

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 27, 2016

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of Bills? Committee Reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I rise today to table the public service group insurance financial statements for the year ended April 30th, 2016, and statement in accordance with section 230 of the Continuing Consolidation of the Statutes of Manitoba regarding fidelity bonds, prime insurance.

Madam Speaker: Ministerial Statements?

The required 90 minutes notice prior to Routine Proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Charlotte Wood

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): As members are aware, October is Women's History Month. Very few Manitobans are familiar with the name Mrs. Charlotte Wood of Winnipeg. However, the name Charlotte Wood is forever written into the history of this nation.

During the Great War, Mrs. Charlotte Wood had seven sons serve in that war, and tragically, two did not return. One son, Private Frederick Francis Wood, died in battle in Belgium in 1914, and the other son, Private Peter Percy Wood, who was only 17 years old, died in 1917 at Vimy Ridge. Four of the remaining five sons suffered permanent wartime disabilities.

Eighty years ago, in 1936, Charlotte Wood became Canada's first national Silver Cross Mother when she placed a wreath on the tomb of the unknown soldier at Westminster Abbey in London on behalf of all Canadian mothers who had lost a child in military service to their country.

While on a pilgrimage to attend the unveiling of the Vimy Ridge memorial in July 1936, Mrs. Wood

was presented to King Edward VIII. It is reported that Mrs. Wood said to the King: I have just been looking at the trenches and just can't figure out why our boys had to go through that. The King replied: Please God, Mrs. Wood. It shall never happen again.

Sadly, it did. Canada's famous and first Silver Cross Mother died three years later in 1939, just weeks before the start of what was to become known as World War II. Charlotte Wood was buried in an unmarked grave in Winnipeg's Brookside Cemetery. Unbelievably, it was more than six decades later before a gravestone was erected to mark her final resting place.

As Minister responsible for the Status of Women and in honour of Women's History Month and in honour of all the remarkably brave women who have received this medal, which is a medal no parent ever wants to receive, I am proud to inform all members of the House that my office, along with the office of the Manitoba Special Envoy for Military Affairs, will be installing a plaque to honour Mrs. Charlotte Wood in Memorial Park. The plaque will be installed in 2017 as Manitoba commemorates the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

Madam Speaker, as we start to close in on Remembrance Day, I wanted to take this opportunity to remind everyone that not all victims of war died on that battlefield. Charlotte Wood is one such individual and I am proud to have had this opportunity to tell the members her story of courage and sacrifice during Women's History Month.

Thank you.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Every year approaching Remembrance Day, a national Silver Cross Mother is chosen to lay a wreath at the National War Memorial and perform other ceremonial duties on behalf of all mothers who have lost a child serving our country.

Susan Charlotte Wood of Manitoba was the very first to be named a Silver Cross Mother in 1936. During the First World War, seven of Mrs. Wood's sons enlisted in the army, with several of her beloved sons injured and killed. Following the war, Mrs. Wood became a strong advocate for military families and veterans. She was an active member of

the Canadian legion, the Imperial Veterans of Canada, and the Association of War Widows.

I submit all mothers would prefer to have her son or daughter alive, living the life she's always imagined for her child. Nonetheless, Silver Cross mothers always execute their duties with pride and grace, offering Canadians the quintessential example of a mother's unconditional love and pride of her children.

On behalf of our NDP caucus, we honour this year's Silver Cross Mother, in our deepest and most humble sincerity say *miigwech* to all of our mothers across the country.

And I would also like to congratulate the Minister for Status of Women in respect of the plaque. I think that's a great honour.

Miigwech.

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

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to speak to the ministerial statement? [*Agreed*]

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, it is fitting that today we honour Charlotte Susan Wood. As a Silver Cross Mother—indeed, the first Silver Cross Mother—and, in doing so, that we honour all Silver Cross Mothers.

And, indeed, we remember all mothers and, collectively, as Canadians, all those children that we have lost during wars that Canada has been involved with. And, indeed, from time to time, it would include Canadians who've been involved as peacekeepers, who may be in difficult situations around the world, and they would not necessarily be called wars, but they would be instances or examples of where Canadians have been playing a very important role globally in keeping the peace, in achieving the peace after wars.

And I congratulate the minister for the initiative with the plaque in Memorial Park; that is also fitting. And I think all of us would join together in honouring mothers and the important role that they have played and the important contributions that they have made.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Rett Syndrome Awareness Month

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Madam Speaker, today is an important day in the Legislature as we

mark Rett Syndrome Awareness Month not only in Manitoba but across Canada. I join all MLAs who are wearing purple ribbons to celebrate the work that is being done, and the work that still needs to be done to help those living with Rett syndrome and their families.

Rett syndrome is a rare neurological condition that affects one in 10,000 infant girls. It is characterized by the loss of spoken language, repetitive hand use, epileptic seizures, osteoporosis and scoliosis. Despite its multiple challenges, many with Rett syndrome live long into adulthood, but most will need a variety of health-care services over their lifetime. There is no cure. Rett syndrome is not publicly well-known, which makes today in the month October so important.

I draw your attention to the gallery where we have Lionel and Trish Guimond joining us with their 7-year-old daughter Ema. Ema has Rett syndrome.

The Guimonds are constituents of mine, and I've had the privilege to follow their journey after Ema's diagnosis in 2013. Initially, they faced challenges finding support and resources to help Ema. But, rather than focus on what was broken, they were determined to arm themselves with information and improve things not only for Ema, but other families affected. Trish travelled the country and brought vital information back to Manitoba, re-establishing the Manitoba chapter of the Rett Syndrome Association. With the help of doctors and the Children's Hospital Foundation, a successful awareness campaign was launched last year. They also started a non-profit organization called Eyes on Ema, which raises awareness as well as needed funds for key organizations to provide resources.

I would like to thank the Guimonds for making such an impact in our province. The volunteer work you have done and continue to do will benefit many families today and tomorrow. A special thank you also to the representatives of Oak Bluff school and the Red River Valley School Division for joining them today and providing the resources Ema needs to thrive in her school community.

As you leave the Legislature tonight, please take a moment and look to the north tower where you'll see the Rett Syndrome Association logo 'limited'—illuminated until Monday the 31st. Manitoba is honoured to stand united with other provinces to raise awareness for Rett Syndrome. Thank you.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I also want to recognize October as Rett Syndrome Awareness Month, an important opportunity to raise awareness about this little-known disorder and to support the individuals and families that live with it every day.

Though many people have never heard of Rett syndrome before, it affects one in every 10,000 girls and is often fatal in males. Today, in the gallery, we have some Manitobans who have been touched by Rett syndrome. Their daily battles show just how strong and how brave the children and adults suffering with Rett syndrome really are.

The Manitoba Rett Syndrome Association, located here in Winnipeg, works to support these children and families through the difficult times. They provide complimentary packages to newly diagnosed children, connect families affected by Rett Syndrome and host conferences and events to promote networking opportunities and awareness of the disorder.

*(13:40)

One of the biggest steps towards understanding Rett Syndrome is the creation of the Canadian Rett Syndrome Registry, which is vital to organizing Canadians with Rett Syndrome. It also brings research opportunities to Canada, runs studies and trials of treatments and matches researchers with eligible candidates. It is a practical step towards improving the quality of life of Rett syndrome sufferers.

Madam Speaker, it is critical that we raise awareness about Rett syndrome and we must continue to support all those affected so they can live full, productive lives.

Thank you very much.

Municipalities of Springfield / East St. Paul / West St. Paul

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Crown Services): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to recognize our community leaders in the rural municipalities of Springfield, East St. Paul and West St. Paul.

