been trying for a number of years to increase the—to build more of these plants, and following Limestone, there was discussion with the Ontario government to build a power grid—a power line to Ontario so that we could develop the Conawapa project. And, by the way, the Conawapa project would have been the largest—will be the largest in Manitoba at 1,485 megawatts.

And just so the members know that we have a total—in Manitoba—capacity of just over 5,000 megawatts, but we have a potential of double that. We have a potential of 10,000 megawatts. We are only halfway to—we're only halfway there, and it's NDP governments that have built almost all of the megawatt capacity.

You know, they may have built a few plants a hundred years ago, but they're very small. They're Pointe du Bois, you know, 75 megawatts; Slave Falls, 67; compared to Limestone at 1,340. Just one of our plants is way larger than all of their plants put together that they had built over the years. So for the public to trust them to fulfill the mandate here and flesh out and build the capacity of Manitoba up to the maximum of 10,000—to trust them to do it, the

public will know that historically, they've not been there. They've been asleep at the switch and they've been unable and unwilling to build these plants.

So—but what we have is just basically complaining on the part of the—of this mothball party. I don't see any vision from them. As a matter of fact, we've spoken several times here already about the need to connect to Ontario, to connect to Saskatchewan, to sell power to Ontario, to sell power to Saskatchewan. And if they would just get onside, rather than being negative about things, and support it.

Their own federal government actually supports an east-west power grid. They've made an effort in the past, but it was thwarted by Premier McGuinty six years ago. But we have new players on the scene now, and so there's every possibility with all this money that's going to be spent.

And they know there's money going to be spent in the next couple of years on infrastructure. When this federal infrastructure money arrives next year, we should be in a position to be able to request that this grid be built. Well, now, how—if that were so—and if we were able to do it, then how would we justify the grid? When we've got willing buyers in Ontario, willing buyers in Saskatchewan and Alberta who want this done, and a willing federal government and provincial government that want it to accomplish this, then how are we going to do all of this if we don't proceed and build a bipole and we don't proceed and build the next in the series of the plants?

It's all—it's all one big project to the members of the opposition. So when they bring in private members' resolutions like this, basically talking about one small aspect—a 4 per cent increase in hydro rates—and spend time in the Legislature actually debating everything but what's actually in the PMR.

The member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler), the critic, you know, it's his own PMR and he didn't spend more than a minute even referencing the PMR. He wanted to talk about a 300-person demonstration out front and people sneaking out doors—stuff like this. He wants to talk about, you know, tax increases when his mayor—the conservative mayor of Winnipeg—is raising property taxes by \$387. That's more than what will be involved in the PST. Where's the demonstration down at City Hall? The taxes, the City taxes this year are going to be \$539 a year—more than the provincial taxes. That's quoted by their own

newspaper, the Winnipeg Sun, for—well, why don't they go out and demonstrate down there?

So the fact of the matter is that there's a lot of issues on hydro here that they actually don't know whether to—which way to turn on this, to be honest with you. I don't think they really know. I think they're really wary—worried that we're actually going to be successful, that we're actually going to get the power grid built, that we're going to get the bipole built, that we're going to build these—we're going to build the rest of the plants to get us up to the 10,000 megawatts so that we can supply clean power to not only, Mr. Speaker, to United States sources, but also Canadian sources.

And I don't know what the member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Cullen) has—why he has a problem with selling power to the United States. But we say, we don't have a problem selling power to United States; we actually want to sell it to Canadians. We have a vision that they don't have, that they have never had, in this province, in that we want to be able to build a power grid across Canada. We want to be able to sell that clean power to Saskatchewan, because as the minister had just pointed out a few minutes ago, that Saskatchewan is spending \$15 billion developing coal plants and gas plants, which is totally not an environmentally sound way to proceed, when you could have the benefit of clean hydro power.

And Alberta—why is Alberta so interested? Alberta's interested in power. Matter of fact, there've been suggestions made that we could run a DC line from northern Manitoba right to Fort McMurray, and the Albertans would be—Alberta would be thrilled, would be really thrilled about that prospect.

So I would suggest that the Conservatives—the Conservative opposition should get its head out of the sand instead of—its head out of the sand and start looking forward rather than being back, rather than being disruptive, rather than slowing down progress.

You know, perhaps these members should go up and take a tour of some of these hydro plants. Many years ago, we did that. I don't think these members have ever seen a hydro plant. They wouldn't even know what it was if they were standing right in front of a hydro plant. I suggest they get in their cars—

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

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the resolution brought forward by the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler).

