

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	NDP
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	NDP
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	NDP
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna	Rossmere	NDP
BRIESE, Stuart	Agassiz	PC
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	NDP
CHIEF, Kevin, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	NDP
CROTHERS, Deanne	St. James	NDP
CULLEN, Cliff	Spruce Woods	PC
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	NDP
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FRIESEN, Cameron	Morden-Winkler	PC
GAUDREAU, Dave	St. Norbert	NDP
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Liberal
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
HOWARD, Jennifer, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Richmond	NDP
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	NDP
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Swan River	NDP
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	Dawson Trail	NDP
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	PC
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	NDP
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	PC
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	NDP
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	NDP
PALLISTER, Brian	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PETTERSEN, Clarence	Flin Flon	NDP
REID, Daryl, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Kewatinook	NDP
RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	NDP
ROWAT, Leanne	Riding Mountain	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	St. Paul	PC
SELBY, Erin, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
SWAN, Andrew, Hon.	Minto	NDP
WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	NDP
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Morris	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 4, 2013

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Speaker: Introduction of bills. Seeing no bills, we'll move on to—

PETITIONS

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Yes, good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present the following petition.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

An increase to the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by R. Friesen, P. Collins, F. Larache and many other Manitobans.

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

Further petitions?

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And these are the reasons for the petition:

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

Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

An increase to the PST is excessive taxation that will hurt Manitoba families.

Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by S. Scarrett, C. Burtson and D. Lavallee and many, many more fine Manitobans.

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

(2) Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

(3) An increase to the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

(4) Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by J. Fahl, J. Adam, E. Yuesshen and many, many other fine Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

Municipal Amalgamations—Reversal

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And these are the background—this is the background for this petition:

The provincial government recently announced plans to amalgamate any municipality with fewer than 1,000 constituents.

The provincial government did not consult with or notify the affected municipalities of this decision prior to the Throne Speech announcement on November 19th, 2012, and has further imposed unrealistic deadlines.

If the provincial government imposes amalgamations, local democratic representation will be drastically limited while not providing any real improvements in cost savings.

Local governments are further concerned that amalgamation will fail to address the serious issues currently facing municipalities, including an absence of reliable infrastructure funding and timely flood compensation.

Municipalities deserve to be treated with respect. Any amalgamations should be voluntary in nature and led by the municipalities themselves.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Local Government afford local governments the respect they deserve and reverse his decision to force municipalities with fewer than 1,000 constituents to amalgamate.

This petition is signed by B. Lopton, L. Sawchuk, N. Miller and many more Manitobans.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And this is the background for this petition:

(1) The provincial government recently announced plans to amalgamate any municipalities with fewer than a thousand constituents.

(2) The provincial government did not consult with or notify the affected municipalities of this decision prior to the Throne Speech announcement

on November 19th, 2012, and has further imposed unrealistic deadlines.

(3) If the provincial government imposes amalgamations, local democratic representation will be drastically limited while not providing any real improvement in cost savings.

(4) Local governments are further concerned that amalgamation will fail to address the serious issues currently facing municipalities, including an absence of reliable infrastructure funding and timely flood compensation.

(5) Municipalities deserve to be treated with respect. Any amalgamations should be voluntary in nature and led by the municipalities themselves.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Local Government afford local governments the respect they deserve and reverse his decision to force municipalities with fewer than a thousand constituents to amalgamate.

And this petition is signed by S. Slein, N. Kehler and R. Cowarl and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

An increase to the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this is signed by P. Mitchell, R. Gillies, G. Dearsley and many others.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

An increase in the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by B. Eva, W. Taillieu, M. Taillieu and many, many other Manitobans.

Hydro Capital Development–NFAT Review

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Manitoba Hydro was mandated by the provincial government to commence a \$21-billion capital development plan to service uncertain electricity export markets.

In the last five years, competition from alternative energy sources is decreasing the price and demand for Manitoba's hydroelectricity and causing the financial viability of this capital plan to be questioned.

The \$21-billion capital plan requires Manitoba Hydro to increase domestic electricity rates by up to 4 per cent annually over the next 20 years and possibly more if export opportunities fail to materialize.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro create a complete and transparent Needs For and Alternatives To review of Manitoba Hydro's total capital development plan to ensure the financial viability of Manitoba Hydro.

This petition is signed by F. Jackson, R. Elliott, M. Elliott and many other fine Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase–Referendum

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Good afternoon. I want to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

* (13:40)

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

An increase to the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Submitted on behalf of C. Neufield, W. Peniuk, D. Jensen and many other fine Manitobans.

Municipal Amalgamations–Reversal

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government recently announced plans to amalgamate any municipalities with fewer than 1,000 constituents.

The provincial government did not consult with or notify the affected municipalities of this decision prior to the Throne Speech announcement on November 19th, 2012, and has further imposed unrealistic deadlines.

(3) If the provincial government imposes amalgamations, local democratic representation will be drastically limited while not providing any real improvements in cost savings.

Local governments are further concerned that amalgamation will fail to address the serious issues currently facing municipalities, including an absence of reliable infrastructure funding and timely flood compensation.

Municipalities deserve to be treated with respect. Any amalgamations should be voluntary in nature and led by the municipalities themselves.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Local Government afford local governments the respect they deserve and reverse his decision to force municipalities with fewer than 1,000 constituents to amalgamate.

This petition is signed by V. Scouten, J. Schmigel and D. Shaw and many other fine Manitobans.

Hydro Capital Development–NFAT Review

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Manitoba Hydro was mandated by the provincial government to commence a \$21-billion capital development plan to service uncertain electricity export markets.

(2) In the last five years, competition from alternative energy sources is decreasing the price and demand for Manitoba's hydroelectricity and causing the financial viability of this capital plan to be questioned.

(3) The \$21-billion capital plan requires Manitoba Hydro to increase domestic electricity rates by up to 4 per cent annually for the next 20 years and possibly more if export opportunities fail to materialize.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro create a complete and transparent Needs For and Alternatives To review of Manitoba

Hydro's total capital development plan to ensure the financial viability of Manitoba Hydro.

This is signed by J. Ireland, M. Gladstone, K. Gladstone and many, many other Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase–Referendum

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

(2) Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

(3) An increase to the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

(4) Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by V. Hodgson, L. Iverson, C. Rapinchok and many, many other Manitobans.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

(2) Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

(3) An increase to the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

(4) Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by R. Cameron, A. Leroy, I. Wilkinson and many, many others, Mr. Speaker.

Municipal Amalgamations—Reversal

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

The background for this petition is as follows:

The provincial government recently announced plans to amalgamate any municipalities with fewer than a thousand constituents.

The provincial government did not consult with or notify the affected municipalities of this decision prior to the Throne Speech announcement on November 19th, 2012, and has further imposed unrealistic guide—deadlines.

If the provincial government imposes amalgamations, local democratic representation will be drastically limited while not providing any real improvements in cost savings.

Local governments are further concerned that amalgamation will fail to address the serious issues currently facing municipalities, including an absence of reliable infrastructure funding and timely flood compensation.

Municipalities deserve to be treated with respect. Any amalgamations should be voluntary in nature and led by municipalities themselves.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Local Government afford local governments the respect they deserve and reverse his decision to force municipalities with fewer than a thousand constituents to amalgamate.

This petition is signed by D. McMechan, A. Bird, C. Bonner and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Hydro Capital Development—NFAT Review

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

Manitoba Hydro was mandated by the provincial government to commence a \$21-billion capital development plan to service uncertain electricity export markets.

In the last five years, competition from alternative energy sources is decreasing the price and demand for Manitoba's hydroelectricity and causing the financial viability of this capital plan to be questioned.

The \$21-billion capital plan requires Manitoba Hydro to increase domestic electricity rates by up to 4 per cent annually for the next 20 years and possibly more if export opportunities fail to materialize.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro create a complete and transparent Needs For and Alternatives To review of Manitoba Hydro's total capital development plan to ensure the financial viability of Manitoba Hydro.

And this petition is signed by A. Schellenberg, J. L'Heureux and V. Dennis and many other fine Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): I wish to present the following position to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

(2) Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

(3) An increase to the PST is excessive taxation that will harm Manitoba families.

(4) Bill 20 strips Manitobans of their democratic right to determine when major tax increases are necessary.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Signed by J.F. Johnston, H. Johnston and L. Orsak and many other Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with subsection 58(1) of The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and subsection of 37(1) of The Personal Health Information Act, I am pleased to table the annual report of the Manitoba Ombudsman for the year ended December 31st, 2012.

* (13:50)

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today 95 grade 4 students under the direction of Ryan Schroeder. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen). On behalf of honourable members, we welcome you here this afternoon.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Cabinet Ministers

Immunity

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): I hope that's more than one class.

Mr. Speaker, speaking of class, class warfare, this government has introduced a special class of people with their budget bill: NDP Cabinet ministers. It doesn't matter if they're right, doesn't matter if they're wrong, doesn't even matter if they're legal.

They have the perfect cure for accountability with this bill. They can tear up signed agreements. They can break their fiduciary responsibilities in the bill. It is even retroactive, and the only other people I'm aware of in Canada who are above the law are foreign ambassadors who have diplomatic immunity in our country. No one has ever accused this Finance Minister of being diplomatic. Frankly, he's probably new to diplomacy.

Does this bill mean that the folks at Assiniboia Downs won't be able to sue that Finance Minister, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, all of these measures that are being put forward are to ensure that resources are used for the purposes which are the priorities of Manitobans, and Manitobans have made it very clear that they value health care as one of their top priorities, along with education, along with various forms of infrastructure. And the bill does what the Finance Minister announced in the budget. It brings forth measures that will be put into

law through appropriate legislative provisions which allows us to reallocate resources from lower priority areas to areas that meet the expressed needs of Manitobans for good health care and good education.

Mr. Pallister: Well, something else Manitobans value is the rule of law, and they expect Cabinet ministers to abide by the rule of law.

You know, the Premier uses his talking points frequently and says that he's putting hospitals ahead of horses. But, of course, even horses do that—even horses do that. But as I said, even at the stable it's common knowledge that's what we do here in this province. But it's one thing to do that and it's another to respect the rule of law, which seems more difficult for the government.

It is one thing to remove the rights of Manitobans to be treated fairly by their own government; it's quite another to make it a retroactive right. It smacks of damage control for an uncontrollable Finance Minister.

Now, the Premier plans to raise the PST illegally on July 1st of this year. Does he plan also to retroactively exonerate himself when he breaks his word and the laws of Manitoba on July 1st of this year?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member himself might recall in a previous life, when he was a member of the Legislature and a member of Cabinet, when he stood up in the House, and I believe the year was 1995, and he said he did not believe that the law would bind any future governments to making appropriate changes to meeting the needs of Manitobans. Now, I know he would like to forget history. I know, actually, the entire caucus would like to eliminate history as a course in our high schools, but history actually does count. He said then that he did not believe that the law that he put in place at that time along with his colleagues would bind future governments to make changes that met the needs of Manitobans.

We think it's important to fund hospitals. We think it's important to protect communities from flood events in the future, just like we did in the last decade when we protected the Red River Valley and the city of Winnipeg with a \$670-million investment. We want Manitobans to be safe, we want Manitobans to be secure, and we will do that through the appropriate legislative measures—

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

Mr. Pallister: Well, this bill doesn't demonstrate his concern for putting Manitobans in a safe position. It demonstrates his concern for putting Cabinet ministers in a safe position, Mr. Speaker, putting them above the law, in fact.

Now, the NDP strategy begs the question: Is this really about the talking points? Is this about hospitals over horses, or is this about hockey–hockey over hospitals?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition has the floor.

Mr. Pallister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps it's more about hockey over horses.

It's just the spend, Mr. Speaker, that's all it is; the rest is an optical illusion. It's just a slush fund created with higher taxes. There's nothing about principle involved here. There's no integrity involved here, just 192 spinners trying to help a group of tired-out, living-in-the-past Cabinet ministers to spin misstatements to the public.

A Premier who last year promised not to raise taxes and broke his word to the people of this province, who this year proposes an illegal tax hike and breaks his word again, that's what this is about. And now a bill that says he's exonerated because retroactively he's immune from accountability.

Will he admit that all this is about is more money for him and less money for Manitobans?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the law-breaking was done by the members of the opposition. It took an official inquiry led by former Chief Justice Alfred Monnin to say that he never saw so many damn liars in his life than when he saw the members of the opposition in front of the inquiry, and he brought down a ruling that said that the law-breaking was done by the members of the opposition.

But it was the Leader of the Opposition that, on October 16, 1995, made the following statement, and at the point of being redundant, Mr. Speaker, I read it into the record again: Granted there are restrictions in this legislation the members have talked about and they—and that they suggest are unreasonable or that would handcuff future legislatures. I do not believe that this is true—this is the Leader of the Opposition—I believe the legislation can be, by any subsequent Legislature, withdrawn or repealed, so I do not

believe the hands-being-tied argument is one that has any validity at all.

That's the Leader of the Opposition in '95—

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

Horse Racing Industry Possible Job Losses

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Mr. Speaker, the NDP have completely mishandled the horse racing file. As a result of their inability to effectively manage this file, we may see the demise of horse racing in Manitoba. This could result in a loss of over 500 jobs in and around Winnipeg.

Is this the legacy the Minister of Finance wants to leave?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): The legacy that this government will leave will be that we have taken \$5 million out of horse racing gambling purses in Manitoba and redirected that to health care, Mr. Speaker.

And I will say, Mr. Speaker, when I say health care, I mean publicly funded, open, accessible, universal health care, not the two-tier system of private health care that the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister) says he would put in place.

Bill 47 Ministerial Immunity

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Well, I guess the Minister of Finance doesn't care about the 500 jobs and the 500 families.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk about the minister's legacy, a legacy of breaking the law, a legacy of civil lawsuits and conflict of interest allegations. That's the minister's legacy.

As a result of his backroom politics, the Minister of Finance is front and centre in a \$350-million lawsuit. The minister is now pulling out all the stops to get himself and this government off the hook. He's introduced legislation to tear up the funding of the contract he just signed; at the same time, he's trying to attempt to shield himself from an existing lawsuit.

Mr. Speaker, is Bill 47 the Minister of Finance get-out-of-jail-free card?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, what's very clear is that this side of the House is committed to taking \$5 million from horse

racing and gambling in Manitoba and dedicate it to health care.

That side of the House has very clearly said it would take \$52 million out of health care, Mr. Speaker, as opposed to putting money into it. They would set up a private, for-profit, two-tier system of health care, as the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister) has said. We've said no to that.

Mr. Speaker, it—whether it's the Red River Exhibition, whether it's the Peguis First Nation, somebody from the private sector needs to step up and make sure that they work with the Jockey Club to ensure that there's horse racing in Manitoba to protect exactly what the member opposite pretends—

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

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, this side of the House has respect for the law.

* (14:00)

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the NDP have not treated this industry with any respect whatsoever. As a result, the NDP find themselves in a \$350-million lawsuit. The government continues to use their heavy-handed approach to get out of signed contracts. They're using Bill 47 to try to protect themselves from an existing lawsuit.

Does the Minister of Finance really believe that Bill 47 will protect him from this existing lawsuit?

Mr. Struthers: What an incredible statement, Mr. Speaker. That side of the House rigged an election. The member for Spruce Woods last week on two occasions put false information on the record and refuses to take it off.