Both West St. Paul and East St. Paul celebrate their centennial this year, and for the past 100 years they have been home to thousands of Manitobans over the years. West St. Paul is a great community that provides a comfortable and less hectic lifestyle in a country setting. Nestled on the border of the city

of Winnipeg, it offers its residents the best of both worlds.

Although East St. Paul is one of the geographically smallest rural municipalities, it has a vibrant youth recreation program, and it's home to Manitoba's hockey Tournament of Aces and the summer soccer classic.

At 143 years old, the RM of Springfield is not only Manitoba's oldest rural municipality with the largest population, it is also one of the fastest growing. Just this year the Springfield Country Fair earned the Celebrate Manitoba award for 134 years of a truly generational celebration of Manitoba's best.

The long, rich history of these three municipalities reads as a preamble to the great future these communities have to offer, and I can personally confirm that for each of these municipalities our greatest strength is our people.

Madam Speaker, at this time I would like to recognize our community leaders. West St. Paul: His Worship Mayor Bruce Henley; Deputy Mayor Stan Parag; councillors Peter Campbell, Cheryl Christian and Detlef Hindemith. East St. Paul: Her Worship Shelley-Mayor Shelley Hart; Deputy Mayor Orest Horechko; and councillors Michael Wasylin, Brian Duval and Charles Posthumus. The RM of Springfield: His Worship Reeve Bodnaruk; Deputy Reeve Tiffany Fell; councillors Glen Fuhl, Shandy Walls, Rick Wilson and Heather Erickson.

Please join me in thanking our community leaders for their continued vision and hard work on behalf of their residents of our community.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Leadership of the Liberal Party

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): Colleagues, I wish to say thank you to all of you. I really appreciate all the words of encouragement that I have received here in—from everybody in the House and in my new role as interim Leader for the Manitoba Liberal Party.

The way I was raised is that you don't say thank you because there was no word for it in my language. That's why our miigwech sounds so similar to the Anishinabe's miig-wech. We borrowed it and made it our own. However, what we do is demonstrate our thankfulness by our actions, and that's why you always see me smiling.

I am from a remote, isolated First Nation reserve. If you've ever seen images of rez kids with crazy bushy hair, snot running down their faces, that was me. Washing your hair or face? Please, that wasted water and I would have to replace that water, so, no thank you. My bike was waiting; I had places to go and adventures to live.

I am a mother of six, one of which is a rainbow child. I have been through a lifetime of hardships in my young life. I am a survivor of residential schools, a survivor of rape. I lived in an abusive relationship for three years, and even though I don't drink alcohol, I have felt its damaging effects through my family.

I want to encourage all that there is hope. I want to encourage them to look within themselves. They can forge ahead of all the negativity and carve a great future. I hope that my story can be their inspiration.

I want to send a signal to all Manitobans, be proud of who you are.

My election as interim Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party is a step forward in this province. Thank you to all in this House for accepting me and respecting my voice at the table. Miigwech.

Bryce Eakins

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Last Saturday, I was very fortunate to be asked by Tracy Williams, executive director of Westman Employment Services, to job shadow a young man named Bryce Eakins.

Take Your MLA to Work Day is part of the Celebration of Disability Employment Awareness Month in October, and I encourage all MLAs to take advantage of this opportunity.

Bryce has been a fan and supporter of the Brandon University Bobcats for many years and has recently been employed by Brandon University. Bryce splits his time between all of the BU Bobcat teams and has become a welcome and invaluable member of the staff.

Madam Speaker, when I met him last Saturday, Bryce was working with the Bobcat women's soccer team, but he took a few minutes to tell me some of his duties. We didn't sit still for long as there was work to do helping the team through the warmup. I tried to help Bryce moving the soccer balls out to the players, but with his scooter—known as "Big Red"—he is much faster than I am and does a fabulous job

making sure the soccer balls are in the right place at the right time.

Madam Speaker, during the game Bryce is on the move getting ice and water for the players and coaches, and making sure that everything is ready when needed. We also managed to spend a bit of time cheering on the team and they finished with a tie game, so they are off to the finals this weekend.

Madam Speaker, Bryce is very enthusiastic and just a really, really happy person. It was a pleasure to be around someone who loves his job as much as Bryce does, and it was easy to see what a high regard the Bobcat athletes have for the work that he does and the joy that he brings to the teams.

Madam Speaker, I thank Bryce for the opportunity to share a little bit of his day. I can hardly wait to see Bryce in action with the BU athletic teams. Go Bobcats.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, we have some guests in the gallery that I would like to introduce you to.

We have seated in the public gallery from St. John's High school, 9 students under the direction of Lindsey Kinsley, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Minimum Wage Increase Request

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): First, I would like to congratulate three remarkable Manitobans: Dr. Harvey Chochinov, Ms. Patricia Bovey and Ms. Marilou McPhedran, who were recently appointed to the Canadian Senate.

Madam Speaker, New Democrats believe that Manitobans deserve good working conditions and fair wages; employers and employees respect this. Polls have consistently shown broad support for increases to the minimum wage, but this government doesn't seem to get the message, yet the Premier has decided to freeze the minimum wage and has introduced their aggressive Bill 7.

The Premier is going to hear tonight from those impacted by his decision.

Will he take off the ideological blinders and raise the minimum wage?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Thank my colleague for the question.

In reference to the topic at hand, she used the word ideology. I think the prisoners of ideology were the previous government, Madam Speaker, and the reason I say that is because they proceeded with their ideological fervour to raise the minimum wage without consulting with small business people across the province, and we will not do that.

What we are proposing is to move towards the idea of indexing the minimum wage so that those recipients of it are able to keep up with the purchasing demands placed upon their households, and we will do that in co-operation with both those who are in unions and in the working community, and those who are employing them at the same time.

* (13:50)

We've strived for that co-operative approach when it was never adopted by the previous government, sadly.

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

Front-Line Workers Employment Security

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): Labour and employers were consulted each year the minimum wage was increased.

Madam Speaker, the Premier refuses to defend working people and makes empty commitments to protect front-line workers. He solemnly swears that the jobs of front-line workers won't be cut, yet he has fired the workers who build roads in this province. He has cut the front lines of our corrections services, shutting down training classes before they even begin, and now he says he will merely try to protect front-line workers.

Will the Premier take real action and stop threatening our front-line workers and the services they deliver?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, the member in her preamble references consultations as being important. I would agree, we just, actually, concluded the first round of consultations, open consultations with Manitobans in respect of our plans for the future. What would make us very pleased

would be to see even more than the 20,000-plus Manitobans who've already participated in that process join in and participate.

We'd like to see the remaining 14 members of the NDP rump participate too, but they've decided to stage a walkout or protest of some kind, with no logical argument as to why.

I congratulate the Liberal caucus members and our colleagues on this side of the House for having the courage to listen to Manitobans. As a new government in this province, we have the courage to act on what we hear as well.

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

Ms. Marcelino: The Premier has a responsibility to govern on behalf of all Manitobans. Partisan attacks are meant to repeat the last election are not good enough. False promises to protect front-line workers are not good enough, especially when he won't define who they are. The government can only hide behind reviews and avoid revealing their agenda for so long.

Will the Premier and his government actually tell Manitobans what plans they have for our front-line workers and the important services they deliver?

Mr. Pallister: Madam Speaker, the member need only note the incredible success that we have encountered in just the first half year in respect of raising the basic personal exemption and reducing the taxes on Manitobans by taking thousands off the tax rolls entirely—those were ignored by the previous administration—on indexing tax brackets to inflation, so no longer will the government benefit, as did the previous government, at the expense of Manitoba households.