You know, we all use hydro in Manitoba, and to come along in one year, raise the rates by 8 per cent, you've got to ask yourselves what's causing these sharp increases of rates. Those rates went up 8 per cent in the last year. But on top of that, they're compounded. They're professing to put them up by 3 and a half to 4 per cent every year from, I mean, now on to somewhere in the eternity. And every time they do that, it's compounded; you're paying the extra increase on what was already there. And now they're putting in a 1 per cent provincial sales tax increase, which goes against that hydro bill and adds to it. It takes advantage of the people that are least able to pay.

Now, when you take a look at actually why these hydro rates are going up, it's mostly because of political interference. When this NDP government went into power, they—Manitoba Hydro was paying about \$50 million a year for the use of the water that went through their dams. That's been raised to somewhere around \$120 million now, and that's basically a tax against Hydro. That's why our rates are going up. They pull an extra \$120 million every year into provincial coffers out of Manitoba Hydro.

And one year in the not too distant past, to balance their budget, they pulled out an extra \$203 million. Those are the things that are pushing the hydro rates up.

When they go out and build the Hydro building, say it's going to come in at a \$80-million cost, and the cost comes in at four times that, that's what pushes the hydro rates.

* (11:40)

Wuskwatim dam, supposed to be an eight- to nine-hundred-million-dollar dam, came in at \$1.6 billion, and that's the figure we're hearing. It may well be higher than that. There's an awful lot of things that could've been accomplished in this province if they had of brought that one in on budget, an extra \$800 million to be spent elsewhere.

And now the biggest boondoggle of the whole works: the routing of the Bipole III line. It's going to cost an extra billion dollars to take the long way around. For whatever reasons that may be, it's going to cost an extra billion dollars, and what does a billion dollars do? A billion dollars would hire 10,000 nurses. A billion dollars would buy every cow in Manitoba. You could be the biggest rancher in Manitoba. A billion dollars would buy a million acres of farmland in this province. You could be the

biggest farmer in the province. I'm touching on some of my background when I bring up those figures, but a billion dollars would buy 10 to 12 midsize hospitals. It would probably buy about 20 bridges. You know, and going that longer route around—and now they've got two First Nations entered into a lawsuit against that routing of the Manitoba Hydro.

They talk about protecting the boreal forest. Well, UNESCO appears to be not satisfied with their application of the boreal forest anyhow, and this is at the time when they're punching a road up the east side that takes up far more territory than the bipole line would. Actually, the bipole line could be twinned with that road and not have very much more of a footprint or an impact on that side. But when they come around the other way, they're running it through a far smaller ecosystem that to me is more—is just as important as the boreal forest, and that's the Parkland forest system on the east side—on the west side—which is the Bipole III lines going to punch right through the middle of it and then down through the best agricultural land in this province, and that is just sheer insanity, down through the best agricultural land in this province. It's going to disrupt farming operations. It's going to disrupt all the things that farmers do on their property. Irrigation, you can't have irrigation when you got hydro towers sitting. It just doesn't work. You can't do aerial spraying where you've got hydro lines, and potatoes require aerial spray. It's just a fact of life that they have to put on air-applied fungicides.

You know, if that isn't enough, that extra billion dollars might be able to go to fixing some of Hydro's aging infrastructure. We're seeing more and more outages in the province, especially in the city of Winnipeg, and that's because of aging infrastructure more than anything else. And there's an increasing number of it and a billion dollars, I think, if it was used there, would go a long way toward improving that infrastructure.

They talk about security on that Bipole III line, and I agree we do need a line somewhere else that—to provide security to the whole system. But then they go along a route that takes them within 40 kilometres of the other two bipole lines. That's not secure. Go down the east side of Lake Winnipeg where you do have a separation distance and a different weather pattern, then you have some security.

You know, I just can't understand why they—the NDP will plow blindly ahead on a premise—on a premise— of a market that may well not even be

there. They are developing their gas resources in the northern United States at a massive rate, and it makes no sense for us to be producing power at 10 cents or 12 cents a kilowatt and then selling it for three. How long do you survive in a business if you're producing something for 10 cents and selling it for three? Like here's—I'll give you 10 bucks, you give me three back and we'll call it fair. Well, yes, that doesn't work for very long. My wallet's going to be pretty empty, and that's exactly what they're doing. It's—they're doing this on a premise that the markets will develop if it's there. They're doing it in a way that's going to put us behind the eight ball for years and years and years to come, and harness our children with more debt than enough.

So I commend—compliment my colleague from St. Paul for bringing forward this resolution. It gives us a chance to have a debate on this issue, put some of the thoughts on the record, and it's certainly an issue that needs to be discussed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs): I'm proud to put a few words on this very amusing resolution from the Conservative Party.