Mr. Speaker, what is absolutely clear in this matter—what is absolutely clear—is whether it's the Red River Exhibition or whether it's the Peguis First Nation or there was anybody else in the private sector that can step forward and work with the Jockey Club to ensure horse racing has a future in this province, we should welcome that. That's our position. If the private sector can help out, all the better.

In the meantime—

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

Municipal Amalgamation Government Relations

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Absolutely nobody believes that minister anymore, so I'll try a different minister.

The member for the Interlake called municipalities under a thousand people totally dysfunctional. The Minister for Local Government now says municipalities are, quote, behaving like insolent children, end quote. Maybe the minister needs to take a lesson in integrity and respect from municipal councillors, reeves and mayors.

I ask: When is this minister going to show municipalities the respect they deserve?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Local Government): Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, in Budget 2013 we showed municipalities a lot of love, 8.5 per cent increase. And that is approximately about \$54 million more than what Saskatchewan gives their municipalities. And across Canada, this government is looked upon as one of the top governments supporting municipalities in their province.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, the minister continues to bully municipalities. He continues to threaten consequences for non-compliance.

In a recent study by Brandon University, small municipalities dominated the top 10 healthy municipalities list.

Why does this minister not recognize the abilities of these municipalities? Why does he refer to them as insolent children? Why won't he show them the respect they so richly deserve as a level of government?

Mr. Lemieux: You know, Mr. Speaker, we've consulted a lot with municipalities, worked closely with them on a lot of infrastructure projects.

You know, I mean, the days are long gone when the member from Neepawa used to drive his wagon full of grain a hundred years ago, and that's how boundaries in municipality were determined. The opposition finally agree that the world is round; it's not flat any longer. Things have changed. They don't seem to get it.

And so, we're working with municipalities to make sure that they're sustainable long into the future, providing them with sustainable funding,

increases like 8.5 per cent increase, hundreds of millions of dollars to many infrastructure projects.

And the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Ashton) every day gets up and answers many of the resolutions that they put forward wanting a bridge fixed, a road fixed, a main street fixed, Mr. Speaker. All along, they vote against—

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

Order. The honourable member for Agassiz has the floor.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, this minister prefers to sit in his ivory tower and shout down his orders to the peasants down below. In November of 2012, with no consultations with municipalities at all, the Minister of Local Government mandated municipal amalgamations.

I ask the minister: Why is he pursuing this top-down, heavy-handed, bullying approach? Why does he refuse to show municipal governments any respect?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is wrong again.

Last spring, I attended seven regional meetings—seven regional meetings—attended by over hundreds of municipal leaders, elected officials, CAOs and asked them and consulted with them on the Building Canada Fund, also on amalgamations.

More recently, last fall, I attended mayors and reeves meetings, consulted with them in at least five meetings attended by hundreds of municipal leaders—consulted with them, asked them, told them what we were going to be doing and the kind of approach we're going to be looking at.

Mr. Speaker, again, in about a week's time, I'm going to be attending mayors and reeves meetings once again, again consulting with municipal officials.

We work with them. We don't bury our head in the sand like the member opposite. We work with municipalities in this province to make Manitoba a better province overall, for all of us.

Biosphere Reserve Government Priority

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): In 1986, the Manitoba Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve

was chartered under the UNESCO's International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves. Fifteen surrounding municipalities and both federal and provincial governments are charter members.

On May 22nd of this year, the Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve sent a letter to the Manitoba government indicating, and I quote: In recent years, there has been no interest displayed by Manitoba, and no representatives have attended any meetings.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Conservation: Why does this minister believe it is fine to ignore an operating UNESCO site in Manitoba while putting tens of millions of dollars into a stalled proposal on the east side?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): Mr. Speaker, I think it's very unfortunate, this time, just after all the tremendous efforts over almost a decade involving, by the way, a nomination bid led by the federal government, actually, that the opposition would flip-flop on its support for the UNESCO World Heritage Site bid.

I think this is a time for Manitobans to stand together to support the tremendous work, to support the environment, to support the protection of Lake Winnipeg and climate change efforts in that area.

And I think the flip-flop of the members opposite reminds me of a quote from Groucho Marx. He said once, why should I care about posterity; what's posterity ever done for me? That's the opposition today, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, I'm presenting a decade of neglect. Every 10 years, the Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve must report to UNESCO with their files, meeting minutes and audit reports.

Riding Mountain biosphere said in a letter to the Manitoba government, and I quote: The Province has been a charter member of RMBR since its inception, but a member in poor standing due to its ongoing absence.

Mr. Speaker, does this minister not value his membership commitments, required under the existing UNESCO biosphere reserve, or is he only interested in his obsessive claim for the stalled east-side proposal?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think, first of all, it's useful to not just quote from Groucho but quote from someone else here. I want to quote from a statement made in this House just a little while ago.

The statement is this: We support the initiative of the fund being established to make sure, with regard to UNESCO, that it's protecting and looking after the future development of cultural activities in those areas. I know there's some concerns expressed around this bill in regards to what if UNESCO, for some reason, didn't provide us with the heritage site on the boreal forest, but it's very apparent that the funds would at least be used—at the very least be used to maintain culture and heritage opportunities in those areas.

That's my—

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

The clock in question period is ticking, folks.

The honourable member for Riding Mountain has the floor.

Mrs. Rowat: I'm asking a question on behalf of the Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve, Mr. Speaker, and this minister is being very unclear and very delusional in his answer.

Because the NDP government has been delinquent in his membership with the RMBR, the UNESCO review committee may identify Manitoba as a province who has lost interest in the biosphere. The Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve has asked for a stronger partnership with the Province. Many people around the world who have visited or moved into the biosphere reserve believe in the respectful process and ongoing review of UNESCO designations, present and future.

Mr. Speaker, why should Manitobans believe this NDP government is interested in UNESCO designations when their actions suggest—

* (14:10)

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

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, I think it's—of all the inopportune times, to put it politely, for the opposition to be flip-flopping on this important project for the well-being not just of Manitoba. This is a Canadian nomination, Mr. Speaker, and for them now to try and undermine that process is unfortunate.

By the way, it's going to decision making by UNESCO in the next two or three weeks. The decision lies ahead.

But, Mr. Speaker, tactics, tactics, tactics. It's no strategy; there's no consistency. You know, the environment doesn't need such fair-weather friends as the members opposite.

Keeyask Community Centre Trust Account

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): On April 7th, 2009, a cheque in the amount of \$2,382,900 was deposited into the Keeyask trust account.

Can the NDP member for Kildonan tell us: Is the money still there?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Yes, I'd like to say to the Tea Party member for St. Paul, Mr. Speaker, that if he'd like, that money's under the auspices of the Keeyask community council. If he'd—I'll take him to my office after, and at my dime he can phone the community council and ask them what's the status of those funds that's in their control. I'm happy—he can come to my office right after the question period and we can phone that committee and that community that's responsible for it and we can ask them about that money.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, on April 22nd, 2009, a cheque for \$2 million was written out of the Keeyask trust account.

Can the NDP member for Kildonan, the individual where the buck's supposed to stop—it's where accountability is supposed to be, in his office—can he tell us: Where did that \$2 million go?

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, again, Mr. Speaker, for the member for the Tea Party for St. Paul, the—this question was answered. We spent five hours in Crown Corporations Committee. The member had half an hour to discuss this very issue with the president of Manitoba Hydro. He provided him with a thorough answer. As well, the member—the president of Hydro promised to get back, indeed, with additional information.

The member knows, as the member was told by the president from Hydro, Hydro funds for activities based on remediation, Mr. Speaker, and that money passes to the community council, who then uses the funds at their disposal. Just like any other municipality that gets funds from the government of Manitoba, it goes into their hands in order to be utilized.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Seems like there are a number of members that want to have conversations, and might I offer the option of either the loge to my left or to my right for those members wishing to have that conversation.

I'm having difficulty hearing both the questions and the answers posed here this afternoon, so I'm asking for the co-operation of all honourable members. Please keep the level down just a little bit.

The honourable member for St. Paul has the floor.

Mr. Schuler: The \$2,382,900 which was deposited on April 7th, 2009, is missing from the trust account.

Can the NDP member for Kildonan, where the accountability is supposed to stop—it's supposed to be in his office at his desk—can he tell us: Is it still available for the construction of the Keeyask Centre, or is it gone?

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, Mr. Speaker, as the member was told at Crown Corporations Committee and as I've said before to the member with respect to the funding, Manitoba Hydro provided capital funding to that community to build a community centre. Construction is supposed to start this summer. The money is in a trust account administered by TCN.

If the member wants to confirm, as I said, he can come up—right up to my office. We'll phone that chief and council and we'll ask them where that money is, because that money's in their auspices. If the member has the courage of his convictions and if he'll—wants to find out the truth and stops playing politics, he certainly can come to my office right here—he can come right to my office and we'll phone right after question period, Mr. Speaker. We're happy to do that.

I don't know why members opposite are so against Hydro and don't want to have any dealings with First Nations, Mr. Speaker. It speaks volumes.

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

The honourable member for Morden-Winkler has the floor.

Emergency Services (Teulon) Closure

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): We've learned that in the Interlake-Eastern RHA they were forced to close the emergency room at Teulon from April the 6th to April the 9th simply because there

were no doctors available that were able to work in that ER. That meant—and besides that, there was a further closure just this last weekend, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

That means seven days where no emergency services were available in Teulon. What if someone suffered a heart attack? What if someone had a serious stroke?

What does this Minister of Health have to say to the residents of Teulon today, and should residents of Teulon expect that their hospital should be added to the list of those other permanently closed ERs?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I can inform the member, of course, that our regional health authorities worked very carefully with their individual hospitals. We know that safety is paramount and full physician coverage is required in these situations. When there is a circumstance whereby a physician is not available, there can be nurse-managed care; paramedic services will be augmented to ensure that in any emergency situation individuals can be dealt with expediently.

But we agree, Mr. Speaker, that we need to do more to ensure that we can bring more physicians to rural Manitoba and to northern Manitoba. That's why we're investing in more rural residencies and that's why we're working with our regional health authorities on very aggressive recruitment and retention strategies.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, this minister says that she needs to do more, and on that we agree. But in particular, where she needs to do more is for the 17 other Manitoba hospitals now experiencing emergency department closures or downgrading of ER services.

Mr. Speaker, we already know from CIHI information that Manitoba has one of the worst doctor retention records in this country. But now the Teulon ER was closed for seven days; that's one week out of the past eight where there was not a single physician available to provide emergency services.

I'd like to ask this minister: What does she plan to do in order to address this serious and dangerous situation of closed emergency departments, and, in fact, does she even have a plan?

Ms. Oswald: Well, Mr. Speaker, the plan, of course, is to continue to work to recruit and retain doctors in rural Manitoba.

I can tell you what would not be part of our plan, that during global economic uncertainty when we have to make difficult decisions our plan would not be to cut the spaces in medical school, which was the plan of members opposite. Our plan would not be to cease all construction of facilities so that it becomes impossible to recruit to rural environments.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen a net increase of over 500 doctors to Manitoba since coming into office. Over 100 of those have been to rural Manitoba. We're going to keep on working on that and we're not going to take the advice of members opposite based on their past circumstances.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Friesen: You know, Mr. Speaker, once again this minister's responses show she'd like to talk about anything other than her own record.

Mr. Speaker, just last week we learned that the ER in Beausejour was forced to close because there were no physicians available. We now know that the ER in Teulon was closed one week out of the past eight, and this just in: the Killarney ER was closed a month ago for the same reason, no doctors available.

Is there anything else that this minister would like to take this opportunity to disclose about ER closures, and will she admit that the word that best describes the situation in rural emergency care is crisis?

Ms. Oswald: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, I will say to members opposite that our regional health authorities know safety is paramount, and when physician services are temporarily unavailable they make contingency plans with emergency medical services, with nurse-managed care.

What I certainly can say to the member is that we know that there are more doctors in Manitoba today than there were in the 1990s by a long shot, Mr. Speaker, and that's what matters to Manitoba families. The same institution, CIHI, reports that from 2007 to 2011 Manitoba's population increased by 4.9 per cent, but we increased our doctors by 17.6 per cent.

So we know that we have more work to do and we're very committed to do that, Mr. Speaker, but one of the paths that we're not going to go down is to privatize—

* (14:20)

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

The honourable member for River Heights has the floor.

Municipal Amalgamation Legislation

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Local Government is quoted today in the Winnipeg Free Press as saying, in reference to amalgamating municipalities, and I quote: "There are no exemptions. There are none. Zero. Nada. Squat. Nothing." He says there's nothing in the legislation that would grant him the power to pick and choose which municipalities should amalgamate.

I ask the minister, who himself wrote this legislation: Why did he write the legislation so poorly that even when amalgamation doesn't make sense, he has no option but to force municipalities to amalgamate?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

The honourable Minister of Local Government has the floor.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Local Government): Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad I was quoted accurate for once, but I just want to say that, you know, the legislation the department and others thoughtfully put together, this legislation, Bill 33, to try to address not only today but the future, it's about municipalities, families and communities building communities in this province. It's not about us and them. We're working together as Manitobans trying to build a better province.

As I pointed out previously to the member from Neepawa, all the consultation that we've done, Mr. Speaker, there are many municipalities coming together, sitting down at a table, talking to each other reasonably about how to come together and amalgamate in a way that'll be beneficial for their ratepayers or taxpayers in their particular region.

Mr. Speaker, we've talked about regionalization for many years now, and we'll continue—

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the rural municipality of Victoria Beach has about 5,000 summer residents, with \$382 million in property assessment. Five

thousand property taxpaying residents meets the hundred person minimum to avoid amalgamation. The property value is certainly adequate. The Minister for Local Government said the legislation gives him no options, nada.

I ask the minister: When his government can amend the law requiring a referendum increasing the PST, can he not change Bill 33 so that sensible options are available to exempt municipalities, instead of the minister's arrogant zero-nada-squat approach?

Mr. Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, when I was asked about municipalities working together and whether or not, without even talking to the neighbours, would they just automatically be given some kind of exemption, my comment was exactly what the member said, and I won't repeat it.

But in the legislation, AMM and others have asked us to be flexible, to be reasonable, and there is a section that allows for some flexibility, but, at this point, we're early in the process. So to say, yes, you've got an exemption, today, where, Mr. Speaker, we have many months ahead of us where amalgamation and the whole process is coming together and many municipalities around the province of Manitoba are working together reasonably and having hard and tough discussions as to where municipality makes sense. We're allowing them to go—

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

Municipalités francophones

Mr. Gerrard: Monsieur le Président, le ministre ne veut pas changer son législation, la loi 33. Le ministre crée une situation difficile pour beaucoup de municipalités, par exemple, Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes, Saint-Claude, Saint-Lazare et Saint-Rose, qui sont très concernées qu'ils perdent leur identité francophone avec cette amalgamation forcée.

Je demande au ministre, saura-t-il agir aujourd'hui de nous donner un amendement qui permette les options raisonnables dans la loi 33 sur les amalgamations?

Translation

Mr. Speaker, the minister doesn't want to amend his legislation, Bill 33. The minister has created a difficult situation for many municipalities such as Notre Dame de Lourdes, St. Claude, St. Lazare and

St. Rose that are very concerned about losing their Francophone identity as a result of this forced amalgamation.

I am asking the minister: Will he act today to introduce an amendment that will provide reasonable options in Bill 33 on amalgamation?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Merci, Monsieur le Président. Le membre de River Heights a-nous a demandé une question sur les municipalités francophones ici au Manitoba. La législation reconnaît il y a les communautés d'intérêt dans la législation. Où il y la complexité, il y a la possibilité de considérer les options de protéger les communautés d'intérêt comme les communautés franco-manitobaines.