But the member also in her preamble references a phrase, false promises, and I am reminded when I hear that phrase of the NDP candidates in the 2011 election campaign, going to the doors of Manitobans and knocking on those doors of those homes, and looking people right in the eye and promising them no new taxes, when they knew at the time that they were going to raise taxes not only on income, PST, on gas and various other things, but also on the home insurance of the very home that they were knocking on. That is false promises, Madam Speaker.

**MGEU President
Meeting with Premier**

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Madam Speaker, tonight, instead of the government's normal spin and misdirection, we'll actually hear from the public about this government's attack on labour. But this government shouldn't have to wait for that committee meeting to reach out to organized labour.

Earlier this week, the Premier committed to meeting with the head of Manitoba's largest union: Can he inform this House when he will actually sit down and meet with the president of MGEU?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, a working woman in Kenora, Ontario, or Canora, Saskatchewan, can vote, and they have the right to vote in secret. The NDP took that right away from Manitoba's working women. We're going to give it back.

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

**Labour Unions
Consultation with Premier**

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Instead of only appointing their friends and other well-connected insiders, this government should make sure labour has a real seat at the table. They don't seem to respect labour leaders that are chosen by the grassroots membership.

Will this Premier commit to meeting with labour leaders and appointing them to his advisory committees, showing them the respect they deserve?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, the member references the word respect. It wasn't respectful the way the NDP treated Manitobans in the last 17 years, Madam Speaker. One of the things they did to disrespect working families and working people was to take away their right to have a secret ballot in the workplace. Another thing they did was to jack on a PST of 7 and then 8 per cent on everybody's benefits at work. These are disrespectful things. The member speaks of respect but doesn't demonstrate it in his preamble.

What I would say to him is that labour leaders are very fine and supportive with the idea of a secret ballot. Kevin Rebeck made sure that there was a secret ballot available to NDP members during their leadership vote following their historic meltdown. If the members of the NDP get to have a secret

ballot, I submit that working men and women across Manitoba should have one, too.

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

**Labour Relations Amendment Act
Request to Withdraw**

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Apparently, we're going to carry on with no answers.

Madam Speaker, we know that this government is more interested in picking political fights and fighting the last election than they are in finding solutions for Manitobans. That's why they picked a fight with organized labour and that's why they won't give labour leaders the respect they deserve.

When will this government come to its senses? When will it withdraw Bill 7 and show organized labour and its leaders the respect that they deserve?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, again, Madam Speaker, respect should be demonstrated in the preambles to the member's question and it wasn't in any of the three. And I would demonstrate to him my respect for him and for labour leaders by the same conduct I have demonstrated in my time in politics. I have tremendous respect for collective bargaining. I have tremendous respect for working men and women trying to make ends meet. I come from a blue-collar family and I come—I was raised by a devout—devoted union supporter.

So, I will tell you this, through you, Madam Speaker, to the member opposite: if he wants respect to be shown to working men and women in this province, he should support our bill and give them the secret ballot.

**Sheriff's Officers Training
Program Availability**

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Jason Smith lives in The Pas constituency. He's a leader in his community, and, in fact, he used to coach the OCN Blizzard hockey team. He applied for a new career as a sheriff with Manitoba Justice. He paid for and completed a CPR and first-aid course as a requirement and awaited his unpaid training course in Thompson in late August. Less than a week before his training was to begin, he was told the training was off. And now, two months later, he's been not told when, if ever, this training will happen.

Will this minister apologize to Mr. Smith and confirm a date when he will be trained to become a sheriff's officer?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I have a tremendous amount of respect for all the sheriffs in the province and the incredible work that they do. And I have indicated yesterday to the member when he asked similar questions, that we are moving forward with this program. The training will commence very shortly.

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

Mr. Swan: That answer is a lack of respect for Mr. Smith and the other recruits who do not have any date, despite what the minister may say.

We know that Mr. Smith is one of 16 recruits who applied to the department to fill vacant positions in the sheriff's office: eight in Winnipeg, three in Portage la Prairie, two in Dauphin, two in The Pas and one in Thompson. These are front-line positions necessary for the safe and effective operation of our justice system.

If the minister has the ability to interfere with her department's training plan, she certainly has the ability to reverse course and correct her mistake.

Will she confirm to Mr. Smith and the 15 other recruits they have a set date now to get their training and start their careers with Justice?

Mrs. Stefanson: The member opposite referred to respect. And I would suggest that members opposite were incredibly disrespectful to all Manitobans when they took away their right to vote in the way of a referendum in—on the PST hike. So I will say too to members opposite that they don't demonstrate respect at all for Manitobans.

*(14:00)

I will tell you, Madam Speaker, that I have tremendous respect for all of those sheriff's officers, the incredible work that they do. And I have said time and time again over the last two days that the training program will commence shortly. Those 15 people that were on the—in line for it previously will have that training very shortly.

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

Mr. Swan: Madam Speaker, there's only 97 sheriff's officer positions in Manitoba; 16 vacancies means that right now one in six sheriff's positions is vacant.

As I informed the minister yesterday, a shortage of sheriff's officers in the department may result either in overworking existing officers and the department incurring overtime costs, or it's going to result in delaying or cancelling court hearings. The minister has now had 24 hours to reflect on this and speak to her department.

Will she do the right thing, show respect and provide set dates now for these people for training to protect this vital—this vital—front-line service?

Mrs. Stefanson: The member again talks about respect. I believe I've already answered his question twice.

But I do want to refer, Madam Speaker, and table a letter for the House today in reference to a question that the member has asked in the past. The letter says I am pleased to advise that Synergy Inmate Phone Solutions Inc. has been selected as a successful proponent in response to the RFP for the Justice phone system. On behalf of the government of Manitoba, I'd like to congratulate your company on their success on this RFP.

The letter is dated February 5th, 2016. I wonder who was in office at that point in time.

Minimum Wage Increase Request

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): An Oxfam report released just two weeks ago affirms decent employment and fair wages is more than a right; it's an absolute necessity. Oxfam notes, 60 per cent of our workforce are women, and after a long shift they go home to do a second shift cleaning, cooking and caring for family. This double burden actually subsidizes the economy by \$192 billion a year. Certainly, Manitoba women deserve a raise.

Will the Premier (Mr. Pallister) reverse his decision to freeze the minimum wage and give Manitoba women the raise they need and certainly deserve?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): I thank the member for the question.

And our government is committed to making life more affordable for women in the province of Manitoba. We've already taken some very important measures to improve affordability for Manitoba women, including taking some of those hard-working single mothers, some of the lowest income earners in our province, off the tax rolls altogether.

And we are also not going to reach our hands into their pockets and steal \$1,600 a year out of those hard-working single mothers and women altogether like the members opposite did. Thank you.

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

Ms. Fontaine: Oxfam encourages all governments to take, and I quote, the high road, raising minimum wage to reflect the cost of living and mandate a living wage. This is a tangible and immediate step of lifting women and their children out of poverty.

Oxfam goes further by asserting, and I quote, mandating a living wage would lay the foundation for a more humane economy.

I ask the Premier to stand with all Manitoba women, mandating a living wage.

Ms. Squires: Madam Speaker, thank you very much for the question, and we are committed to making life more affordable in the province of Manitoba for working women and all women in the province of Manitoba.

And we won't take any lessons from members opposite who scrapped gender-based analysis in 2014, who pulled resources away from training programs for women. We're going to stand up for women and work for them where they failed.