I find it interesting that the resolution talks about rake—rate hikes that compound the financial hardship on Manitobans' families when the former leader of the Conservative Party talked about bringing it to market rates, which would have more than doubled the cost to the average Manitoban. So you're talking in excess of a hundred per cent increase as a policy endorsed by the Conservative Party, and then they're complaining. Because their policy is to double the rates over a hundred per cent as an official party policy, and they complain about a 4 per cent rate. And to me, I do—I am concerned about a 4 per cent increase, but then I also look at other activities by Manitoba Hydro that we have been able to implement as policy in Hydro and in the government.

An example is when the Conservatives were in power we were dead last on energy efficiency. And when I think about it, they did not care about the poor people, they did not care about the seniors, they did not care about the average Manitobans. They wanted them to pay and pay and pay. I am pleased that through policies from the Crown corporation we have moved from dead last under the Conservative government to the best in the country. And, Mr. Speaker, for anyone who understands math, the best saving is one where you don't have to pay the money

in the first place. So if you put in more insulation—oh, that's a program supported by Hydro. If you get a new furnace—oh, that's a program by Hydro. If you get more windows, you can get a program supported by Hydro. If you get savings even in water, it's a program supported by Hydro. And you know, we've also done projects that are supported in First Nations. We've done programs like BUILD and BEEP that support people who are poor, who used to pay the highest energy bills, that now have good energy efficiency and lower bills. I think that that is socially responsible, and, you know, we're not using energy. People aren't paying the bills they are because we've moved from dead last under the Conservatives to the best in the country, and I think that's a positive motion. Because what you're doing is you're saving energy, which is a resource. And I think it's—I can't use the h-word, as in—because it's unparliamentary, so I'll say hilarious that they try to compare our rates to the over a hundred per cent increase that they had as a policy from the Conservative government.

The other thing that I find is rather hilarious is that under the Conservative government, when different members, all the rural members, were saying that they supported their residents and their constituents, they had a differentiated hydro rate where northern residents and rural residents paid higher than the city residents. I think it's rather funny that they purport to support rural Manitobans, and you have members, like Spruce Woods—the member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Cullen), that actually say, I support my people, but I think that they should have paid more money than people in the city paid for hydro. I think it was very good where we said all Manitobans should benefit from a Manitoban Crown corporation, a Manitoban resource, and I think that it's very positive that we equalized hydro rates for all Manitobans.

And, Mr. Speaker, I look at it this way. When you're looking at policies, here's an interesting comment: What has the Conservative government built in hydro in the last 50 years? There's a great list; it is nothing. It is nothing.

* (11:50)

So I am pleased to say that they—and it's on the record—when the NDP government started building Limestone and it cost—yes, it did cost money to build Limestone—but it has had a return on investment of 500 per cent. And that is going to return—that return on investment isn't just for the last 30 years, it's going to be lasting for many, many decades.

And so they keep on commenting about what the return on investment is. Let's talk about some economic reality. When the Conservatives were in power the debt-to-equity ratio on hydro was 90 per cent debt to 10 per cent equity. Under our management of this government the debt-to-equity ratio is 75-25 per cent. That means we have improved it where we have less debt for the amount of assets that that company enjoys. We have invested.

And as minister of energy, in the past, I know that there was reports in the '90s that they needed to do something about transmission. What did the Tories do about transmission? Nothing. There was reports on how they should look at future economic opportunities. What did the Tories do? Nothing. They had reports on how they should do energy efficiency. And guess what the Tories did? Nothing.

And, you know, Mr. Speaker, I look at what they've done to hydro. They have a policy to sell hydro, they have a policy right now from the Leader of the Opposition that they do not want to build new hydro capacity.

And to me—I hate to say this—it makes sense to me, absolute sense, to have an asset that you build. You sell the power to a third party; the US, Ontario, Saskatchewan. They give you money; they give you money so you don't have to pay for that asset when you need the power. It's a very simple concept; even the member who was talking about Hydro buying cows should understand that.

We should understand that if you build an asset, if you build an asset—like a dam—and you sell 10 or 20 years of power, you pay for that asset. So Manitobans get an asset paid by a third party. That, Mr. Speaker, is good economics and it makes good sense. And you know, I know the members opposite complain about their telephone system, but it's funny when you hear crowing across the way about, oh, we don't have a telephone system.

And by the way, Mr. Speaker, we have high rates. In fact the rates doubled in a matter of 10 years. And I find it interesting that they crow that they need better service and they crow that they need better rates, but they sold a Crown utility that provided an important service.

Mr. Speaker, I believe hydro is our future. I believe it should benefit all Manitobans. The past policy directions of the members opposite, whether

they wanted to double the rates to every Manitoban, whether they wanted to make sure that there was no energy efficiency projects so that people paid and paid and paid for their monthly costs or whether the poorest people had the highest energy bills. That is unconscionable.