On est très sensible à leurs besoins. On est prêt de considérer la certaine flexibilité d'avancer leur intérêt, de garder leur identité, de garder leur culture et de garder leur langue, Monsieur le Président. Le ministre des affaires municipales est très prêt de considérer leur préoccupations et leur priorités. Merci beaucoup.

Translation

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member for River Heights has asked a question about Francophone municipalities here in Manitoba. The legislation provides for community of interest. In complex situations, it is possible to consider options to protect community of interest, as in the case of Franco-Manitoban communities.

We're very sensitive to their needs. We are prepared to be flexible in promoting their interests, and to safeguard their identity, their culture and their language, Mr. Speaker. The minister of municipal affairs is quite prepared to consider their concerns and priorities. Thank you.

Manitoba Export and Trade International Promotion

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): I have been very patiently waiting for questions from our worthy opponents on economy and export, which is so important for the quality of life and jobs in this province. Manitoba's hard-working people and the businesses supported by our government initiatives have been doing remarkably well.

Since 2003, Mr. Speaker, I have been working with our government to promote export and trade internationally.

Now, I understand that there are some news clippings in the paper that I read, and I would like my collegial minister of enterprise, trade and training to elaborate the House about some of the success stories we have in Manitoba economy and export. Thank you.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade): I thank my colleague for the question. There's certainly a lot of good news that we can report. I'll do my best to report what I can in the 45 seconds allotted.

But, of course, Mr. Speaker, we have had the third lowest unemployment rate in Canada—second or third lowest unemployment rate—third lowest unemployment rate for youth in the country. Our GDP has grown 2.7 per cent in 2012, outpacing the national average of 1.8 per cent.

The headlines say it for themselves: Province's exports looking better than forecast; Another good news story for Manitoba; Banks like what they see in Manitoba economy. We're hearing it all in the newspaper, Mr. Speaker.

Perhaps members opposite could be a little bit more positive about the good things that are happening here. With their fascination with Saskatchewan, I'm surprised they're not wearing watermelons on their head and carrying green pompoms. But we'll continue to be cheerleaders for the blue and gold here in Manitoba.

Emergency Room (Beausejour) Closure

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, there are 17 health-care facilities in Manitoba currently faced with emergency department closures or downgrading of emergency services. On Victoria Day, that number increased to 18 when the Beausejour ER was closed because there was no doctor available.

Can the Minister of Health please indicate to the constituents of Lac du Bonnet whether this is the new standard of health care the RHA amalgamation has brought upon communities in the North Eastman region, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): No, it is not.

Mr. Ewasko: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess I thank the minister for the answer.

This past weekend—again, ER closure. This is a beautiful area of the province, and as such, its population triples or nearly quadruples during the summer months. Given that Beausejour's ER was closed on the holiday Monday just a few days ago and again this past weekend, should residents and tourists expect the emergency room to be closed when the next holiday rolls around?

If a resident or tourist experiences a medical emergency, I ask this minister: What are they supposed to do?

Ms. Oswald: As I said to the member previous to this, we know the regional health authority is working very hard on recruitment and stabilizing the physician supply. We know that the emergency room is under nurse-managed care, so to say that it was closed in its entirety doesn't represent the care that was available there. We also know that the regional health authorities broadly will augment EMS services, will ensure that the STARS helicopter ambulance is available, will ensure, where appropriate, that Lifeflight is provided.

We know that there are emergency contingencies across the board, Mr. Speaker, but, again, I would say to the member that recruitment is actively under way and the regional health authority is well aware of the population increase in the summer and is working very hard to provide—

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

Mr. Ewasko: According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, Manitoba has one of the lowest doctor retention rates in Canada. Of new physicians that first registered in Manitoba between 1995 and 1999, only 32.1 per cent were still practising in Manitoba 10 years later. The Canadian average, Mr. Speaker, is 58.1.

* (14:30)

This minister has failed to retain doctors in rural Manitoba. In fact, she's allowed our province to slip to the bottom of the barrel.

Why should then Beausejour area residents have any confidence in this Health Minister to fix this serious problem facing emergent care in rural Manitoba today, Mr. Speaker?

Ms. Oswald: What the member opposite can be assured of is that we're committed to continue to invest in health care. It's why we made new investments into our regional health authorities this

year. It's why we've seen over a hundred doctors come to rural Manitoba since we started in 1999.

And I would hasten to add, Mr. Speaker, that when the members opposite were firing nurses and freezing the medical school spaces and all health capital, they were also taking money from the Lac du Bonnet PCH to the tune of \$150,000 when their leader was in the Cabinet, and also the Pine Falls health centre, \$775,000. They took that hit under their watch.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HudBay Flin Flon Mine Rescue Team

Mr. Clarence Pettersen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the HudBay Flin Flon mine rescue team who recently won the 53rd annual Manitoba Mine Rescue Competition held in Winnipeg.

Mine rescue is a specialized emergency operation in which trained personnel, wearing protective breathing apparatuses, enter a mine during or after a mine fire, explosion or other disaster to rescue trapped miners, extinguish the fire, or restore the mine to its original safe condition.

It was in 1933, Mr. Speaker, that HudBay Mining & Smelting Company Limited in Flin Flon, now HudBay, became the first Manitoba mining company to have certified mine rescue personnel. HudBay Flin Flon led the way for other Manitoba mines to develop mine rescue stations, acquire essential emergency equipment, and train mine rescue personnel. Now, some 80 years later, Flin Flon's mine rescue team is still a leader in mine rescue in Manitoba.

The first-ever provincial mine rescue competition in Manitoba occurred in 1961 and has flourished into an important tradition in the mining industry. This year's competition took place in the three-level parkade in the Winnipeg Union Centre. The parkade served as a simulated mine for half-an hour-and-a-half search and recovery component of the competition. In addition to the hands-on challenges, the competition also included a written test component. The competition, the best training that mine rescue teams from across the province can access in a nonemergency setting.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask all members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in congratulating the HudBay Flin Flon mine rescue

team on winning the provincial competition and encouraging workplace health and safety. We wish the team good luck in being accepted into the National Western Regional Mine Rescue Competition.

The HudBay Flin Flon team consisted of Tracy Knutson, Daren Lyhkun, Bryan Rainville, George Warman, Dustin Patterson, Damian Dominey, Jeremy Beauchamp and their trainers Done Peake and Olaf Hettrick. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

National Environment Week

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, June 2nd to June 8th is National Environment Week. National Environment Week is an annual event and is a time to take action to help preserve, protect and restore Canada's environment. It's also an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the progress that has been made and to encourage such efforts and endeavours all year long.

Interestingly enough, the idea for environment week came to be when former Progressive Conservative Prime Minister John Diefenbaker noted that young people had, quote, tremendous energy, enthusiasm and initiative, end quote, concerning pollution and the environment. The idea inspired a bill to draw attention to all aspects of a healthy environment, and the name, Canadian National Environment Week, was chosen.

I'm also very excited to indicate that Brandon will be holding their first Enviro Expo with an aim to empowering youth on environmental issues while celebrating the community's environmental achievements. Assiniboine Community College's Brandon campuses will host interactive workshops for students, thus connecting them to environmental issues and initiatives that they learned inside the classroom and with what's going on within the community.

Mr. Speaker, National Environment Week is a great opportunity for Manitobans and all Canadians to celebrate our achievements in protecting Mother Nature. At the same time, this protection strengthens the economy and enhances our health and quality of life. United Nations has designated the year 2013 as the International Year of Water Cooperation. Canadian Environment Week will promote the theme water-working together. This year, it's extremely pertinent as it's a valuable opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of working collaboratively to protect, manage and preserve our

water resources for future generations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Interlake Churches Painting Collection

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, the Interlake has a rich and fascinating history, one that many have worked very hard to preserve. Today I am pleased to inform the House about one piece of Interlake history that has found a permanent home at the Arborg & District Multicultural Heritage Village.

For 20 years Manitoba artist Millard Barteaux has been painting historical churches across the Interlake. Built for the most part between 1910 and 1930 by community volunteers, for an average cost of about \$600, these small churches could be found across the Interlake region and were, for many, an essential part of community life. However, only about 15 to 20 per cent of them remain standing today.

Over the years Mr. Barteaux has painted well over 200 Interlake churches from across the entire region. He has travelled to their locations and searched out archival photographs of those that no longer stand. They will now hang permanently at the heritage village preserving this piece of history for years to come.

This weekend I had the honour of attending the grand opening of the exhibit. It was very inspiring to see a collection of images that embody such an important piece of the Interlake's history, and I cannot think of a better home for them than the old Poplarfield St. Nicholas Parish Hall, which is now the centrepiece of the heritage village.

On behalf of all members, I would like to thank the Arborg & District Multicultural Heritage Village Association for making a home for the collection and, of course, Mr. Barteaux, for his work to preserve our past heritage for future generations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Keeyask Community Centre

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Over the past few months, members of the Progressive Conservative caucus have been standing in this Chamber and asking for accountability in regards to the \$6 million that was committed to, and then funded, for a Keeyask community centre, for the TCN First Nation.

This money was supposed to be already in advance of flood mitigation, flooding due to the

Keeyask dam that was supposed to be built, and the monies were forwarded. We've gotten up in question period and indicated which funds had been forwarded in which amounts. We've also questioned about where the money is. Member for—the NDP member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), the minister responsible, indicated that was in a trust fund, and we've indicated that we have some information that the fund has been depleted.

In it all, the minister has been on 18 sides of the issue, unfortunately, never giving any clarity at committee, at Manitoba Hydro. Any time any one of these questions came up, the minister would push aside the individual that was supposed to be answering the questions, the CEO of Manitoba Hydro, and wouldn't let the chairman of the board, the president, answer the questions. What he did was, in fact, put a lot of political spin, which has made this case even more complicated.

Because the member—the NDP member for Kildonan, the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro, has said, on the one hand, that the money is in trust and that it's going to be built this summer sometime, and then goes on to say that they can do whatever they want with the money; he has no responsibility for the money, once it's been forwarded.

And how unfortunate because the people on that First Nation would like to have this cultural centre, an 8,000-square-foot hub for education and culture, and the member—the NDP member for Kildonan, the minister, has let them down with his lack of accountability, with his lack of answers, with his turning his back on that community and any kind of accountability.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Portage Lions Club

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, on May 16th, 2013, I had the privilege of joining members of the Portage Lions Club and the public at large, to recognize the club's 75th anniversary and to help celebrate three quarters of a century of community service, friendship and fundraising. Under the direction of the Winnipeg Lions Club, the Portage club was chartered in 1938, becoming the second club in Manitoba.

Members of the Portage Lions are volunteer leaders in the community who truly embrace and uphold the internal model we serve. They are proud members of the world's largest service

club organization and a network of approximately 1.35 million Lions in over 46,000 clubs in 185 countries. They also include MacGregor and Oakville clubs, who were sponsored by the Portage Lions and chartered in 1936 and '85 respectively.

*(14:40)

Members of the Portage Lions Club are proud of their history and the many, many ways they have helped the community over the past 75 years. Individual accomplishments are too numerous to mention within this time permitted, but I'd like to highlight a few of the club's most significant contributions. The Lions Prairie Manor, providing care for the elderly, was a major club project and opened in 1971 with a hundred beds. Fifty more beds were added in 1976, and a chapel was constructed in 2005, and the club continues to contribute to resident needs. Through fundraising efforts, the club in 2004 was able to provide the Portage and district hospital with a contribution of \$63,000 towards the purchase of specialized equipment for cataract eye surgery. In 2008, \$50,000 in club-raised funds was provided to the Community Foundation of Portage and District for the establishment and administration of an endowment fund.

The community has much to be thankful for, and the ongoing generosity and service of the Portage Lions Club has been far-reaching whether it's support for Portage Plains United Way, Salvation Army, CancerCare, Big Brothers and Sisters, Fort la Reine Museum, Journey for Sight, Canine Vision or school drug-prevention programs, school patrols, high-school bursaries, minor sports and assisting individuals with special needs.

As this milestone is observed, I would ask all members to join me in recognizing Lionism in general and more specifically the Portage Lions Club on 75 years of service to the community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

GRIEVANCES

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Arthur-Virden, on a grievance.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to be able to stand up on an unfortunate occasion to have to grieve today to the—in the Manitoba Legislature to grieve on the situation faced by Manitoba Hydro and this government's deficiencies in their programming in regards to planning major projects, such as the dams

in the north for the new projects that the governments thinks that they are wanting to bring forward that they've been talking about for years and years, but there's been so little action.

Mr. Speaker, it's a concern to all Manitobans that their rates are going up at 4 per cent a year for the next 20 years. They always talk about having affordable rates, but, when you combine that with the taxation that this province has faced as individuals, we know that the individuals in Manitoba are paying much higher rates and cost of living than other areas of Canada when you combine all of those things.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the Public Utilities Board has asked the government to put on hold all of their major capital programs and to review them all. Because, you know, plans that were put in place 20-30 years ago—mostly 30 years ago in this case—to build these dams and require a new Bipole III line to export power and to make sure that we have reliable sources here in Manitoba are projects that due diligence has been not taken by this government in reviewing the options.

That's why their own—and the changes in the demographics that have happened in our surrounding areas that require that power in an area that is in the proximity of which, of Manitoba, would allow us to be able to export viably that power to our neighbours. Mr. Speaker, I only speak of the situations that we're faced with not only in the growth of our own petroleum industry here in Manitoba to provide other sources of energy, but also with what's happening in our neighbouring state of North Dakota and southeast Saskatchewan and all through that area, and that is the finding of oil and gas—shale gas—in North Dakota and certainly in states like Pennsylvania and other areas of the United States and other areas of Canada, as well—northern BC, northern Alberta. Many areas of Canada have come up with shale gas opportunities that make the export of—or the need for these new energy sources in the north to come to the attention of the Public Utilities Board, who had—and I was there last summer when they asked, in the summer of 2012—it's over a year ago almost—that the Public Utilities Board appointed—whose members are appointed by the New Democratic Party in this province, to sit back and take a second sober look at the types of capital projects that they were going to move forward with.

This is a definite concern to every Manitoban's future. We want to make sure that Manitoba Hydro is

a viable company to supply us with reliable product and power down the road and find opportunities to export, too, when it's viable. But, unlike when the dams were built and the hydro was developed in the first place, Mr. Speaker, many of those opportunities were there, where you could export power at a higher value into the United States than what you can now because of new energy sources that have been found. And that's why the Public Utilities Board asked for the government to step back from their ramming of this through in this fashion that they have been moving forward with in the last few years, and review it.

We're not saying don't build them, Mr. Speaker, we're just saying, step back and look at the realities of the marketplace. Things that were in place 30 years ago don't necessarily be relevant today, and that's what the Public Utilities Board recognizes, but the government doesn't seem to. So, if they won't heed their own Public Utilities Board's call for looking at a stronger review of this project, who will they listen to? Well, they haven't listened, either, to the engineers—the retired engineers of the University of Manitoba. They haven't listened to the engineers who are presently electrical and power engineers at the University of Manitoba and other jurisdictions, who indicate that there's a great need to review this whole project.

Mr. Speaker, it's a \$21-billion project. It's almost equal to the whole debt of this Province—two thirds of it, at least, anyway; it just went over \$30 billion with this last budget. So, their concern is the fact that we're exporting power to the United States at 3 or 4 cents a kilowatt hour right now. Shale gas is, some places, in the United States, energy is going for no more than 3 cents into some of those states right now. Break-even prices in the northern part of Canada—or, Manitoba right now to build these new projects, we're told it's 10 cents to 14.