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

Ms. Fontaine: Oxfam asserts, and I quote, gender inequality does not happen by accident; it is in rooted in long-established norms, attitudes and beliefs, and it can be exacerbated by laws, policy and government spending. Government action can, however, act to reduce inequality between men and women at work. Governments have a fundamental responsibility to do so, especially when markets and the private sector fail to do so.

Will the Premier take the high road and mandate a living wage for all Manitoba women?

Ms. Squires: Equality is very important to us on this side of the House, and we've only been in office 3 per cent of the time that members opposite have. They had 17 years to get the job done.

Where they failed, we'll get it right.

Canadian Human Rights Tribunal Ruling Federal Response

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): I sincerely appreciate all of the members of the House standing together yesterday to tell the federal government that inaction on equal funding for First Nations people just isn't good enough.

Ojibwa spoken. Translation unavailable.

I thank you all.

People around the country are encouraged to see that this issue is also being debated in the House of Commons today. However, I suspect that it's going to take sustained and continued advocacy on all of our parts to ensure that justice is achieved for First Nations people.

With that in mind, I would like to ask the Premier whether he could tell this House about a timeline for when he can raise this issue with the Prime Minister and the other first ministers.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Very fair question.

Been raised, will continue to be raised.

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

Mr. Kinew: I thank the Premier. We will continue to follow up and ensure that those conversations continue.

At the heart of the tribunal decision which has brought this matter to light is the issue of child welfare, and we know full well in this province that there is a crisis with regards to indigenous kids in care.

With that in mind, I would like to ask the Minister responsible for Families whether he will tell us today that he can bring this issue up at the federal level and ensure that the federal government carries out its constitutional but also it's moral duty to equally fund child-welfare services on reserve.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, I've been an advocate for what the member is raising for a long time. We'll continue. It is very multifaceted but, of course, we need to focus on several key areas.

One of those, of course, is job creation in our northern communities. That is key; that's been raised repeatedly at virtually every meeting that I or my colleagues have had with chiefs and councils.

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

Application of Jordan's Principle

Mr. Kinew: Of course, job creation is a noble goal, but as Canadians, equality is a paramount principle, and we cannot rest until equality is achieved for First Nations people as demanded by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. And so, I respect action on all fronts.

Also implicated in this decision was the issue of health, so I would like to ask the Minister of Health whether he can undertake to raise this issue at the federal level and ensure that Jordan's Principle is not just a principle, but that it is actually implemented.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I will raise the issue with the federal minister.

Mental Health-Care Services Use of Peer Support Workers

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, improved prevention and treatment of mental- and brain-health issues needs to be one of the very top priorities for Manitoba. We have too many people who are affected: we have too many people with depression; we have too many people with suicide—who have committed suicide.

One of the successful interventions which is being used widely in other jurisdictions is the employment of peer support workers. People with lived experience with mental health issues have been found to provide effective and cost-effective help.

With the minister of help—Health commit, today, to implementing an approach which includes a much greater employment of peer support workers to aid those with mental- and brain-health issues?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): We have committed to having a review of the mental health and addictions together, and one of those components to be looked at will be peer support.

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

Suicide Prevention Family Notification

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I thank the minister.

* (14:10)

On October 24th, just over a year ago, Bonnie and George Bricker's son Reid went missing. And months later he was found in the Red River, dead from suicide.

On October 23rd, after his third hospital and third suicide attempt in 10 days, Reid went to the Health Sciences Centre emergency room for help. A previous suicide attempt is one of the strongest of all risk factors for suicide, and yet Reid was sent home without notifying his parents.

Will the minister support a change to Manitoba's laws to ensure that families and caregivers are notified in such circumstances as is being asked for by Bonnie Bricker, Reid's mother, who is here today in the gallery?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): The PHIA legislation is up for its five-year review this fall. I have connected with Mrs. Bricker and I've asked her to be a part of presenting ideas in terms of how the legislation can be improved, and I certainly look forward to her input. As difficult as it might be for her to provide it, to relive some of the circumstances around her sons death, we think it would be valuable to have her input.

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

Expansion of STEP Program

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister.

Madam Speaker, the care of those who are at risk of suicide—in particular the care of those who've had a previous suicide attempt—could be improved in a number of ways. As an example, the prairie mountain regional health authority introduced a mental health Supported Transition, Evaluation and Planning program—called STEP—to follow-up on individuals who discharged from hospitals after a suicide attempt. This program was launched in 2011 and has been successful in that 100 per cent of those discharged were alive as of the most recent report on the Prairie Mountain Health website.

Will the minister ensure that the STEP program, or a similar one, is used now province-wide to reduce suicides among those at risk?

Mr. Goertzen: I have asked my department to put in place a standard protocol when it comes to suicide evaluation and those who have been released from facilities. The Prairie Mountain example is one we are looking at.

Prebudget Consultation Meetings Public Input

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): Last night was the fifth Your Province, Your Plan prebudget consultation community meeting. I had the opportunity to host a prebudget consultation meeting with my constituents, and I'd like to thank the Minister of Finance for support for these local meetings.

Could the minister provide more details on what he has heard at these meetings and what other opportunities Manitobans will have to participate in the prebudget consultation?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I thank the member for Swan River for that question and for hosting us, along with the member for Dauphin (Mr. Michaleski). Last night, again, we were in Winnipeg for other consultation meetings. Certainly, at the Swan River meeting we heard concerns around value for money about controlling costs for municipal services, the importance of getting child care right after years of growing wait lines.

Madam Speaker, briefly, it's 50 stakeholders in five in-person meetings, hundreds of Manitobans attending, 9,000 visits to the website, 600 electronic submissions, hundreds more made to the Minister of Finance office. When the NDP did budget consultation, it was cynical; it was carefully controlled. It didn't always result in a budget. When we are doing it, Manitobans will have their say through Your Province, Your Plan.

Health Services Insurance Amendment Act Minister of Health's Position

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, yesterday the Health Minister refused to state 'cwearly'—clearly in question period where he stands on health premiums. Well, this morning his government answered the question when each and every one of them voted against a bill to ban health-care premiums in Manitoba once and for all.

Why won't the minister commit to protecting Manitoba's public health-care system and tell us definitively whether he's open to introducing health-care premiums in Manitoba?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, the previous government spent \$155,000 for lawyers to prove that the legislation that they introduced

yesterday and debated this morning wouldn't have any effect in court. If you would like, actually, a ruling on that decision, he can talk to the member of St. Boniface, who ordered it to go to court.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Once again, this minister is avoiding the simple question here.

Health-care premiums cost families thousands of dollars a year. They're deemed inefficient and unfair by health policy experts. They shut out low-income families who can't afford to pay and they make health care less accessible to all. Premiums are a real threat to the public, affordable health-care system that every single Manitoban values.

Will this minister call health premiums what they are: an unfair tax on Manitobans that undermine our public health-care system?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, this is the member who, during the summer, put out a press release saying that Zika was spreading across all of Manitoba, and then they had to withdraw it from their NDP caucus. It's also the member who is part of a party who tried to scare cancer patients and saying they wouldn't get their medication after the election.

If they want to bring in legislation, they should bring in legislation to try to bar those kind of activities and scaring Manitobans.

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

Mr. Wiebe: I think it's very clear where this government stands when they vote this morning against a bill that would protect Manitobans and protect our health-care system. It's very clear where this Health Minister stands. He's open to privatization. He's open to visiting other places like Saskatchewan to see how their government has started to do it.

You know what? This Premier (Mr. Pallister) refuses to—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: —commit to protecting front-line workers in health and he's launched an unprecedented attack on labour that threatens the people who keep our health-care system running.

Madam Speaker, health premiums are the first step towards privatization, and we can't allow it to happen in our province.