I believe that we need to have a Crown utility that is good for people, that provides benefits and equal rates across the province. And I believe that hydro is truly our future. And I differ from the member opposite because the member opposite was talking about having good economic policy, good social policy and if I compare what the Conservatives have done in the past that is not an accurate statement. They have been the—not the Progressive Conservative but the regressive Conservative Party. And they've been regressive on the social policy, on the economic policy and even on simple things that I really thought previously they'd get—which is simple, basic math. Debt to equity, having someone else pay for your asset you're acquiring and having people pay lower hydro bills is a good thing.

And so I am surprised that they have a record over the last 10 years to vote against all those things. I believe that we have a vision of the policy that Manitobans can embrace. And Mr. Speaker, I am very, very shocked—I'm very shocked that the members opposite had continued to shut—try to shut that vision down.

Thank you, very, very much, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to recognizing the next speaker on this matter, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today the family members of our page Austin Amy. We have Gene Amy, who is the mother of our page, and Peter and Esther Haluschak, family friends. And on behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you this afternoon—this morning.

House Business

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

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Steinbach, on House business.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, I'm seeking leave of the House—I know there's other members on the other

side who want to speak to this resolution—to allow us not to see the clock so they can have the opportunity to speak and bring this motion to a vote.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to allow the House not to see the clock at 12 noon, to allow the debate to continue?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: I hear a no. It's been denied.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Now, is there another—the honourable member for Selkirk.

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to make a few comments this morning on this resolution brought forward by the member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler). I enjoyed his comments. He didn't talk at all about hydro, unfortunately, in his comments. He talked about some rally and he talked about a few other things about some rally outside. Regrettably, he didn't say anything about the importance that hydro plays in our province and in our economy.

I thought maybe the member for St. Paul would talk a little bit about his history when it comes to power lines, Mr. Speaker, because I remember when he was first elected, he used to bring in petition after petition suggesting that the Hydro—well, he wanted to politically interfere in the decision made by Hydro that did not put a hydro line through East St. Paul. I remember that because he—one of the—one of his points in his resolution was that hydro lines cause cancer. But nevertheless, so I was—I wanted to see if—him to make some clarity on that, but because we know that there, in fact, there is a split in the Conservative caucus when it comes to Bipole III.

We know that the members on the western side of the province would like to see that line go down the eastern side of the province. And we know that the members from the eastern side of the province are completely content to have this line go down the western side of the province.

Because I'm sure the member, as the member said, the member for St. Paul and the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), they secretly don't want this line to go down the eastern side. They don't want this to go through their community. They don't

want this line to be rammed right through Beausejour. They don't want this Bipole III to be going right down East St. Paul.

The member stood up, the member stood up every day in this House, and he tabled a petition, every single day in this—he tabled a petition saying, I don't want any hydro lines coming through my area; I don't want any lines coming through East St. Paul; I don't want any lines coming through Springfield. But now, Mr. Speaker, now he pretends that he, in fact, does. I was hoping to have a little bit of clarity from the member opposite.

But as we said many times, Mr. Speaker, we need no lessons from these titans of industry across the way, these captains of commerce, who bought a money-losing gas company, Centra Gas, and they sold a money-making telephone company, MTS. Now, that debate—we've had that debate in this House many times. We don't need any lessons from them when it comes to that. We know that the Centra Gas was losing money, but they bought it. We know that Manitoba—after the taxpayers, after the ratepayers of Manitoba Telephone System invested over a billion dollars upgrading the system in the early '90s, in the late '80s and the early '90s, they sold it off. And we know they sold it off to their friends. We know that was certainly one of the largest scandals in the history of this province.

The member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau) talked a lot about the issue of equalized rates, and I was very proud to be a part of a government that, in fact, lowered rates for rural Manitobans. We equalized rates. You know, the member for St. Paul didn't talk about the fact that he voted against lowering rates, and the member for Lac du Bonnet didn't talk about the fact that they voted against lowering rates, and the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) didn't talk—just a minute ago he stood up here to talk about the resolution, but he didn't mention the fact that, I didn't support lower rates for my constituents. He wouldn't even stand up. The member for Agassiz (Mr. Briese) stood up, and he didn't say—I thought maybe he would stand up and say, yes I know, I didn't lower—I didn't support lowering rates for my constituents. I thought maybe he would have said that in his brief comments.

But I was saying, Mr. Speaker, we know—*[interjection]*—in a second—we don't need any lessons from the members opp when it comes to cutting taxes. As I've said before, it is this government that's

the true tax cutter. The member for St. James (Ms. Crothers), now, she's the tax cutter. The member for Steinbach is not a tax cutter. The member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) is a tax cutter. The member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) is not a tax cutter. The member for Riel (Ms. Melnick) is a tax cutter.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Selkirk will have five minutes remaining.

The hour being 12 noon, this House is recessed and stands recessed until 1:30 p.m. this afternoon.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 9, 2013

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