And I heard Mr. Thomson, the president of Manitoba Hydro, at the recent business council's meeting in Fort Garry, here, a few weeks ago, after reviewing the actions of the business council over the past 15 years and looking forward to the next 15 years, Mr. Speaker, and they were concerned. He was talking about, we need to have vision; we need to have future viability. Well, that's true, but every business that I know of takes a look at an annual or a biannual review of its projects to make sure that they're viable, that they are able to carry out the cash flow and the needs of the customers and the builders on a planned basis.

Mr. Speaker, there was a—there were many questions at that business council meeting of Mr. Thomson, that particular day in the workshop that I attended, and many strong business leaders in this province asked sound questions about, where was the viability of this whole project? Where are we going to get the cash flow to make this happen? And none—not one of them, really, was concerned about looking at the long-term vision of building these projects, provided there were concrete sales of this resource into customers that would presently sign those deals, and it was found wanting in that area. There's one or two that may have been there for smaller portions of it, but certainly not any indication that the contracts that were required to cover this whole project were viable or in place.

Mr. Speaker, I think that that was a big concern to those there, and, of course, one of those people was former honourable governor general of this country and former premier—NDP premier of this province, Mr. Ed Schreyer. And he brought forth strong concerns both there and in his—Premier's presentation later in the day, about the viability of these projects. So it's very apparent that this government isn't listening to anyone, not even their own sources within their own party as to how to move forward on this.

Mr. Speaker, I guess, certainly, they're—if they're not prepared to do that, they aren't prepared to listen to coalitions like the bipole coalition for the new line was taking its way around Manitoba across the southern part of the city, to get back up to the northeast part of the city before we export to the States. They weren't—they're not able to take into consideration the bipole landowners group that's out there now to look at the expropriation that the government would have to go through, or the payments, and deal with them as far as having an agreement with these landowners. The Clean Environment Commission—I attended the last days of their presentation back in March.

We've got the Clean Environment Commission's report that should be out here in June some time, Mr. Speaker. That was the indication there, even with a couple of weeks of delay that they had allowed for an opportunity for others to provide a bit more information in their sessions at that particular meeting. And, if it won't listen to them, then what hope is there for coming up with a needs for and alternate—alternatives to process? You know, is it a sham? Is it just going to be a shell game?

* (14:50)

You know, Mr. Speaker, we desperately need a needs-for-and-alternatives-to process in this particular capital project. Not that all of them wouldn't need it, but in this one, particularly, building a line—building the line is one thing at a cost of an extra four point—\$1.4 billion, but when you're looking at a situation of building the—of spending the \$21 billion in the first place to put the infrastructure in the north that's required to use for the export of this product, it raises concerns amongst all of the citizens of this province because the government is responsible for all Crown corporations and Manitoba Hydro is a Crown corporation. One of the strengths that it has is it is presently able to cover its sources, cover its expenses, but only because the government wants to raise the rates 4 per cent a year for the next 20 years.

So, with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I—it's unfortunate that I have to grieve today in—on the matter of hydro, but I just give notice to the province of Manitoba that this of great concern.

Mr. Speaker: Any further grievances? Seeing none—

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): Pursuant to rule 31(8), I'm announcing that the private members' resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be one put forward by the honourable member for Flin Flon (Mr. Pettersen). The title of the resolution is Northern Climate Change Research.

Mr. Speaker: It had been announced that pursuant to rule 31(8), that the private members' resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be the one put forward by the honourable for Flin Flon, and the title of the resolution is Northern Climate Change Research.

Ms. Howard: Will you resume debate on Bill 20?

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Mr. Speaker: We'll now resume debate on Bill 20 on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), the Bill 20, The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act (Various Acts Amended), standing in the name of the honourable member for Portage la Prairie, who has 25 minutes remaining.

Bill 20—The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act (Various Acts Amended)

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you from—to my colleagues. I certainly appreciate the opportunity to put a few more words on record. I just got nicely wound up the other day when we ran out of time.

And I was discussing, actually, the relative debt per capita of the three—of the four prairie provinces, or the four western provinces, more accurately, and had gotten so far as to mention BC, which has a debt per capita of \$13,492, and mentioned Saskatchewan, which is in the \$8,932 and actually gaining because they have a surplus and their number is being reduced.

Alberta, which many members on the opposite side seem to think is in tough financial shape, because they certainly have a short-term deficit issue, but their accumulated deficit is actually only \$2,443, so certainly by far in the best financial shape of any western province especially when you can compare that again with Manitoba's number of \$23,757 and rising every year.

So, certainly, we're leaving our children and grandchildren quite a legacy to deal with and that—though some of it would be infrastructure, let's hope, a great deal of it is actually annual debt in terms of government services, and that will be something that they will have—be hard pressed to show in the future when they have to pay this off, to show what they're getting for that—for those dollars.

Now, moving on from that, of course, we're looking at the laws that are being changed as part of this bill. The taxpayer protection laws were put in place for very good reasons, and that was to protect Manitoba families from future governments that may be irresponsible in terms of how much tax they raise and their responsiveness to Manitobans. And, certainly, that describes the actions we're seeing here today.

And I know that many of the groups in the Manitoba community had been talking about increase of PST for infrastructure increases. And, of course, the responses that we got following the budget speech were very telling. We had groups like Winnipeg Harvest and David Northcott saying that that increase would not actually help anyone in the poverty groups and the low-income area; in fact, it would be a very serious blow to them.

I know that food, in particular, and a lot of clothing is not covered by PST, but many of the other essentials of life actually are impacted by PST. And even things like housing, even though not every—not the rental is covered, the building of the houses and the cost for maintenance on those houses actually is an item that PST applies to, and that actually adds to the cost in the long term. And that is always passed down to the bottom, and that is usually the people that can least afford those types of increases.

Other major groups also were very quick to speak out against the proposed increase in PST. Groups like AMM, who certainly are very aware of the infrastructure deficit that we have all across Manitoba; the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce; Manitoba Chambers of Commerce; Manitoba Business Council; Manitoba Heavy Construction Association—all have stated that there should be a referendum in place before we make these kind of major increases. And what is being proposed in terms of the increase in PST is not money that is dedicated in their direction.

Now, I know that when every—when the—if you go back to the election of 2011, every MLA was out on the street knocking on doors. And certainly the stories that we were telling were quite different than what we're hearing today. We were very consistent with our approach and we were very clear that probably it'd take 'til 2016 at least, until we could get the deficit under control, but the NDP made great promises that they would have it under control by 2014. In fact, it seems to me they were bragging quite freely about being ahead of schedule. Apparently, that schedule was not the same as the rest of us, Mr. Speaker. And certainly they were not out there talking about raising the PST or, in fact, broadening the PST, which is what they did a year and a half ago. And that certainly puts a lot of things in question as to the promises that were made at the doorstep and the credibility and—I guess, in terms of the mandate that's out there.

I know, at the time, I remember being a part of the forum with the—all-candidates forum, and there were people in the crowd that raised the question about whether the NDP could actually balance the books with their promises and proposals, without having to make major tax increases. And, of course, their candidate followed the party line and said that, of course, we would—they would not do that. And he's a very credible individual, certainly an honourable man. And I know that he would, frankly,

be quite embarrassed with what has happened since. And I had the good fortune to run into him, actually, on the weekend, and though he certainly didn't want to say anything negative against the NDP party, he was not comfortable with the increases that they had—they are proposing, and, certainly, not a huge fan of the direction that things are going.

So, not only will these members opposite have a chance to go back to the doorsteps at the next election and make their point as to—and be responsible for the promises that they made, they will have to face that electorate again.

But there actually are other people that ran on their behalf who will never have that opportunity or may never have that opportunity if they choose not to run again, and their credibility actually was damaged by the actions of this government. And that's something that they should think about, especially coming out of their convention where they've had an opportunity to face some of these people. And I would hope that, at least to some degree, they would offer apologies that they actually didn't stick to their guns and stick to the promises that they had made.

But broadening the base, certainly, of the PST, certainly was a blow. In particular, I've been—I've had a lot of calls from the people that are impacted by the PST being applied to insurance. And we do have—an insurance firm in town, Portage Mutual, who were very front and centre because they got caught, as did most insurance companies, when the sudden announcement that they would be covered by PST a year and a half ago, and they had already billed three months in advance, which is standard in the insurance industry—they like to have their money as quickly as they can get it.

And so they had already sent out a number of statements that actually didn't have PST on them, and they were having—told they were going to have to either pay up or go out and send a follow-up bill to these individuals. And, of course, that's not something they wanted to do because their credibility would certainly suffer from that, and a compromise was handed out and then a period of time was allowed so that people could actually plan ahead for that. I wonder if that's been done again, with the proposed increase, again, on July the 1st, because that actually isn't law yet and, as mentioned earlier, there are many groups that actually bill well in advance of when they're expecting to receive the money. So they're going to have to do a fair bit of rebilling over the one point on PST.

* (15:00)

And there are also organizations that actually tender a year in advance, and so what's the situation for those individuals with those companies? Will they be able to, perhaps, adjust their amount that they're charging because they're going to have to provide services with a 7 per cent GST instead of an 8 per cent, or vice versa? What will their options be, or will they simply have to absorb that extra cost into the future?

Now, this change from the election promise certainly has a major point, and it will cost Manitobans, actually the first year, the broadening, about \$277 million. That's about the—sorry, that's the increase with one point in PST basic. And that's the largest single increase in taxes in Manitoba since going back to the Howard Pawley days in 1987, certainly a major blow. Overall, Manitobans will be paying 385–\$83.5 million more in PST to the—due to the NDP's decisions to expand and increase the tax over two years. So that includes the broadening.

Now that equates to about \$1,200 per year just for the PST. But they actually did far more than that. I mean, they increased the gas tax, and we certainly remember the promises around that and that we would see that dedicated to infrastructure. And that certainly doesn't seem to have been the case.

There were increases in liquor costs—beer in particular was one that many people actually complained about—cigarette taxes, and there were a wide range of other fees that were increased as well. So that adds more to that \$1,200 a year and for the average family comes to about \$400 per year; that gives us about \$16,000 per year in increased fees and taxes for a family of four. And that's certainly a major increase and will have major impact.

Now that's an average family and some families spend more than that, and there's certainly been the point made that some people have consumable goods beyond that. But there are actually lots of businesses that pay PST as well on a wide range of things.

And I know that the farm community, in particular, though some things are excluded if they're directly related to food production, there are a number of things that we pay PST on here in Manitoba that actually other western provinces do not. And the most obvious one is actually any buildings that you build. We pay PST taxes on all of the materials that go into that. And that is quite a significant additional cost.

In fact, a lot of the construction people along the Saskatchewan border, where they do not pay additional PST on buildings, find it very tough to compete with their Saskatchewan counterparts because they're right now at 7 per cent disadvantage about to become an 8 per cent disadvantage. And that certainly makes it tough for them in the future.

But, when the PST proposal first came forward, we heard first off that this was going to go to things like flood infrastructure, and we did finally see an announcement the other day that there is actually a plan somewhere in the distant future to actually spend some of this money on flood control.

And you look at the proposals—and there are a number of proposals that have been out there to deal with the flood waters, either on the Assiniboine or on Lake Manitoba or in water storages—some of those are 20, 30, 40, even 50 years old in terms of the engineering that's been done on them. So certainly we know that any—no work will be done without those things being reworked.

And there is a call for proposal that's out there now to have a look at some of those and look at what might be the best options, for instance, for something like Lake Manitoba. That's a three-year proposal so that we won't actually be looking at any commitment to anything until at least 2015, and that seems to line up with the election years quite nicely. So I suspect that what we'll see is another vague election promise made on the doorstep that we will deal with these issues and these communities.

And I hope that this promise actually is kept far better than the last one was, not to increase PST. But chances of any major construction and any completion dates until about 2021, 2022 is an awful long way into the future. And it is very discouraging to see that their—the commitment actually hasn't been very strong.

I cannot but help think of other proposals on the Assiniboine River, for instance, that were promises made by this government. In 2004 they promised to make—with the federal government—the expansion of the Shellmouth Reservoir, and the federal government actually held up their end of that. They had to acquire property in Saskatchewan, which they did—and that property is still there—so that we could expand the gates or raise the gates on the Shellmouth structure and store additional water. And that was never completed because we never moved ahead as a province on our side of that agreement.

So actually we paid a price for that even in the 2011 year. In fact, we pay a price on the lack of ability to control the water levels at Shellmouth virtually every year. There's always flooding in the valley to some degree and usually it costs someone some money. Sometimes it's just producers, but it often causes government money because of the damages done. But we missed that opportunity.

And looking back from that, we've actually found back in year 2000, when the dikes that—on the lower Assiniboine—which up until that time had been under control and maintenance of Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, PFRA, which is a branch of the federal government who had had a big—major hand in building them, and actually—and were responsible for the maintenance—was trying to get out of that business. In fact, PFRA no longer even exists as an organization.

They turned it over to Natural Resources, and there was a deal hammered out at the time that maintenance on the dikes would be improved, and, in fact, a construction plan over five years was the agreement, and that we would see mostly federal dollars flow over that five-year period, as long as the Province did their share. And their share was to acquire the properties because on that river, most of that is actually old titles, actually river lots, and so most producers, or most farmland owners, actually own right to the water's edge. So the dike is not actually the property of the Province. It's actually the property of the farmer in those cases.

And so for construction to be done, and reconstruction, which is a major project in a few areas, they actually had to acquire property, and a branch of the provincial government, Land Acquisition, was supposed to provide that service.

They were supposed to go out and deal with all of the farmers. And it was a multi-year phase process and they were to work their way down the river. Well, they got the first year done, but the Province did not keep up its end of the agreement; it did not acquire the properties that they needed to continue construction and so construction ceased.

So there again, we see a lack of commitment to actually dealing with that issue. And the goal of that particular project was to rebuild the dikes in the lower Assiniboine to make them a better standard and also make them more reliable.

But it also increased the river capacity substantially. And the river capacity was a huge issue

during the 2011 flood, and we couldn't get more than 17 or 18,000 cubic feet actually down the river at that point in time. And given the fact that back in 1976, we got 25,000 cubic feet per second down that river, one has to wonder where all of the capacity went.

But the commitment was to build the new dikes back in those times to a capacity of at least 22,500, which would certainly have helped us deal with the flood of 2011. In fact, if you put those numbers together, the reduction that we would have received, in terms of flow down the Assiniboine by having the control structures so the additional control structures in Lake of the Prairies and the increased capacity on the lower Assiniboine, we actually would not have had to do the Hoop and Holler cut, which certainly cost this government a great deal of money, and probably not have had to direct anywhere near as much water towards Lake Manitoba, and certainly not have had to do the emergency reconstruction that took place on the Portage Diversion.

So, had we done what was committed to be done, we would certainly have been in a lot better place, and perhaps there would have been a lot less people that are still displaced from particularly the north end of Lake Manitoba where the outlet went in.

Now I mentioned the other day that I had been in a couple of coffee shops and had talked to a number of people about their feeling about the increase in PST and the effects of Bill 20, and certainly there are many people out there that are very concerned about where this government is going. The fact that they don't seem to be paying much attention to the concerns of citizens in one form or the other, and that they seem very focused on getting as much—as many dollars as possible, as quickly as they can. They're certainly very money hungry these days, and there is concern that this may not be the last increase that takes place; that we may see actually quite substantial more increases in the future because the budget is not yet balanced. We're still running a significant deficit every year and that will be part of the accumulated total, I mentioned earlier, that will be left for our children and grandchildren to pay off.