Will the minister stop playing games and tell us where he stands on health-care premiums?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, yesterday the member said that I should get some ideas about health care from Quebec, and so I did a little bit of research and I found out that in Quebec you can buy an MRI procedure for \$750 in Montreal. I found out in Quebec you can get a CT scan for \$2,500. In Quebec you can get a mammogram for \$350. You can get an ultrasound for \$150. In fact, in Quebec you can actually hire a private doctor.

I wonder if he's told his colleagues that there's a privatizer in the NDP and it's the member for Concordia.

Seniors Housing Status of Project (Flin Flon)

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Madam Speaker, as we age we all want to live with dignity in safe communities close to our families and friends. That's why, after consulting with the community, our former government decided to rebuild the damaged complex at 4 Hemlock Drive in Flin Flon for housing for seniors.

Last month, an article in the Reminder, the local paper, said that this government plans on completing that project. This month, a reply I received from the Department of Families says that the province-wide review of capital projects may affect completion.

Can the Minister of Families tell me if the Flin Flon seniors will have a place to live in 2017 as originally planned?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): Housing—it's important to have housing solutions and affordable housing. That didn't happen in this previous government.

When coming into office, we found over a half billion dollars in deferred maintenance on housing projects. So when it comes to housing projects, we're not going to take any advice from the former government.

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

Mr. Lindsey: There's a concern when we have local people who have been very active in Flin Flon constituency moving south for care, when they could

live close to their family, with friends, in their own community.

This government has been ignoring the North since they took office.

Can the Minister for Families tell me if the government is going to stall on this project and fail northerners yet again?

* (14:20)

Mr. Fielding: Madam Speaker, this government is about providing solutions for affordable housing for Manitobans. That's why I was up—just recently, in fact, in two weeks ago I was up in northern Manitoba with the member from Thompson reviewing housing projects going forward.

We're going to go ahead with housing projects that make sense. We're going to partner the federal government that have committed dollars to housing. These are going to be solutions that will be long term for Manitobans so they have affordable housing in the province.

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

Mr. Lindsey: I'd like to table a graph that clearly shows the increase in investments for Manitoba social housing under the NDP.

Madam Speaker, under the NDP, residents of the new complex were going to pay a percentage for rent based on their income. That would've been manageable and fair to seniors from all income levels. We haven't seen any indication that there's a plan for the North from this government.

Can the Minister for Families tell me if northern seniors, first, will have a place to live in 2017 in Flin Flon and if the government is planning to make them pay more than what the original plan was?

Mr. Fielding: I'm headed off to Ottawa next week for federal minister—meetings with the federal ministers and provincial ministers in terms of affordable housing, to make sure we have housing accommodation for them.

The one problem that I see with the NDP government, not just in housing, but in child care and everything else, is they're stuck in ideology, Madam Speaker. They're stuck in ideology, where they see one thing only: it's the government is the only solution to any problem that's out there. We will have affordable housing, we'll have a mix of affordable housing that's provided by the

government, by non-profit sectors. These are going to be long-term solutions without leaving over half a billion—half a billion—dollars in deferred maintenance on our housing stock.

Those are the types of solutions we're going to come up with for housing.

Port of Churchill Grain Export Market

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Madam Speaker, since the Harper government dismantled the Canadian Wheat Board against the wishes of farmers across Manitoba, the Port of Churchill has suffered. Shipments out of that port have plummeted and producers have faced difficulties in getting their grain to market.

Will this government—that the wrong-headed actions of the Harper government are hurting Manitoba workers and producers today?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): I thank the member for the ag question because agriculture is so important to this province, and the next best thing to a bumper crop and good prices on livestock was getting rid of the NDP government in Manitoba for *[inaudible]*

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

Mr. Saran: I tabled the most recent statistics from the Canadian Grain Commission on the exports of Canadian grain from Canadian terminals. There have been no exports from Churchill this year. This hurts producers. In a year when there is a big crop, they cannot get their grain to market.

What action has the minister taken to get the port back on track?

Mr. Pedersen: Again, I thank the member for that question.

And exports, whether it's grain or livestock, are very important to the ag sector. That's why this government continues to work with the port authorities, with the export agencies, with our department, Growth, Enterprise and Trade. We're going to work very hard to increase the exports of all Manitoba agricultural products.

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

Mr. Saran: Churchill is suffering. The closure of the port hurts producers, but it also hurts the

many workers who have lost their jobs and their livelihoods. The closure of the port has effects all across the province.

When will this government take action? What plan does the government have to bring back jobs to Churchill?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, I think if anyone here—and, certainly, on this side of the House there are all of us who do care about farmers and the future of agriculture—we must support CETA and the signing of CETA, a tremendous opportunity for Canadian agriculture, a tremendous opportunity for Manitoba agriculture.

The present federal government has carried the ball which was initiated eight years ago by the previous federal government. The federal NDP have taken a position against this trade agreement, and it is important that the provincial colleagues here, if they care about improving exports, if they care about eliminating duties on tens of thousands of Canadian exports to a major—major—trade partner, if they care about obtaining an advantage over our trading competitors such as the United States, they need to step out into the sunlight and tell Manitobans they support CETA.

Prebudget Consultation Process Public Input

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): As I mentioned recently, we had the opportunity to host a prebudget consultation meeting with my constituents. And again, I would like to thank the Minister of Finance for support for these local meetings as part of the larger prebudget consultation process.

Can the Minister of Finance tell this House other ways Manitobans can participate in the prebudget consultation process?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I thank the member again for that question. It didn't sound like members of the opposition were even listening to the question. But that's not surprising, given that they haven't been part of the exercise of listening to Manitobans.

While we thank—yesterday I was joined by the member for Fort Richmond (Mrs. Guillemard), and the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Reyes) at the table, along with the member for Burrows (Ms. Lamoureux), who was there listening to Manitobans, asking good questions and receiving back from Manitobans good ideas of how to

strengthen the economy, fix the finances, put people back to work.

Madam Speaker, there is still time for these members of the NDP to get involved in this process. We will continue to gain this—from Manitobans the submissions that will really work to strengthen this province and to get us back on track. That's the process that we are looking forward to. It's the process we still invite them to get on board with.

Children in Care Change of Funding Model

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): I want to thank everyone for supporting my resolution.

To the Minister of Families, my question is: Will you look into changing the funding model? We must stop funding the model of apprehension. We must start funding organizations such as the NCN organization that divert children from ever entering the CFS system and has decreased the apprehension by 43 per cent. We must support—we must fund supporting of families.

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): I very much appreciate the motion that the member talked about. I can tell you this was a model—Nelson House is one that I went up to, just not about three, two-and-a-half weeks ago, with the member for Thompson (Mr. Bindle). It's something that she talks about, I think, makes a lot of sense, where you're having the individuals that are taken out of the care and the—the care of the children is in the centre.

We know, obviously, that funding models are stretched. We know that the amount of kids that have taken in care has exponentially gone up, which no one in this Chamber, I think, would agree is a good idea. We're open to any solutions that we can have to stretch the dollars further and ensure that we have proper services for our children in care.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Bell's Purchase of MTS

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

The background of the petition is as follows:

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

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

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

* (14:30)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by many fine Manitobans.

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

Union Certification

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, these are the reasons for the petition:

Manitobans have benefited greatly from a fair and balanced approach to labour relations that has had a long period of labour peace in the province.

Under current legislation, if 65 per cent of workers in a workplace vote to join a union by signing a union card, then a union can qualify to become automatically certified as the official bargaining agent for the workers.

These signed union cards are submitted to the Labour Board and are subject to tripartite review, which includes worker management representatives as well as an independent third party each of whom review every card and ensure that the law has been followed.

The provincial threshold to achieve automatic certification of a union is the highest in the country,

at 65 per cent, the democratic will and decision of the workers to vote and join the union is absolutely clear.

During the recent provincial election, the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party announced, without any consultation, that it was his intention to change this fair and balanced legislation by requiring a second vote conducted on a matter where the democratic will of workers has already been expressed.

This plan opens up the process to potential employer interference and takes the same misguided approach as the federal Conservatives under the Harper administration took with Bill C-25, which was nothing more than a solution looking for a problem.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the provincial government maintain the current legislation for union certification which reflects balance and fairness, rather than adopting the intention to make it harder for workers to organize.

And this petition has been signed by many hardworking Manitobans, Madam Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, on House business.

I'd like to announce, in addition to the bill previously referred, that Bill 17, The Fatality Inquiries Amendment and Vital Statistics Amendment Act will also be considered on at Tuesday, November 1st meeting of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced by the honourable Government House Leader that, in addition to the bill previously referred, that Bill 17, The Fatality Inquiries Amendment and Vital Statistics Amendment Act will also be considered at Tuesday, November 1st meeting of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs.

* * *

Mr. Micklefield: Madam Speaker, we'd like to resume debate on Bill 14.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 14—The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: To resume debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen), second reading of Bill 14, The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Amendment Act, standing in the name of the honourable member for St. Johns, who has 25 minutes remaining.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I'm pleased to put some words on the record in respect of this piece of legislation, I suppose. I want to just reiterate—I was cut off I know that we ran out of time—so I just kind of want to reiterate some of my thoughts that I tried to express last time.

It is, when you've worked in the community for so long, and for myself it's well over 20 years now working in the community, really in the trenches and working with folks that are literally the most marginalized of the most marginalized of Manitoba, and indeed across Canada.

And when you see the urgency and the critical issues that Manitobans are dealing with, even as we sit here this—today, it is—I can't express actually how disheartening a bill like Bill 14 is when you think about really just its absolute minutia that it is in respect of really what we should be doing in this House and what we're so privileged to be sitting in this House and the roles and the responsibilities that we have in this House, which is to actually govern and to present bills and motions and resolutions that actually in my mind make changes for Manitobans.

I have to stress again that I—Bill 14 is nothing more than just minutia. We know that severance disclosure is always made public in Public Accounts. All this does is move it up within 30 days. But I just want to go back to that we are six months into this government's mandate, and this is the best that they can do.

And I don't know if it's the best that they can do because they are so wholly divorced from what is going on in this province with, again, the most marginalized of the marginalized. I'm not sure. I don't know if members opposite actually have had the experiences of working with people that are just struggling.

And I want to share for members in the House, you know, some of the stories and some of the

experiences and some of the journeys and, actually, some of the lives of Manitobans that we all represent here. I had spoke last—whenever this bill came up. I spoke about a mom that I had supported and advocated for in respect of her daughter who had been raped at the age of five. I do want to share that that mom and that daughter went through very difficult years and had to go through, obviously, the court system. And, luckily, that individual, that perpetrator, that pedophile is actually in jail.

And I will share that with the supportive community, and particularly the indigenous community and, in particular, indigenous women in the community. That little girl is—well, I guess she's not a little girl anymore. She's a young woman and she is extraordinary. She has graduated, and her and her mom, again, with the support of programs and services that our government put into place and in concert with just their intrinsic strength and their resiliency and courage, she is actually doing quite well. And so I'm really proud to stand with a party that believes in investing substantial dollars in respect of supporting indigenous women and children who have been victimized.

I know that in the last six months we keep repeatedly hearing on this side that, you know, you've had 17 years to do this and you've had 17 years to do that, but I can stand proud here in respect of the work that we have done in 17 years, and work that we had a lot of catching up to do once we took government from Premier Filmon and the Conservatives before that. And we are proud to say that we stand with families and with indigenous women and women and children here in Manitoba, and that is absolutely evidenced by the programs and services that they are now claiming we did nothing with, which is not accurate.

You know, so when you—you know, and I think, too, another family that I work with, that I've worked with since the summer of 2008—I work with a family; they are from Ebb and Flow First Nation, and their daughter, back in July of 2008, she was 17 years old and just small little girl—just a small, small little girl who was actually a mom. She had a son who at the time was, I believe, 18 months. She was murdered and her little body was dumped just outside the city in a ditch.

And I remember travelling there because there was going to be, like, a memorial and, of course, I've gone to—I can't even tell you how many vigils and

memorials and funerals, but we went; I went to go support the family. And I just always have this memory in my mind of this young woman's mom and her sister, and standing at the banks just crying and getting full of dirt because they were trying to get as close to where her body had been found.

*(14:40)

And so supporting that family in the sense that the mom also has intergenerational trauma and was also—had a myriad of different issues that she was dealing with, and also supporting the sister of this young woman that was murdered who also has a myriad of issues. And I can tell you that this young girl who was murdered was sexually exploited when she was 10 years old. And she was preyed upon by an individual who was in his 40s, and he groomed her, and he raped her, he sexually exploited her. And then he had done that to her sister as well. Her sister was about 12, and she had been raped by this individual as well. And so, this young woman who was murdered, her sister also has a myriad of issues.

And so fast forward just a couple of years after this, their son/brother, who I worked with—in fact, one of the things that our government did under Tracia's Trust was we had what was called the all children's lives matter or sacred children's lives matter. We actually changed the name a couple of times. And in our second year of that, which was a community forum—it was an open forum for people that worked with, you know, social service agencies, police, government—that worked with children that were sexually exploited, we would bring in guest speakers, but we also always had an affected family. And that particular year, we had this young girl's—who had been murdered—her brother attend. And actually, the first time I ever met him was at this young girl's funeral. And he was extraordinary. I remember just sitting in the church, and I was sitting with a community member, and we were listening to him. He was extraordinary.

And so then we had invited him to this all children matters forum, and, again, he was extraordinary. He spoke about, really, the conditions that his family have had to live in and spoke about, you know, even as we're sitting here today, the sexual exploitation that goes on of children here in Winnipeg and across Manitoba. And that young man, who I loved—I absolutely just adored him and would help out for a myriad of different things—housing, food, you name it—because the issues are ongoing. It

just doesn't end when a loved one is murdered. The issues are ongoing. And that young man was also murdered. I was—I got a call from his mother. It was honestly 4, 5 in the morning, and he had been shot in the head. And so going to the hospital, you know, of course—I don't know if you've ever seen that, but it's pretty traumatizing. And he died.

And so, you know, the—here is just one family, one Manitoba family, that deals with really critical, immediate, urgent multifaceted issues, and I know that people are probably wondering why I'm bringing all of this up. And it's because I really do firmly believe and I know and understand my position as an MLA as a sacred responsibility. And I think it is all—you know, for all of us, it is a sacred responsibility. And it is our responsibility to be able to govern and to seek resolution for all Manitobans. And Bill 14 is simply just a waste of time.

And, you know, I know that sometimes, perhaps, you know, not everybody is always so pleased with what I have to say, but I actually find it just so disheartening that we are sitting here—and this is—I don't know what hour we are on debating this minutia, but that's what we're doing. And yet we get paid and were elected by Manitobans, I'm pretty sure, who don't really care about a time frame in respect of what public servants or technicians get in respect to their severance. It is part of the Public Accounts record. But I would submit to this House that Manitobans want us to be doing more and substantially more than what Bill 14—what we're wasting our time on, Bill 14.

So I do just want to have that preamble. I want it, you know, put on the record that I think it is such a waste of time and it is absolutely just minutia, this bill.