Now people are frustrated that they're not really feeling like they're being heard by this government. They're certainly looking forward to the opportunity what then—this bill gets to committee. And I do hope it's done in a manner that is respectful of their ability to come and speak to these—to this bill, because certainly people do not have lives that can be

changed at the last moment and turn up in the middle of the night to go to committee and to speak, and then maybe not get to speak that day and have to come back the next day. That I certainly hope that we are more respectful of people than that.

And this theme of respect seems to be one that actually is touching many areas. And we see people in the community feeling that they are being disrespected by this government.

* (15:10)

I represent a constituency that has a lot of people that are impacted by the flood, and I can tell you the level of satisfaction on claims and lack of claims and those that were turned down, certainly, is not—they're not very satisfied and they feel the government has disrespected them in a significant way.

You also have—though my particular community is not one that is impacted by municipal amalgamation, certainly many of the surrounding municipalities are impacted by that. In fact, it's kind of interesting because the city of Portage, which has roughly 12,000 represent—or people in it, and the RM around it, which is the RM of Portage la Prairie, has about 13,000. Actually, one of the examples of what other alternatives are out there in terms of amalgamation—they are not amalgamated, nor do they have any desire to do so—but they've had a working agreement for the last 12 years or so that is revenue sharing and service sharing. And it took them eight years to hammer out that agreement between two different sets of administrations, but they reached an agreement that worked for both and it continues to work very well.

And we do not have the problems of competition over whose resources are used, nor do we have the questions about where a plant or where a business would be located, because they've agreed ahead of time to do that, and that's the kind of co-operative and—co-operative approach that we would certainly like to see municipalities work on, and if they choose to amalgamate down the road then that would certainly be their prerogative. But to push them in that direction, certainly, under a threat of some type of action, though we're not sure what that action would be, certainly seems inappropriate.

But I did have a chance to discuss this, actually, with the reeve, and the reeve—representing 12,000, 13,000 people—was one of the ones that that particular municipality did a pretty good job of handling the flood situation during the flood of 2011,

which was very stressful for them. They were all very new at the job and we had just had a major change in the represent—about the reeve and a number of councillors had been changed, and we were hit from a number of fronts, both at the lake and on the river and on the Portage Diversion, all of which was in their jurisdiction, and including the Hoop and Holler cut, which—flooding an area that wasn't traditionally at risk—they did a pretty good job of handling it. But he shared with me that, actually, he had been instructed to look at surrounding municipalities to see if there were any out there that it would be to their advantage to amalgamate with.

Now, that's a pretty big municipality, far beyond the assessment guidelines that are in place right now as to what to look at. And, if you look around them, we're actually surrounded by a number of fairly small municipalities. It would have been a little bit like, you know, an ant in bed with the elephants, and whether or not the interests of those surrounding municipalities would've been well served. He, of course, laughed it off and said there's no way we—anyone would want to join up with us, and I think he's probably very correct. I think we have a unit that works very well, especially being as we seem to be able to work together and share a number of these issues.

I think that's far better direction to go than what we're seeing right now in terms of pushing people that don't wish to be pushed and who are doing a good job as another level of government. And we're not showing them the respect that they deserve, because, certainly, they are the closest to the people and when issues arise. It is almost always the municipal people that hear first, and then if it's not a municipal issue or something that reaches beyond them, then, of course, we end up talking to the Province and sometimes we end up talking to the federal government, depending on what the issue is.

But I think it's important that we move back to this point of respect for the people in the community and show them some respect, whether it's hearing them on particular bills, whether it's giving them the right to referendum, whether it's legislation that will impact them and giving them the opportunity to speak to that, and at proper consultation. I know that mention of consulting in the municipal meetings right now, but that was actually after the news was already out there and they were told that they had to do that. And, you know, where I come from, consultation is talking to them ahead of time, saying that this is what we're thinking about, do you have

any opinion, do you have any wish to move in that direction? And that does not meet my definition of consultation.

So, Mr. Speaker, I certainly have enjoyed the opportunity to put a few words on record of regards to Bill 20 and the impacts on Bill 20. We know the money probably isn't going to go to the flood mitigation that was promised, or, if it does, it'll be so far into the future that, certainly, the people that are paying the money now will be questioning, well, where has the money been? What's—what have you been doing with the money? Certainly, they move very quickly to talk about infrastructure, but then we heard the city mayors and AMM talk about the fact that there really wasn't any new money in place for them as well.

There is also a significant impact on the people that have issues with income, whether it's the housing issue that I mentioned earlier or whether it's just keeping food on the table. Every time an additional dollar goes somewhere else, and money does go with the PST even though some things are not covered, it has an impact on every household. And it certainly puts a lot of them at risk, and we do not need to put these people at risk. A society should be measured by how it treats its most disadvantaged individuals, and I would suggest that this particular increase does not work for those people, and certainly puts them at risk. We heard that message very clearly from a number of poverty groups including Winnipeg Harvest and others, and we're also hearing it quite dramatically from the people that are under—the homeless people and people that are stressed for housing, the so-called working poor that have a great deal of difficulty making ends meet for whatever reason, and yet are still consumers and still spend money in our community, much of which is on material that is covered by the PST increase.

We also have heard about the vote tax, and, frankly I shake my head over this one in all honesty, because if you're going to go into the occupation that we're in now, which is political, if you don't expect to be involved in fundraising you're just in the wrong business. And I think that message needs to be brought home very clearly to the members across the way who feel pretty satisfied to take this additional money. If they didn't want to get involved in fundraising, which has always been a part of politics and will probably always continue to be part of politics, why did they make that choice? Why did they sign their name on that form and go around and find a hundred other individuals to back them up? I

think they need to rethink their career if they're not happy with that, and I would certainly encourage them to step up to the plate and say, we're not going to take the vote tax, we don't think as a party we should take the vote tax.

Now, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill, Mr. Speaker, and I know I have many colleagues that want to join me in doing it.

Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to talk on Bill 20. This is the bill which removes the people's right in Manitoba to have a referendum before the provincial sales tax is raised by 1 per cent, from 7 per cent to 8 per cent as of July the 1st. This is an important measure for a whole variety of reasons, and it is important that we consider what is being proposed in Bill 20 very carefully.

We stand today, Mr. Speaker, at a fork in the road in terms of democracy in Manitoba. The question is this: Do the people of Manitoba have a right under today's law to a referendum on the merits of increasing the provincial sales tax before the provincial sales tax is increased? This is a democratic right, a voting right. We have today on the books in Manitoba, under Manitoba legislation and under current Manitoba law, a requirement that there be a referendum before the provincial sales tax is increased. Notwithstanding the presence of the legal requirement for the referendum, the government has brought forward Bill 20, which will remove that requirement for a referendum.

Now, it's notable that they have done this not before the budget where they imposed the provincial sales tax, that they have done this—brought forward this bill after the budget was presented, and so it is a retroactive measure. And this question arises as to whether there is a fundamental right here to a referendum that applies not just to the provincial sales tax, but to the referendum requirement before Manitoba Hydro is privatized and the referendum requirement before Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation is privatized. Either there is an 'egal' and 'lethical' right—ethical right to these referendums or there is not.

Does the Province have the ability, the government of the day, to do away with these important voting rights on the whim of the government, or is this such a significant and important voting right that it needs to be preserved and enhanced?

* (15:20)

And we are at a fork in the road today because we come as we vote on this—as we move forward to the question of whether or not governments of whatever sort have the right to throw out legislation which provides people with important voting rights, important input into the decisions of—major decisions of government. Or do the people of Manitoba not have such a right, such a legal right?

I would say, Mr. Speaker, if there was ever a time and a place for a referendum, this is the time and the place. The Premier (Mr. Selinger) and all the members of his government campaigned two years ago in the election on not raising the provincial sales tax. The Premier, two years ago, when asked about whether he would raise the provincial sales tax, said the whole concept was nonsense. There is no doubt where the Premier stood two years ago; there is no doubt what people voted for two years ago. And while there is an ability—and should be an ability—for governments to change their mind at times as circumstances change, that there needs to be safeguards by the people and for the people of our province such that major decisions like this are not completely overturned and reversed without a democratic consultation, which in our province is required by law as a referendum.

Not only is this a complete reversal of the Premier's position in 2011 during the election, but it's quite apparent to those of us in this Chamber that the government is not managing the finances well and that there is, in fact, a questionable need for an increase in the provincial sales tax.

We know, for example, that only last year, the NDP government brought in a budget—a budget for expenditures last year, and when the expenditures were added up at the end of the year, the government had spent \$130 million more than it had put in expenditures in its budget. If the government had, in fact, kept to its budget, then there would be a \$130 million now available to the government, which would fulfill much—not all—of the \$200-million requirement that the government says it needs this year in provincial sales tax money.

So the government should clearly have demonstrated a much greater ability to manage the finances. And this is one of the reasons why referendum would be important, so that people would have a chance to examine how well or not well the government has done and make their judgment as part of a referendum. First question

would be, is this provincial sales tax increase needed? And it's a question—it's a question which the government, through its poor management of Manitoba's finances, you know, has left open.

The second part of what the government has committed in this budget is that they not only want to put the provincial sales tax up by 1 per cent, they not only want to raise \$200 million in new money this year, but the government has committed to use every penny of that \$200 million toward new infrastructure money that would help deal with the infrastructure situation in Manitoba.

Now, Mr. Speaker, oh, it's queer to many people—Association of Manitoba Municipalities, business council, Manitoba Chambers of Commerce have suggested, have put forward, have supported the idea that there needs to be adequate money for infrastructure. And yet, when we have a careful look at the budget, the booklet that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) put forward on estimates of revenue and estimates of expenditure, on the estimates of revenue we see very clearly the new \$200 million that the Minister of Finance expects to raise this year, but when it comes to the other side of the equation, when we look at the estimates of expenditures on infrastructure this year and compare those to last year, there's not a lot of difference. There's nowhere that there's that extra \$200 million that the minister says he wants to dedicate very specifically. And, in fact, I and others in this Chamber have asked the minister, have asked the Premier (Mr. Selinger), for a list of those \$200 million of new expenditures above and beyond what has been spent last year on infrastructure, and the Minister of Finance and the Premier has been completely unable to provide that list after being asked many, many times to do so. It is another reason why there should be a referendum, because if the government really proposes to do this, and will really carry through on its province and its commitment, then we should be able to have access, the people of Manitoba, as well, should be able to have access, to that list.

It is a pure matter of making sure that this government, which is breaking its promise to raise—not raise the sales tax, and therefore has lost a lot of credibility—and so it is important that there is built into the process now a process which will take the government—make the government accountable, right, which will ensure that what the government says it's going to do it is actually going to do, because in the past the experience with this government, you

know, is that it says one thing and then it does another—just exactly as it said that it wouldn't raise the provincial sales tax two years ago, and now is saying that it will raise the provincial sales tax and is doing so. So it is a time like no other to make sure that there is accountability, because the credibility of this government is in question. It is a time like no other to have this referendum, so not just we in the Legislature but the people of Manitoba can have input and a say and can make their judgment.

So we should have this referendum. In my view, there is no question about it. It's a legal requirement, but there's also a moral and ethical requirement, given the particular circumstances which we are under today. Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the history of democracy, the history of the rule of law and the history of democratic rights for people. And I want to begin by talking for a moment about the year 1688, the Glorious Revolution in England, because this was a time when there were limits put on the power of kings. The power was given to parliament in many areas, particularly relative to economic institutions, and the whole situation in 1688 opened up the political system to a broad section of society. And that change was fundamental to the changes that have occurred since then not only in England, but in western democracies, which have allowed input and inclusion of people—a diverse section, groups and sections of society.

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It has allowed input to people but, at the same time, it has provided the basis on which we have been able to make vital economic and innovation gains. And those economic and innovation gains have been particularly critical in the century since then and are fundamental to the society that we have today, and the fact that we are able to improve on a pretty steady basis the standard of living of people, Manitoba and Canada and western democracies.

And it contrasts very distinctly to the situation that has occurred in nondemocratic societies where the history is much more troubled, where the economic gains which may advance for a while are often then lost, and we have states which have been through great periods of trouble because they have lost or never gained this democratic ability, this ability to include large segments of their population in decision making. And this is critical that we do not lose this ability to include people in decision making,

and that is people beyond the few who are here representing Manitobans.

Now, let us talk for a little bit about the situation, you know, in Manitoba. We have had, over the years, some significant advances in the democracy in Manitoba. I think very few of us would argue with decisions made by a bill giving the votes to women. Everybody would agree with what happened in 1916. Nobody is going to turn this around just because it was a bill that was not in the Constitution. And remember, we're today arguing about a bill, and it may not be in the Constitution but it should perhaps have no less credibility than the votes given to women, because what we're doing is giving the power to people with a referendum. And that power should not suddenly be taken away by government on a whim.

And, of course, in the 1950s, again, under a Liberal government, we had the extension, the vote to Aboriginal people, again, on a bill, not a constitutional change. And no one is going to reverse that process, and it's very important that we don't—*[interjection]* It was the Liberal government in Manitoba in the early 1950s—provincial, right. Just as it was a Liberal government that brought in the vote for women in 1916. It was hard fought but that's what happened. We're not going back and change history, but we're going to talk about what happened.

You know, the history of the rule of law and it's important, and let's look not just at the votes, but there is a history of the use of referendums in Manitoba. And I don't know how many are familiar with this, but in 1915, the Liberal government of the day was elected, not only on giving votes for women, but the Liberal government of the day was elected on a platform to hold a referendum, and that referendum was on prohibition, and to abide by the results. It was a very divisive, all right, subject at the time. The temperance organizations actually drafted the legislation of that day—they participated. The vote in that referendum was held March 13th, 1916, and the voters of that time showed resounding support for prohibition. And, as a result, the Liberal government introduced and passed legislation to provide for prohibition because the people had spoken.

Now, interestingly enough, you know, Norris, who was the premier of the day, was actually a—you know, a social drinker. He used to go down to the Royal Alex with some of his friends and tip back a drink or two, but because it was a democracy, right,

he followed the wishes of the people and accepted the referendum.

Now things changed and, interestingly enough, the legislation which provided for the referendum was actually ruled later on unconstitutional and thrown out. But still the Liberal government of the day, under Toby Norris, you know, abided by and of course later on we had changes under a Liberal government that changed things so that there would be a government-owned liquor store and liquor operation. And that was in 1924.

So there is a history of referendum in this province and we shouldn't forget that. And that early history was not enough to provide, as it were, stable—all right—circumstance of having referendums or not having referendums. But because we are today at a critical juncture, you know, whether we accept or we throw out referendums, you know, we cannot be halfway when they are in law. We either have referendums for the PST, for Manitoba Hydro, for MPIC, or we accept the principle that they can be thrown out very easily, that they're not all that important.

And I, for one, Liberals, stand up for the principle that referendums are important, used selectively to give rights to people—voting rights to people. And that's what we are talking for.

Are we going in Manitoba to progress as a democracy and improve rights for people, or are we going in Manitoba to go backwards and give away and throw away these rights, these democratic voting rights, for the people of Manitoba? It is an important issue and it's one that we should not take lightly.

We need to remember that many of those who have gone before us fought, hard—World War I, World War II, in other wars—to preserve the democratic voting rights that we have today in this province. We should not throw those democratic voting rights away lightly, as this government is doing.

We need to recognize what this government is doing. We need to recognize why it is so important and why these voting rights should not be treated lightly.

You know, I refer members of the NDP, the members of this Chamber, to an article by Lawrence Martin which appeared today in *The Globe and Mail*, in which he writes these are not normal times, today. Our national, provincial, political and administrative

institutions have never been so fragile. Democracy is vital.

And whether you're talking about what's happening in the national government or whether you're talking about what's happening at the provincial government has to be a concern. And we should be concerned. And we've got to be very careful, partly because this government, this NDP government, has a history of not being as attentive to people's rights as they should have been.

In bill after bill after bill, this government has included clauses which would nullify—right—the minister's responsibility, they would remove any liability for ministers for actions of gross misconduct, inserted right in the legislation. And I have stood up in this Chamber many, many times to speak out strongly against that. But it's still happening today with some of the laws we are seeing.

The government, the NDP, has used Crown corporation dollars to hire political staff, not an appropriate action. The government of the NDP has politicized the civil service, calling a rally involving civil servants, sending the message out to civil servants, to get people coming in, in the civil servants here to the Legislature, to support their views on immigration.

*(15:40)

Now, I actually supported the government's views on immigration, but I do not support their politicization of the civil service. It's very dangerous.

Time and time again, this government has not shown an adequate ability to consult people, to consult the First Nations and Metis people. I—there are countless times that I have talked with people in the First Nation or Metis community and they have told me, we haven't been consulted on this, what is going on? Why is this government not talking to us? You know, and, most recently, in this session, there's not been adequate consultation, right, so that this session could run more smoothly. The government is being arrogant and wanting its own way regardless of what the Liberal Party or the Conservative Party wants.

This is a fundamental, democratic issue. We should not toss out this need for a referendum so easily, and I, for one, will stand up to say that Manitoba Hydro should not be privatized without a referendum; that MPIC should not be privatized without a referendum; and that the PST should not be

increased without a referendum, because these are important decisions for all of Manitobans and should not be taken lightly.

We are in an age of the Internet, in an age of social media, where the potential to consult people, to have new and cheaper voting approaches are there which can be done rapidly. The government said it didn't have time, but, in fact, if this government had called the referendum on the day when Bill 20 was introduced, we could have held the referendum already, we would know the answer. That was a vacuous excuse. We need, as democratically elected MLAs, to stand up to any government which tramples on the democratic voting rights of ordinary and everyday Manitobans. These are essential to democracy; they should not be thrown away.

There are those who believe that the voting rights in provincial elections granted to women and Aboriginal people are inherently different from the voting rights in a referendum, but I would suggest to the members here that they are all part of a democratic process and a democratic progression and that we should support the democratic progression which gives the people greater rights. It is easier and more opportune for people to vote today with things like the 'interlet.' This may be only a law and not a constitutional change, but so were the laws which granted the rights to vote to women and the right to vote for Aboriginal people. We don't want to lose any of these rights.

I talked about rights once before in this Chamber and the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) got up and said it was so misguided, so classically Liberal. Well, I'm proud to be a Liberal and stand up for the voting rights of people in this province, and I will continue to stand up for the voting rights of people in this province as long as I am here and as long as I'm alive.

This government has seen—not only in this area but in other areas, in its approach to the Jockey Club, changing the law after the fact instead of following the law. In its approach to municipal amalgamation not doing the sort of consultation, not being open to sensible suggestions, but just saying, squat, nada—those are not appropriate.

In the last few years we have fought, many of us, for democratic rights, voting rights for farmers before changes were made to the Canadian Wheat Board, and yet we now as a government which is throwing away democratic voting rights in a very, I believe, misguided way.

I have talked about many things and I will end with one, and that has to do with the fact that we are talking about a PST which has an impact on everyone, but has a disproportional impact on those who are of low income. And its disproportional effect is due to the fact that they have less marginal income, less ability to, you know, get around or to address problems, so each change, each increase is particularly onerous. And when we have a government which has not, in its many years increased the shelter rates, when we have a government which has not paid the attention that it should have to those on low income, so that, in fact, they are getting farther apart from other Manitobans and not closer together, it is a problem. And it's a problem that this government needs to be reminded of.

When Evelyn Forget stood up in a forum in Calgary recently, she pointed out that under this government, although 80 per cent of those with average and greater incomes are—actually have an improvement of health, the 20 per cent who are the lowest income having—are going in the opposite direction, that they are showing decreased health. They are doing worse, and that is a significant problem for this government which has paid lip service to the needs of those on low income, but has not paid the attention that it should have done.

And so, when you increase the PST, it is that extra burden, it is that extra straw on the camel's back—as they talk about—that makes a difference. And that is one of the reasons why we need to be cognizant—Mr. Speaker, I'm winding up my speech—of the fact that all Manitobans should have input. All Manitobans—

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

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 20, The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act, the act that, in essence, puts in place another per cent on the PST, takes away the requirement for an amendment.

I was very disappointed that the NDP government did not—members opposite did not choose to support the hoist motion and give this, give us time to have that referendum, give this some second thought, but let the people of Manitoba have their say because I believe it's certainly a democratic right. We have a law that says there will be a referendum if provincial sales tax or income tax was

raised. That law was put there for a reason—thank you. It was put there for a reason and it was put there with very good thought given to it and to just go out and rewrite that legislation, I think, is the wrong thing to do.

It's interesting that—and I know most of the things that I'm probably going to say will be put on the record by other members on the debate on this bill because the debate seems to have been somewhat endless—but it's interesting that the NDP government was so high on having a referendum on the Wheat Board. It was a democratic principle that they thought we had to—that should be adhered to, and I give them credit for sticking up for what they felt was a democratic process. But now, when there's another democratic process there, they're not even interested in sticking up for it, all they're interested in doing is throwing it out.

You know, I heard the Premier (Mr. Selinger) on the radio the morning after the BC election, and he said that was democracy in action. He said that is what democracy is about, that's democracy doing what democracy should be doing. So, obviously, he agrees with the democratic process, but it appears that he only agrees with it when it's in BC and not here.

*(15:50)

We get a constant theme from this government in question period and then at other times, and it's—it becomes very predictable. They take no responsibility for any of the—their actions. They choose to blame Filmon, the Progressive Conservatives in the '90s. They choose to, when they can't blame the Filmon government, then they blame the feds, the federal government. They say it's the federal government's fault. And, when that doesn't work, they'll go so far as to blame municipalities. They'll blame victims for their mismanagement. They even blame patients in hospitals for having the audacity to report that they had to sit there for anywhere from six to 12 hours to get emergency services.

Beyond that, they then move to misdirection, and the misdirection is anything that can draw attention away from what they don't want to be talked about. And right now, the 1 per cent increase in the provincial sales tax is what they don't want talked about. So that is why we saw several weeks ago the big fuss over the Portage Diversion. It wasn't so much a dangerous situation at the time. Those people went in there and they said, we'll move in a

second if you ask us to, if there is a threat, and that's what they said. Yes, the threat certainly disappeared in a hurry but, anyhow, they talked to both the RCMP and they talked to the government people that run the structure, and the communication was quite good.

And so the—to get this House talking about something else besides the increase in the PST, a huge fuss was made over it. I even heard the minister suggest Assiniboine downs was going to be flooded. Assiniboine downs is going to be put out of business, but it's not going to be flooded. This minister is—the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) is going to do his thing. He's going to pull their funding so that he can get control through a different board of that facility. It's, once again, a rather underhanded way to do something. You go out, withhold the funding to start with, even though the legislation says you have to produce the funding, and I presume the funding's been produced because the judge suggested that they were in contravention of the law and they should follow the law until they at least change the law.

I want to talk a little about what the—I want to talk a little about the impacts of the 1 per cent increase on PST to municipalities. Municipalities have, over the past few years—they face—they provide so many of the services to people in their jurisdictions, and over the past few years, simply on sales tax, we've seen in 2002 an expansion of sales tax to a number of services for municipalities, once again in 2004, again in 2011, and now a 1 per cent across all the things that municipalities pay PST on.

In 2002, the PST was expanded to engineering and architectural services, and in 2004, it went to legal, accounting and many other services municipalities must access. Then in 2012 was when it went on to insurance premiums, and that was the big one. The AMM provides the insurance for all the municipalities outside the city of Winnipeg. That increase, that 7 per cent sales tax on that insurance program, cost roughly \$700,000. Now, with another 1 per cent, it will take it over \$800,000, simply out of the AMM, which is non-profit. The AMM's there to provide services to the municipalities. Municipalities must pay that. It's a tax-based service for municipalities, so it's taxes paying for taxes to the Province—\$800,000—just another way to take it out of the residents' of those municipalities pockets. They take it out of their pockets through property tax paid to the municipality, and then the municipality has to buy their insurance and that premium then goes to the provincial government.

Mr. Speaker, the 2 and a half per cent hike—or 2-and-a-half-cent hike in fuel was a huge hit to municipalities a year ago too. You know, it just goes on and on and on, the costs go higher all the time. Municipalities are large users of fuel. They're usually running for—some fairly heavy equipment—trucks, graders, Cats, all sorts of equipment out there—and that extra 2 and a half cents on fuel has a major impact on their budgeting.

The other thing that continues to happen is there's more education tax downloaded onto property all the time, and when the education tax expands on property, it takes away municipalities' ability to draw their revenues for municipal services off that property because the taxes get to a level that they can't handle. So the municipalities then become the ones that are doing the interference to keep the taxes lower on property, and they come up short.

You know, when you think about all those services that municipalities provide, there's so many of them: there's libraries, there's recreation, there's roads and bridges, water and waste water, infrastructure, many health-care services, education, fire and police services, land-use planning—just to name a few. Property assessment, building code enforcements, transit, floodfighting—some more of the things that municipalities supply, and yet this government, through their expansion on PST, is tying the hands of those municipalities even more.

Now, you know, a number of years ago—and I can't remember the exact year, I know was involved at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities level—the federal government, in essence, saw the light. They said it's wrong to be charging goods and services tax on municipal services; it's wrong to put a tax on another level of government that makes their revenues out of taxes. So they took it away; they took it off. Municipalities no longer pay goods and services taxes, and it was millions—it was tens of millions. It was across the country, and it made a tremendous difference to municipalities.

Now we have, in essence, the provincial government turning around and trying to draw back that—what the feds gave back to the municipalities. They see it as an opportunity to pull some more money out of them.

They—the feds did another thing just a couple—or three years ago, and they did a 2-cent surtax—or took 2 cents of the tax off fuel and put it into—gave it to municipalities, which certainly is a help to the municipalities.

Now we have a minister that 'kleeps' claiming he's dramatically increased the funding to municipalities. Somehow the municipalities don't agree, and I just don't understand how they're not getting that picture that he so loudly promotes it.

The—you know, when a year ago, they raised the price of motive fuel in the province 2 and a half cents, the City of Winnipeg said that additional fuel tax would cost the City of Winnipeg alone, another \$450,000.

* (16:00)

When they talk about the—the municipalities asked for 1 per cent of the sales tax—of the existing sales tax, by the way—and a little bit of smoke and mirrors, a little bit of sleigh of hand, the Province comes along and says, oh, we'll give the equivalent of 1 per cent of the provincial sales tax. Of course, that includes all the various programs you're in right now and all the various things that are there. And when the smoke cleared away, it was almost a push. It was a very little gain whatsoever to the municipalities.

You know, municipalities—one of the things that I worked on when I was with the municipalities quite some time ago—and I'm sure the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn) worked on the same issue when he was involved with—was rural water pipeline infrastructure—[interjection]—and once again I hear the Minister of Local Government (Mr. Lemieux) blaming the feds. I hardly get it out of my mouth, he starts blaming the feds. The funding—and the funding rolled into Building Manitoba and disappeared, and the minister—the prior minister said—of finance—said we used it for other priorities.

So you can spin it all you want, the money was still there. You chose to spend it on other priorities and tell the municipalities it was the feds' fault. There's—rural water pipelines are economic development. They're—they help all of rural Manitoba. We have one in my municipality we put in a number of years ago: one third funding from the federal government, one third from the provincial government, one third local. Once the money rolled into the Building Manitoba Fund, the Province should be putting in two thirds, and the local, one third. They're fairly costly projects. But the Province came along in their generosity and said, no, we'll go 50-50. Well, municipalities can't really—in a lot of cases, can't afford that other 50 per cent, and one third they can maybe make work but they are very costly undertakings.

You know, some of the little things that this NDP government's done that I don't see making any sense, and I may stray a little off topic here, but I built a new home last year and I'm—there's myself and my partner Barb, the only two people living on a whole half section of land, 320 acres of land. Under the new regulations that this Province put in place, I could not use an ejector. In my old yard site where I used to live, I had an ejector. It was there for 45 years, trouble-free, caused no problems whatsoever. I could not put an ejector in my new yard site so it cost me \$8,000 more to put in a field. An ejector pumps the grey water on top of the ground and the sun shines on it and it—the ultraviolet rays break it down, it dries up and it's gone. The septic field takes the same grey water, puts it underground closer to the water table. It doesn't make very much sense really, but that's what we were faced with and it cost me \$8,000 more, simply because of a regulation that I don't think the government gave a lot of thought to. They were trying to make political hay with and I was the victim of—along with many others—of their folly.

You know, I couldn't help but think, when we look at the amalgamations of municipalities and the way this government is plowing ahead with that so-called legislation, I do agree with amalgamations. I've told the minister that many times. I don't agree—I do not agree with forced amalgamations and he knows that, and it was interesting when they—when he first made that announcement last November that the first press release or the first interview he did he tried to hide behind me by saying the former president of the AMM was in favour of this amalgamation. Well, in favour of the *[interjection]*—pardon me, I had the wrong president. I thought he was referring to me and I—*[interjection]* Anyhow, the forced amalgamation has just caused a lot of anxiety out there.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

I attended the mayors' and reeves' meeting in Miniota and I made a few notes. The Minister for Local Government assured all the people there that he was the advocate for municipalities at the Cabinet table. And I wonder how come they're were having such a difficult time getting their message across at the Cabinet table if the minister was advocating very strongly on what they were feeling.

He also went on to talk about all the heavy load and what wonderful people municipal councillors were, patting them on the back and telling them he

knew they did it for very little money. And it was a very nice speech, but I made the note at the time that the Minister of Local Government's (Mr. Lemieux) going to save many councillors a lot of aggravation by putting them out of jobs. I wrote, what a saint. He—how kind of him to tell them, okay, there's going to be 60 less municipalities. I got rid of a whole slug of you.

And, you know, I think municipal politics is such a good learning level for a lot of people. It doesn't matter what walk you follow in life, municipal politics teaches a lot of lessons. You learn a lot of things when your there and I know there's a number of members in this House that have had some municipal or school board experience. Great learning. It's—I think everyone should serve on municipal council or a school board at some time in their lives. It changes your perspective. But now the Minister for Local Government's certainly taking away that opportunity from a lot of fine Manitobans. They will never have a chance to serve on municipal council now because they're going to take away so many of them.

So the—I think it's kind of reprehensible that they would force this. I always found that the carrot worked better than the stick. And I still have concerns about where they're going with this.