But I do also want to put on the record—and it was something that the member from Southdale kept repeating in his time that he spoke about. He and many members who actually spoke to this bill have attempted to kind of make it as—the narrative has been that it's almost, it's like absolutely egregious; there's something wrong with us paying severance to individuals who are highly qualified, who work so hard.

And I know one of the individuals—myself, I was obviously a technician, and when I came into as an MLA, I actually lost 90 days of overtime—lost them, and that's fine. I'm so blessed to be in this position. I know another one of my colleagues that actually had,

I think, over 300—over a year of overtime that that individual will never get back, because people work so hard. I know that for myself in the things that we did in respect of specifically MMIWG, and I can speak in respect of Wiping Away the Tears—which is a gathering that we did for families of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls—that's three and a half days. I would start work. I'm usually up at 5, but I would start work at 6 during Wiping Away the Tears, and I would go until midnight every single day, and I know individuals that work like that all year round. And so to try and make it as if these people did something wrong or something criminal, I just think it is so egregious and so disrespectful.

But I do want to go back to what the member from Southdale referred to repeatedly. He said we—you know, taxpayers—we have to respect taxpayers and their hard-earned money. And I—and, of course, all of us on this side believe that as well. I do want to—and he also said that it should be subject to public scrutiny. Absolutely, I think we can all agree on that. Hence, why our government always made those known in Public Accounts.

So I do want to just note a couple of severances, since members opposite seem to think that it's—so seem to think that it's like something so wrong or so criminal to actually not support people that are, again, working so hard. I do want to kind of note some severances of Tory staff.

So I'd like to note, for the record, the severance for Maureen Cousins. She was a policy analyst, and I bet you she was a really good policy analyst, right?

An Honourable Member: One of the best.

Ms. Fontaine: One of the best—awesome. Great. So there you go. So she got a severance in 2012; she got \$45,944, which today, in 2015-2016 dollars, would be \$47,254.55.

An Honourable Member: She worked there 12 years.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, that's great. That's great. I'm—great. I'm—I support a woman who works for 12 years and I support her right to be able to get severance. So, thank you. I agree with you. I'm glad that my sister Maureen Cousins got severance. She deserves it.

Tricia Chestnut, she was an economic analyst as well. She got \$44,188 in 2012. Today, in today's dollars, Madam Speaker, that's \$46,035. And, again,

I would argue that my sister Tricia deserves her severance—absolutely, hands-down deserves it.

I would argue—I would also say that my sister Rochelle Squires, also got—

Madam Speaker: Order. When making reference to ministers or other members here, they are to be acknowledged either by their ministry title or by their constituency title. So I'd like to just caution the member on that. Thank you.

* (14:50)

Ms. Fontaine: Absolutely, I apologize for that.

The member for Riel (Ms. Squires), who was also an economic analyst, and in 2012 she got a severance package of \$32,925, which, in today's dollars, again, Madam Speaker, would be \$34,301.37.

So those three women, which, of course, I would absolutely support that they got severance, I'm sure that they all worked extremely hard and probably lost many, many days of overtime. And we don't really know what those severance packages included, what their vacation days or their overtime—we don't really know, but, nonetheless, they deserve it.

And, of course, as everybody knows in the House, I absolutely support all my sisters in the myriad of different positions that they—so I want to get on to a couple of other ones, just because, again, the member for Southdale (Mr. Smith) talked about public scrutiny, and I think that here's a place where we can just put it officially on the record here.

So some more severance packages—so Julian Benson—so secretary Treasury Board. So, in 1998, he got a severance of \$56,891, which in today's dollars would be \$78,873.03—that's.

Taras Sokolyk, chief of staff. In 1980—in 1998, Taras got \$93,294 in severance, which again, Madam Speaker, in today's dollars is actually \$129,341.74.

So David Langtry—I don't know all of these individuals, Madam Speaker; I'm just new here. But he was a senior manager and, in 1999, he actually got \$82,548, which in today's dollars is 112—or \$112,622.24. That's David Langtry.

So Hugh McFadyen—we all know who Hugh is. When he was the chief of staff, though, Madam Speaker, he got a severance for \$44,195. That was in 1999. So, in today's dollars, that would be \$60,672.05.

So Bonnie Staples-Lyon—yes, so she was the secretary of Cabinet communications and, in 1999, she got a severance of \$64,920 and, in today's dollars, Madam Speaker, that would be \$89,123.87.

So, again, because I just want to honour what the member for Southdale (Mr. Smith)—I just want to honour the spirit of this, you know, open accountability and scrutiny. So let's continue.

Frederick Mantey—*[interjection]* Yes. Okay. Yes. He was the special assistant to the Premier and, in 1999, he actually got a severance of \$74,915, which in today's dollars, Madam Speaker, would be \$102,845.27.

So Cynthia Carswell, she was a professional officer. In 1999, she got \$49,765, which today, Madam Speaker, would be \$60,128.07.

Heather Campbell-Dewar, professional officer again, she got \$42,000 and 32—you know, I'm just noticing something interesting, Madam Speaker, that I think we should all be interested in. So, in today's dollars, her severance would be \$57,702. And what's so interesting is that the—all the men are getting more severance than the women. That's fascinating—fascinating, fascinating.

So anyways, if we want to calculate those severance dollars in today's dollars, that comes out to \$699,309.90. So I do want to point out that I know that the members opposite, you know, are losing their minds in respect of severance that was paid to NDP. I do want to just juxtapose that our amount compared to that 699 is \$670,000. Well, 17 years—some of those individuals would have gotten severance for 17 years, as you know, because members opposite keep parroting that every opportunity that they have.

So—oh, so I do also want to make note, because, again, I want to honour the member from Southdale. I do want to—just finally in my last couple of minutes, I do want to note the severance in respect of our Premier (Mr. Pallister)

So, in 1998, our Premier took a severance of \$22,431.67. Today's dollars again, Madam Speaker, that would be \$31,108.54. Again, when our Premier was in—out in Ottawa, our Premier got a severance again back in 2008, so it's twice. And back in 2008, he got a severance for seven—\$77,700, which today—today's dollars would be \$86,394.19, which would be a total for the Premier's severance to date that we know of is \$117,502.73.

So, I would—you know, I'd—I'm so honoured to be able to put those numbers on the record. I think that it's good. And, you know, I know that we've chosen to kind of, you know, debate what is in essence absolute minutia in respect of Bill 14. It is an absolute waste of our time, and I know the member talks about—the member for Southdale (Mr. Smith) talks about that we have to respect our taxpayers. I want to have it officially put as—on the record that if actually taxpayers could sit in this gallery and see the minutia and the ridiculousness that goes on in this House every single day, I think that they would be offended, and I think that they would certainly change their votes in the next election for sure.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Alan Lagimodiere (Selkirk): It's my pleasure to make a few remarks concerning The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Amendment Act. But, Madam Speaker, before I put some words on record regarding the bill, I would like to tell everyone a little story regarding disclosure and what a great weekend I had this past weekend.

My uncle was diagnosed with lymphocytic leukemia—and it's an incurable untreatable cancer—about five years ago, and every year my brother and I make an effort to take him out and go fishing with him for a weekend at least once a year, and usually it's about this time of year just before freeze up. And I had the opportunity to go fishing with my brother and my uncle this past weekend, and we were fishing for the elusive muskie in southeastern Shoal Lake in Manitoba here. And I'm happy to report that I did catch two muskies this weekend, one 39 incher and a second 46-and-three-quarter incher. A master is a 30 incher, so I'm proud to say that I will be entering them on Travel Manitoba's Master Angler program, and I thank the honourable minister for Growth, Enterprise and Trade for the program and encourage everyone to come and enjoy our great outdoors.