You know, a number of years ago—something I was just thinking about the other day, but—so a number of years ago in Estimates, a former minister of Agriculture here, Ms. Rosann Wowchuk, I said to her in Estimates—and this was probably in 2007 or 2008. I told her that I had some concerns that—with what was happening in the cattle industry, and as you know we'd had the BSE in 2003. I said, with what was happening in the cattle industry, I felt that we would probably have at least a million acres—taking it out of hay and cattle pasture and turned into cultivated crop acres again. And in most cases that would be fairly marginal land, but we saw a rise in crop prices and no returns on cattle for a number of years. And I was concerned about the environmental impacts of that, and I felt that it was something that the minister of Agriculture should have been paying some thought to, and I had hoped that she would. And her answer was less than good, as far as I could see. She said simply that she hoped I was wrong.

Well you know, five years later, well over a million of those acres have been broke up, grass, hay land, gone back into cropland, partly because of high prices of grain, but partly because of the disasters of

the cattle industry. And the environmental impacts are certainly there. Permanent grass, permanent cover, is certainly more of a carbon sink than cropland. Cropland, at its certain stages, does pull carbon out of the atmosphere, but when the crop stubble and the residue breaks down, it goes back, so it's more of a push than a reduction.

*(16:10)

You know, there's some simple solutions to that. You can do some rewards for good environmental management, good environmental projects. The impacts will be felt for years, you know. And I've raised the concern with the minister; unfortunately, as so often happens in here, the approach is taken that the opposition is always wrong, and I was hoping that we were going to have some success with that.

There's a number of things that could be done that would be the carrot, rather than the stick in those cases. Assessments could be lowered on those lands, or zeroed. We are seeing too many wetlands disappear, too many tree covers disappear, and I think you still need to do things that provide incentives. They're not terribly expensive in most cases, but some incentives to farmers to keep those properties in their natural states.

In 1997, I won the Environmental Stewardship Award for the province, and I won it over a project I did on my farm where I did some riparian fencing along the lake at my place, did some—set up some paddocks and rotational grazing, off-site watering. It was a good project. I was proud of the project. It made sense to me. There were some funding from government and also from our conservation district, and on my own I probably would not have been able to afford that at that time, but with the help I had we set up a very nice project.

And it certainly appears to have attracted some interest because we were able to win the award and then compete at a national level on the environmental stewardship awards. And that system is still working till this day. It works very well and, you know, you feel that you have accomplished something to help the environment, help the waterways and just make Manitoba a better place to live.

You know, this 1 per cent increase in the provincial sales tax, I don't think the Province thought this out very well. They just said we need money. They made the excuses why they thought

they needed money which, under closer examination, haven't held up very well. But the—an expansion on the provincial sales tax affects everyone. It doesn't matter whether you're urban, rural; it doesn't matter whether you're young or old; it doesn't matter whether you're rich or poor, or in between. Every time you buy a good, buy a service, you're going to be paying an extra 1 per cent on the sales tax.

When you roll it together with the increases in taxes last year through last year's budgeting process, and the additional taxes in this year's budgeting process, not quite as large as last year's, but some \$30 million that I've been able to find—there's probably a lot more. When you roll those together, you come up with an extra \$500 million worth of revenue for the Province this year. And \$500 million worth of revenue, one and a quarter million people—do the division. You've got \$400 a place and it's—a piece, and it's \$1,600 for a family of four, average of \$1,600 for a family of four.

Those people, those hard-working Manitobans, could find a lot of uses for an extra \$1,600. You know they say, well, what would you give up? Well, I've—several times that I've given lists in here of the things that could be given up. There's such a number of them, the spin doctors, the communications people. Cut it in half, you'd probably save \$6 million. You're getting a long way toward what you need to offset some of these extra costs.

You know, the vote tax, the vote tax that this government has now put into place is so bad, it's just a silly idea. Like, you've got 37 sitting members. You divide the vote tax, the overall collection as \$7,000, and I understand they've lowered it a little bit, so it's less than \$7,000, but if it's 5 or 6 thousand dollars per sitting member, why not just go out and raise it? It's not hard to raise money, and why do you feel that the taxpayers of this province need to pay for a political party's operation?

I see my time is growing short and I know my colleague from Riding Mountain is waiting to speak, so with that, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): It's a pleasure to put some words on the record with regard to Bill 20, obviously in opposition of where this bill is intending to go with Manitobans, and I just want to put a few words on the record with thoughts and concerns that have been raised to me as an MLA for Riding Mountain, as well as a critic for Family Services and Persons with Disabilities and the Status of Women.

Mr. Speaker, or Mr. Deputy Speaker, under the balanced budget, debt repayment and taxpayer protection act, Manitobans have the democratic right to a referendum whenever government wants to raise a major tax, and we've seen last year where the government raised, you know, PST, or incorporated PST in a number of areas or, actually, over the last several years.

We've seen them increase it under assurance premiums last year, legal and accounting areas in years prior, but those haven't been major increases or tax increases, but those have been increases that have directly affected Manitobans in a number of ways.

And it seemed to play right into where the government has gone with Bill 20, is now that they're going to increase PST by 1 per cent. So all of these services over the last number of years that have seen an increase or having to pay PST on those services, are now going to be under this new PST increase. So the government, in a sense, has slowly rolled out their grab—or tax grab on taxpayers' dollars in various ways and now they're going to hit them big time with this one additional per cent, going to 8 per cent.

I had a conversation yesterday with Anita Zimmer. Anita Zimmer is a business owner in Russell, Manitoba. She owns Mala Boutique and has for several years. My children and I have shopped that store several times. I've always enjoyed talking to Anita, who actually went to normal school with my Mom, and Anita has her fingers in everything in the community. She's a great volunteer.

She's working on the centennial this year in the community. She's working on a history book. She's pulling historical records to create a record of details that schools shared in that—over the last hundred years. So she's somebody that I believe has her ear to the ground, has her community's best interests at heart, but is a business owner in a community that is very close to the Saskatchewan border.

* (16:20)

Anita says that with this increase to 8 per cent it is pretty much going to shut her doors. She is not going to be able to compete. She has found over the last several years that just even the 2 per cent or 3 per cent—2 per cent difference between Saskatchewan and herself has seen its challenges, but she's been able to work through them and provide different types of services or incentives. But this one extra per cent increase is just something that she doesn't think her business can bear.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that's very sad and unfortunate because I think Anita has a lot to offer Manitoba. Her business is a great business, and I know that she has a lot of people that would be interested in and at some point taking over that business. But with the increase in PST it just takes away that incentive for Anita's business to transition or move on to the next generation.

So that's just one example, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of how this 1 per cent increase is going to have an effect on communities along the Saskatchewan border, and the US border for that matter. Individuals I've heard who have gone to Minot to go shop, actually who live in Manitoba, have actually thought of going—or have indicated they're going through Saskatchewan on their way back through the States because they'll have to—they'll pay less tax coming into Canada than coming back through Manitoba.

So, again, there's, you know, individuals who are looking at ways to save a dollar, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and by the government implementing this one extra per cent is going to play hard on small business, on Manitoba families and I think it's just the wrong way to go.

Now, during the election, I know that the minister—or the Premier (Mr. Selinger) of the province, at a debate in Brandon—I was at that debate—and I heard the Premier say that it was nonsense, that he would not increase taxes, major taxes, in the next—after the next election. And, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have seen that that wasn't true. We have seen this Premier raise taxes, over \$286 million last year, and a significant more this year with the PST.

And I just cannot understand how this government can continue to believe that they're doing it what is in the most interest, or in the best interest, of Manitobans. And, when they say they're doing what matters most to Manitobans, well, I tend not to agree and for a number of reasons, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Manitoba families are going to be severely impacted by this decision, and we have seen families who have had to seek supports and help from different organizations like women's shelters, Samaritan House, Winnipeg Harvest; they all are looking for help when they've hit a stumble in life, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And these organizations are there to help them; they provide the supports that they require to get them through. They provide them with a hand up, not like this government who has its

hand out whenever there's an opportunity to raise taxes or increase service fees.

These are individuals who are looking for ways to make their life better and assist their families. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've seen what the increase, by having PST incorporated into legal and accounting services, has done to women's shelters, to other non-profit organizations; it has actually put them in a very difficult situation because they've had to pay that extra PST, which they never had to before.

And, you know, these organizations are providing benefits and services that are so necessary in society, and they are to be commended for the work they do. But it seems that this government continually takes from these types of organizations and from families who need help from this government and from individuals who want to make a difference with these families.

So I don't think that this really should be something that the government should be proud of; I don't think it's something that matters most to Manitobans. When you are increasing taxes, I think that if they would give it a sober second thought and step away from that commitment of theirs to raise the PST, actually withdraw Bill 20—you know, we've done our part—we've done our part—to try to give the government an opportunity to take a sober second thought on that.

The member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) brought in a reasoned amendment. We had an opportunity to debate that, to share the concerns that we're hearing from Manitobans with regard to the increase in PST. We've provided a hoist motion trying to get the government to pull the bill until they've had an opportunity to discuss this proposal of a tax increase. But it—I'm, you know, I'm sorry to say that, you know, the government's not listening; they're not paying attention to what matters most to Manitobans.

You know, the prebudget consultations, I know that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) was in Brandon, and I know he had a long conversation with several organizations and groups with regard to the services that they provide. He indicated that he was concerned about, you know, certain aspects of services that are being provided, including services for community living for adults. I know that organizations gave a presentation and indicated that they just cannot meet the needs of individuals within the communities that they represent, that there's such

a shortfall of support with regard to providing the services to having adults living with—in the community with disabilities. And, you know, the Minister of Finance indicated at that meeting that he understands, he knows that that's an issue, that's a concern and that he will take that forward.

You know, nowhere in speaking to these individuals did the Finance Minister raise the point of increasing the PST by 1 per cent. They would have remembered that. I think they would have remembered that quite clearly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because these organizations are non-profit organizations. They provided a significant service to persons with disabilities, providing them with living accommodations; they provide them with and support employment opportunities for them.

And in communities that I represent like Riverdale—in Rivers, I mean, and in Minnedosa and in Russell, they're huge employers—employees within the community. They do a significant amount of work within our community, and I think that by this government not paying attention and respecting the work that they do, and not respecting their requests at a prebudget consultation, is extremely disrespectful.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$1.2 billion is going to be required—and that's billion dollars—is going to be required for debt servicing. And, to me, that is a significant amount of money that could very easily be spent in areas that matter most to Manitobans. It could be used to help, you know, provide supports for families who are in need; it could provide supports for the child welfare system, which, we know, are struggling to maintain business as usual within that area. We know that it's the busiest business in Canada, our child welfare system, and I think that, you know, \$1.2 billion would do a significant benefit to that department and that organization, so when we see this amount of money going into debt servicing, I think Manitobans should be very concerned about where the Province is leading them over the next few years.

Another area that I think would benefit extremely, would benefit in a great way, from the \$1.2 billion in debt-servicing fees, would be Victim Services. We've all had family members, friends who have actually been victims of crime, or have had an opportunity to try to provide support for individuals who have been victims of crime. I've been both. I have been a victim of crime and I've used the services of Victim Services, and I'm so impressed by

the amount of work that these individuals, you know, get through in a period of time.

* (16:30)

And that region that they represent in the Westman area, for example, is unbelievable. They work from, pretty much, Killarney, all the way to the US border, to Waywayseecappo, to Dauphin area, and with minimal amount of staff. But they never fail to be there when individuals are asking for support or help. And I believe that they do a thankless job in some ways, but I think that without their support and their services a lot of victims would not fare as well, I can say, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know I am forever grateful for the supports that I received from that agency when I was going through a situation.

I'd also like to speak about the need for increased support from this government and increased interest from this government in Victim Services, and the role of the victim and how we have to be more prepared and more interested in the services that they provide.

A few years back a friend of mine was actually assaulted by her husband and relied on law enforcement to provide supports. I was at the event and that evening I actually was with her at the hotel where we were staying. It was a hockey tournament—or a hockey game. And I was called to help provide supports for her. And this was in a community in the Interlake. So we were out, you know, as a team, watching our children play. And I was called to my friend's room. She was, you know, covered in blood and was beaten badly. And I can't believe how well the police service provided care and support. And we went to the hospital and care and support was provided. We—then were, you know, called into Winnipeg and went to the "D" Division, and did the necessary paperwork and protocol that is required when a woman is beaten, and made her reports. And I stayed with her all night, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And to see the pain, to see the disbelief on this woman's face, that her husband could actually do this to her, that this was actually something that was done to her by somebody that she loves. And her concern for her kids, the concern that she had, of how she was going to be able to tell her children that their father had beaten her.

It was probably the hardest 24 hours of my life, dealing with somebody that was dealing with something like this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The supports were great. We worked as a team in our community to provide her a safe environment to live.

And we got a house for her. We helped her move her furniture out. Victim Services were very good at providing an update on what was happening with the individual, the husband who was incarcerated.

But then there was the breakdown in the system. My friend actually was not told that her husband was released. And it was actually the same night that my husband and I and two other couples were at their house on the farm, which is 10 miles outside of Souris. We were out moving furniture, moving her out of the house. And her husband has guns and they were confiscated. Not all of them apparently, as we found out later. But what we did not know when we were doing this—and that—and if something would have went wrong, in which very easily could have, because we did not know that the husband was released.

And that, you know, is a definite disconnect, I believe, from the justice system and Victim Services and the victim, because there were four families, who all have young children, working together to move this woman out of the house, and this man was let out of jail and nobody was notified. So here we are thinking that we were safe when we were absolutely not safe. We were put in a very difficult situation, and we were very scared afterwards learning what we did, that he was set free.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Another incident with that situation was the woman actually learnt that her husband was given his guns back during that period of time. You should have saw the fear on the woman's face when she was told that her husband had gotten the guns back because he was going to need them to hunt. She double-shielded her windows, locked all the doors, and I believe that we as a group, as a unit, really would have liked to have seen stronger supports available for our friend.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that this government has a lot of opportunity to do better, a lot of opportunity, and when we see \$1.2 billion being put into debt servicing, and we're seeing the government not be held accountable for their departments' inability to balance their budgets and are only reducing their pay by 20 per cent, not 40 per cent, when we see situations like Manitoba Hydro not being accountable to the money that was put towards a community centre in a community that was expecting and needs that type of service, it makes you wonder about how our province could

have been with all of the choices that have been made if they were made in a different way.

And, you know, my colleague for St. Paul's is raising some really serious issues with regard to Manitoba's Hydro's commitment to a recreation facility. I've been the critic for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs. I've travelled a lot in the northern communities, and, you know, I believe that even as a rural member, I believe that community centres are our heart and soul of our community. It's a place where people gather from different backgrounds and different interests, and we all join together as a community and actually, you know, enjoy sports, enjoy festivals, enjoy fashion shows or whatever your community is doing. But it's bringing communities together so that you can then, you know, heal or grow as a family or a community. So, when he's raising this issue with regard to where that facility is and why it's not being built, it's not about, you know, this minister dropping the ball; it's bigger than that. It's bigger than that; it's about this government's not caring about where the dollars are going. These people in this community deserve to have a facility where they can get together.

We hear of suicides, and I know that the member for—the Deputy Premier on the other side and I have had debates on youth suicides and the challenges that northern and Aboriginal and Metis and communities have with regard to the need to engage children, the need to engage youth, to give them a purpose and how these types of activities and of feeling a sense worth would reduce the incident of suicides, et cetera. So, when you're having a situation like this, it's bigger than just where did that money go; it's about why don't you care about why that facility isn't built and what it needs to be doing for that community. Children need to have a place to gather. And I believe that, when a community doesn't receive something like that, then it becomes a serious issue.

* (16:40)

Recently, there was a rally in Boissevain by civil servants who were very concerned, or very concerned that the government is reducing front-line services, services that matter to Manitobans. And, you know, I know several people who have worked within the Department of Agriculture or Rural Development or Crown Lands who feel that, that that by the government continuing to draw back on those positions and remove those positions from communities where they—where it does make a

difference to those families, it is working in contradiction to their statement of them doing what matters most to Manitoba families, because I don't think that is happening, Mr. Speaker.

I remember when the Crown land—Crown Lands women from Minnedosa who—12 or 13 of them lost their jobs because the government was moving those positions. And I remember hearing—listening to the government and hearing how they were saying things that made it really sound like it was a pawn game or, you know, a chess game where they were just moving positions and not realizing that these are individuals, these are families, these are women who contribute to the communities that they live in. So, when these jobs were taken from the community, so were a lot of these families left without a position for their family member, and some of them were single parents.

And I just, you know, I just can't believe how the government can talk about protecting front-line services, when I have seen in my communities, front-line services being eliminated, being moved, not being filled, but the positions travelling somewhere else is just—goes against the grain of what rural development or economic development or, you know, communities is all about.

I've had conversations with individuals from Grandview, where the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) is from, and, you know, they've lost their Conservation jobs. And, you know, this is a community that is right on the park. This is a community that respects the park, believes in, you know, conservation and this is an office that would work directly with the individuals who live in that area, and that position has been moved. And I find that rather interesting because, you know, the Minister for—of Finance, the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers), actually, you know, sits at the Cabinet table. So I wonder, you know, at times, you know, do they care about what is being done within their own communities, and have they been a voice at the table and do they actually, you know, have a say in how things are handled with regard to their communities.

It was interesting—Richard Cloutier today, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) was on there and he talked about consultation, but it wasn't about consultation for the referendum. No, it wasn't about Bill 20 and about the need to have a referendum on this PST increase. No, it was interesting; he was talking about having a consultation with regard to the pesticide

ban, Mr. Speaker. And I found that interesting because he will have discussions and consultations on matters with regard to pesticide bans and other things, but he will not entertain the discussion of a referendum on the PST increase, and I find that rather concerning.

We've talked about, you know, flood issues, and my communities have been hit hard in a number of ways with regard to flooding. I've got the Qu'Appelle, as well as the Assiniboine and the Souris River coming through several of my communities, and we've had serious discussions—some very, very trying discussions with individuals who just have given up; they've given up in trying to get this government's ear with regard to flooding compensation.

We have the Shellmouth Dam act, which, you know, compensation was supposed to be identified by April something. And I found it rather interesting, I got an email from one of my constituents who said, sorry, your email must've went into the junk mail. I didn't notice this till just now, when they had been called and reminded that there was an email from this individual, and then the response was, well, I'm sorry. We're fighting another flood, so we won't be able to deal with this in April as was identified, because, you know, we can't do that right now because of flood issues.

Well the government set the date. The government set the date of April, Mr. Speaker, and, you know, again, it just shows this government not clearly thinking through where—how they're developing, you know, deadlines and timelines and how they're not being transparent and forthcoming with people that are looking for this government to provide the supports that they said they were going to give them. These aren't individuals who are saying, you know, give me, you know, money because I've been flooded. These are situations where individuals have been promised. They've been identified as individuals who have lost a significant amount of money and lost their livelihoods and who were told that they were going to receive some compensation, and they haven't.

So I guess I'm looking at a government who can't seem to get past their announcements, and we're seeing more and more Manitobans realizing that this government isn't really about what matters most to Manitobans, that this is a government who's got its hands in everybody's pocket. They're more concerned about how they can, you know, do a press

release or do an announcement, but not even paying attention to where those dollars are going, Mr. Speaker. And, as a representative in this House, I find that offensive. My constituents are offended. They are very concerned that this government is very much into telling them what to do, but not doing what they say, and we've seen that with the amalgamations. We have seen individuals speak eloquently about the reasons why this is not a good idea, and I do know that the Minister for Local Government has heard these arguments, but, again, on deaf ears.

So, in closing, I have to say that I'm not impressed with Bill 20's lack of accountability to Manitobans, and I look forward to further debate on the issue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Prior to recognizing the honourable member for Steinbach, I just want to remind the House that the Speaker has received notice that the honourable member for Steinbach has received his leader's unlimited speaking time.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, what a pleasure it is to rise on what will probably be a series of days to speak about Bill 20, and I look forward to speaking for a number of days about this bill. It's important to remember that we started the debate on this bill—the minister introduced it on April 17th, and we started debate on the bill on May 7th. So we've had almost a month now of debate on the bill, trying to convince the government members, trying to implore that the government members would live up to the promise that they made.

We brought forward a reasoned amendment. I would call it both a reasoned amendment and a reasonable amendment, Mr. Speaker, asking the government to not proceed with the bill because they failed in the prebudget consultation meetings to ensure that information was brought about the PST to those consultation meetings.

So I believe all of our members had the opportunity to speak to that reasoned amendment and to talk about how disrespectful it was that individuals weren't given the full information at the prebudget consultation meetings that were held by the government in the spring. And yet we didn't hear one government member, not one government member stand up and speak to the reasoned amendment. Not one single member of the government was willing to

stand up and defend the actions of the government on this particular bill on the reasoned amendment. And, ultimately, that is what governments need to do. That's what governments are about. They make decisions, and I understand that not every decision of a government is going to be popular. That's the nature of government. But, when government makes decisions, it is their responsibility to defend them, even when they made a decision as bad as this one.

When they've broken a promise, when they've broken a sacred trust to Manitobans, that they made during the last election, it is ultimately the responsibility of the government to stand and defend that. And yet we've not heard one single member opposite of the House speak to this. There are often members—I've heard of the government who feel quite proud about how often they speak to an issue or speak in other bodies that they may have been elected to at one particular time. They talk about how they're defending their constituents, how they're working on behalf of their constituents.

* (16:50)

We see the brochures, Mr. Speaker, that the government puts out, working on your behalf, a strong voice some of them say, and yet we saw something completely different on the debate on second reading in this House on Bill 20, and I would say, and perhaps the table officers will correct me at some point, this is a historic debate. I don't know that there's ever been a bill that's been debated longer at second reading than this bill. If this isn't the bill—*[interjection]* Well, no, I'm not as sure as—*[interjection]* I'm not as sure, as the members are. I don't think, in fact, that the debate that they're referencing to was as long, but I'm sure that the Deputy Clerk is already researching and will have an answer for us shortly.

But what is clear is that this bill will be—by the time it passes, whether that's in August or September or later in the year, in the winter, this bill will be among the longest debated bills in the history of the Legislature. There's no doubt about that. This bill will have had the length of debate that few others will have ever attracted. It will have attracted attention that few others would've attracted, but for good reason, for a good reason, because all Manitobans, 1.2 million Manitobans-plus, were made a promise. They were made a promise that they wouldn't be paying an additional PST. They were made that solemn vow, and so I was disappointed on

the recent amendment, which was really an amendment about what the government did in their prebudget consultation meetings, that there wasn't a single solitary member of the government who would stand up and say, that's not true or that is true or have some other variation of disagreement, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), who hosted those prebudget consultation meetings, didn't stand up and speak.

You know, I understand he's involved in a lot of other problems. He's a busy guy. He's meeting with lawyers. He's meeting with others, Mr. Speaker, because he's got a lot of court obligations these days, but he could've spent a few minutes, a few minutes here in the Legislature to talk to the recent amendment and say why it is that he disagrees, that maybe he feels that the information was provided at the different consultation meetings, but he didn't. He didn't say anything. We didn't hear from the Government House Leader (Ms. Howard). We didn't hear from the member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan), the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald). We gave them opportunities. We asked them to stand up in their place and speak. They were in the House at the various times during the debate and they didn't get up.

The member for Minto (Mr. Swan), the Attorney General, didn't speak, didn't want to say anything. The member for Fort Garry wouldn't speak, didn't want to voice their expressions about this. You know, we know that the member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer) who put out a very long and detailed defense of the PST increase because he's been getting no doubt many, many people who are concerned about the increase and concerned that he didn't keep his promise to those Manitobans in the last elections, he didn't get up and speak.

The member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), who put out brochures, Mr. Speaker, when he was briefly a Member of Parliament about how often he spoke in the federal House, he was very proud of the fact that he had spoken more than other members in the federal Parliament, but he didn't speak. He wouldn't stand up. He wouldn't say anything on the particular amendment.

We waited for the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) to stand up and say something on behalf of his constituents. He likes to say that he's a strong voice for his constituents and yet we heard no voice. He didn't stand up and talk about what it was that he believed on that particular amendment.

We didn't hear for the member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff), Mr. Speaker. Now the member for Interlake has had many different things to say in many different forums. We know that he's called municipalities dysfunctional. He told people who were in the diversion that they weren't going to get any compensation if they didn't move out of the diversion, and so of anybody, if I was going to lay a bet on who was going to get up and speak on that particular amendment, it would've probably been on the opposition—or on the government side, it would've been the member for Interlake but he didn't stand up and speak for his constituents.

The member for St. Norbert (Mr. Gaudreau), well, he spoke a lot, not on the record, we heard him yelling a lot here in the House, in the Chamber, and he was—he had a lot to say off the record, Mr. Speaker, about different sorts of things. He was defending the PST tax increase, saying how important it was to increase taxes on the good people of St. Norbert, those who will be out visiting the Farmer's Market in the summer, maybe there will be opportunities in the evenings for members here to do the same, and to speak to those individuals in his constituency. But he didn't stand up, not on the record, to talk about how the increase on the PST was going to hurt the good folks of St. Norbert; wouldn't stand up, Mr. Speaker.

You know, we didn't even hear the Premier (Mr. Selinger). Now I didn't actually expect the Premier to get up and speak on the amendment that was brought forward. I would have liked it, and I would have hoped that that kind of accountability and that kind of responsibility would have been something that the Premier wanted to take.

He is, ultimately, the person who led the party in the last election who made the promise, who went on TV and said that it would be outrageous to even—nonsense to consider raising the PST. That was his promise, Mr. Speaker. It's on YouTube. It's the nature of how things go these days when you say those sort of things they're captured forever. So he had the opportunity; he could have stood up and he could have spoken, Mr. Speaker, about the allegation that we made in the amendment that the prebudget consultation meetings didn't, in fact, bring forward the full information about the PST increase. But he didn't say anything.

The member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), who is never shy to speak in this House, Mr. Speaker,

either on the record or off the record; we can hear him clearly even when we're not in the Chamber sometimes speaking on different issues. And so, if there was anybody I'm sure who was going to stand up on the government side and speak on behalf of their government, it would have been the member for Kildonan. But he didn't. He didn't stand up, and he didn't speak.

The member for Dawson Trail (Mr. Lemieux), not far from the great constituency that I represent and the wonderful people in Dawson Trail, communities of Ste. Anne and Lorette and Landmark, Mr. Speaker, people who believe in honesty, who believe that it's important to stand by your word, people who want to believe in the best in people—they want to believe that when somebody says something, Mr. Speaker, that they can take that to the bank.

I think, probably in that constituency as well as many of the constituencies that we represent, you can still do a deal by a handshake, doesn't have to be written in a contract; those days, I know, are fading a little bit, Mr. Speaker, but it's important that people believe that their word is their contract.

And so I would have thought, Mr. Speaker, that we would have heard from the member for Dawson Trail because he, in fact, gave his word. I spent some time in his riding in the last election, and I know that he went to communities in Ste. Anne and Lorette and Landmark and in between and knocked on those doors and told the fine folks of those communities: I'm not going to raise your taxes. Elect me—re-elect me and my government. We're not going to raise your taxes; we're not going to increase the PST.

Premier said it on TV, probably said, you know, yes, you can take his word for it. And a lot of people would have, a lot of people would have taken his word because that's how folks operate in that neck of the woods. They believe that, if somebody says something, you should be able to take your word for it, you don't have to necessarily get it in writing, doesn't have to be a contract; it's something that happens between individuals.

And so I would have thought that the member for Dawson Trail would have come in here and explained himself, explained himself to his constituents why it is that he didn't live up to his word and why it is that our particular amendment on the prebudget consultation meetings, if he didn't believe it was true, it wasn't true.

Didn't hear from the member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau), member who is in his own riding the Assiniboia Downs is currently under attack by this government; haven't heard him speak in defence of Assiniboia Downs, haven't heard him speak in defence of the Red River Ex.

And this is a government that's pitted those two fine Manitoba institutions against each other, put them at odds with each other publicly, Mr. Speaker; a disgraceful thing to do, to take two fine institutions in the province of Manitoba and pit them against each other.

Haven't heard the member for Assiniboia come to this House, stand up and explain why his government has sullied those two fine institutions, why he's pitted them against each other. He didn't have—*[interjection]* And now I hear him laugh, Mr. Speaker. And I suppose that that he would have done himself a favour by saying nothing at all, instead of laughing at these two institutions; thinks that it's funny that the reputation of those two institutions are going to dragged through the mud along with the reputation of the government and the Finance Minister.

And, if he doesn't care about the reputation of the Finance Minister—and I'm not here to defend that—he should at least care about the reputation of the organizations within his own constituency and the volunteers who were involved with those good organizations, Mr. Speaker.

And I say shame on the member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau) for not standing up and defending those institutions. And shame on him for not standing up and saying why it is that he made a promise in the last election but then, ultimately, didn't follow through on that promise, Mr. Speaker. That is something that he should have done.

Over the next several days, Mr. Speaker, I hope to have—

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

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) will have unlimited time.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 4, 2013

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Petitions		Biosphere Reserve	
Provincial Sales Tax Increase–Referendum		Rowat; Mackintosh	1951
Goertzen	1943	Keyeask Community Centre	
Wishart	1943	Schuler; Chomiak	1952
Ewasko	1943	Emergency Services (Teulon)	
Driedger	1944	Friesen; Oswald	1953
Mitchelson	1945	Manitoba Export and Trade	
Eichler	1945	Jha; Bjornson	1955
Stefanson	1946	Emergency Room (Beausejour)	
Maguire	1946	Ewasko; Oswald	1956
Helwer	1947	Members' Statements	
Municipal Amalgamations–Reversal		HudBay Flin Flon Mine Rescue Team	
Rowat	1944	Petterson	1957
Graydon	1944	National Environment Week	
Smook	1945	Maguire	1957
Briese	1947	Interlake Churches Painting Collection	
Hydro Capital Development–NFAT		Nevakshonoff	1958
Review		Keyeask Community Centre	
Cullen	1945	Schuler	1958
Schuler	1946	Portage Lions Club	
Friesen	1947	Wishart	1958
Tabling of Reports		Grievances	
Manitoba Ombudsman, 2012 Annual Report–		Maguire	1959
Access and Privacy			
Reid	1948		
Oral Questions		ORDERS OF THE DAY	
Cabinet Ministers		<i>(Continued)</i>	
Pallister; Selinger	1948	GOVERNMENT BUSINESS	
Horse Racing Industry		Debate on Second Readings	
Cullen; Struthers	1949	Bill 20–The Manitoba Building and Renewal	
Bill 47		Funding and Fiscal Management Act	
Cullen; Struthers	1949	(Various Acts Amended)	
Municipal Amalgamation		Wishart	1961
Briese; Lemieux	1950	Gerrard	1966
Gerrard; Lemieux	1954	Briese	1970
Gerrard; Selinger	1955	Rowat	1974
		Goertzen	1979

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