However, Madam Speaker—[*interjection*]

What's that?

An Honourable Member: What about the one that got away?

Mr. Lagimodiere: Yes, well—however, Madam Speaker, in the spirit of full disclosure, I must admit that my brother did also catch a muskie this weekend, and yes, his was 47 inches, a little bit bigger than mine, a quarter inch bigger than mine. So, it goes on the record, my brother's was a quarter inch larger than mine.

Madam Speaker, when I was campaigning, one issue which was brought forward from my constituents was that they had lost trust in their government. My constituents told me that we were all the same. We say one thing and do the other once elected. This perception caused me great concern and left me asking, how did governments get themselves into this predicament. How did governments lose the trust of the very people who elected them?

Our government was elected in April on a mandate of being open and transparent. Bill 14 is a component of that promise made to all Manitobans. The Province is a steward for public funds. In order to complete its work it was elected to carry out, it must hire employees. The Civil Service Act refers to these employees as technical officers. This bill will ensure that political reimbursements and secondments, agreements, contracts, and severance payments are disclosed.

* (15:00)

Taxpayers expect integrity in the hiring and severance process, and Bill 14 ensures this will happen in an open, timely manner.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

The public has the right to know how government dollars are being spent, especially when it comes to advisers to the government, unlike the past when huge severance packages were handed out without disclosure to the public. Government advisers know that they are paid with taxpayers' dollars, and these advisers should have no problem with this type of information being disclosed to Manitobans since Manitobans are the very people whose tax dollars go to pay these technical officers.

Bill 14 ensures timely disclosure of severances, 30 days after completion. The bill will be retroactive to include current staff hired by the newly elected government. And this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is clearly in the best interests of Manitoban public, who put their trust in us to act on their behalf. Hard-working Manitobans have every right to know how their tax dollars are being spent when it comes to advisers to the government and to those appointed to positions by the government. Manitobans have a right to expect access to this information regarding public sector employees in a timely and convenient manner and in a format they can understand.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Office of the Ombudsman has indicated that senior civil servants should have a limited expectation of privacy when it

comes to their salaries, benefits and severance. It is public money, and the public should have access to information on just how it is being spent when it comes to public sector compensation. As such, the reimbursement must be accounted for in a transparent and honest way.

Bill 14 also introduces the concept of severance into the act and requires that severance payments to technical officers be reported to the public within 30 days of payment. The act also makes it clear that employment contracts and secondment agreements for technical officers will be subject to disclosure within 30 days of signing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as most of the people in the House are aware, before I was elected, I practised as a veterinarian; I spent 28 years as a veterinarian. During that time period, full financial disclosure was an integral part of my daily practice. Honesty and transparency with my clients allowed them to make informed decisions with regards to how their money was best spent. Bill 14 is directed toward allowing Manitobans to make informed decisions regarding monies being allocated for public sector compensation.

When I left my home on Monday morning, it was very dark and foggy out; I immediately thought back to those days when I was in my practice heading out on an emergency call. Most calls came in the dead of the night and usually in severe weather, the worst being snowstorms. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would arrive at the end of the driveway and I'd always notice that the driveway's usually about a half mile long, it hasn't been cleared of snow, and I know that the people in the house were sitting in the house thinking, I helped pay for that four-by-four; I want to see how well it works before I buy one for myself.

During those occasions, I would often have my assistant attend with me on those late night calls. These were always emergency situations and it was always nice to have an assistant. There were times when I was so tired that my assistant would have to drive home, and I must admit that I occasionally took the opportunity to get a little shut-eye.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is nothing worse than waking up in a car, in the dark, in a snowstorm, on some back road and not know where you are and where you are heading. If the driver does not provide the information to you when they see you're awake there's that awkward moment when you feel uneasy and apprehensive and end up

wondering if you can trust that driver. I thought this situation was much like Manitobans were experiencing with their previous government: the government being the driver, the ones in control, and the passengers, the Manitoba public paying for the ride. Bill 14 will require the government to provide the information needed with regards to public sector compensation so the public can relax and enjoy the ride once again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the NDP use words like openness and transparency in the House, but where was the taxpayer protection, the openness and transparency, when the NDP government paid nearly \$700,000 in payouts to former NDP staffers? Bill 14 will bring us closer to the openness and transparency with payments to the public sector that is deserved by all Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I find it thought-provoking when the members opposite are bringing up their concerns over situations where they feel that previous governments were not open nor transparent in their dealings. They ask our members to get their calculators out and do the math. I don't know if the honourable member is trying to tell us that it was not right when there was a lot of information that was not disclosed to their satisfaction in the past, or whether they are saying—or whether they are trying to justify their position by saying so and so did it, so it's okay that we did it.

I am happy to see the members opposite say they will come on board and say they will now endorse Bill 14, The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Amendment Act, since they, too, now state that they have had concerns over the lack of public sector disclosure in the past and seem to agree it is time for a change in how governments report employment contracts, second agreements and severance packages.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am concerned. When debating Bill 14, it now appears clear that debates presented by the NDP were not aimed at debating the pros and cons of the bill but were used by the NDP to make political statements to try to advance their own political agenda. Very little text in their comments to be related back to addressing the bill directly, and yet they accuse our side of the House of wasting their time on this bill when, in fact, the record clearly shows that they are the only ones who wasted the House's time were the members opposite.

Bill 14 will help to bring the trust back between government and Manitobans. Trust has been said to

be the glue that holds the relationship together. This includes relationships between the public and governments they elect. But what is trust? It's one of those terms that is hard to define. In my business career, I've noticed that the difference between successful businesses and non-successful businesses is related to the degree of trust between the employees, the management, the owners. And successful businesses exude trust at all levels and all staff are engaged, and it is extended to include the degree of trust Manitobans have for those businesses. In essence, trust is a feeling of security and the belief that something or someone is knowledgeable, reliable, good, honest and effective. In human relationships, trust develops when people interact and like the results. Lack of disclosure erodes those relationships.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, throughout my veterinarian business career, there were four core aspects of trust that I encouraged all who worked for me to follow. They were being able: Whichever position someone held, I challenged them to ensure that they had the capacity for the task. I asked them: Do you know your stuff and can you get the results? I'd ask: Are you a believable person? Can you keep confidences? I'd ask: Are you able to connect with people? Can you work well with others? You need to be able to listen and solicit input. You need to be honestly—you need to honestly demonstrate care and empathy and express praise. And, finally, you need to be able to demonstrate dependability. You need to do what you say you will do. This means keeping promises and commitments.

As a group, the three drivers of trust that are important for all staff are still accountability—that people do what they say they can do; benevolence—that people truly want to do good for others, not just to serve their own benefits; integrity—this is to focus on the shared values with those we are serving.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the role and importance of trust in all our engagement efforts cannot be underestimated or undervalued. Bill 14 will help bring trust back to government. The challenge, of course, is that we have entered into an era of declining trust in government. This poses serious challenges. Several drivers contribute to this decline in trust, which have been identified to include perceptions of bias, limited engagement and a perceived increased distance between citizens and government.

* (15:10)

Bill 14 will help to—in building trust in government by providing effective communication. The more citizens and communities understand the process, the goals and intentions and intended outcomes, the more information Manitobans need to have to make an informed decision, the more Manitobans and governments understand the perspectives of each other and their roles and stake in the process and issue, the more trust our government will develop. Mr. Deputy Speaker, our open government—our open engagement will help build trust in our government by building respect. We genuinely respect the input of all participants or members, even if it's sometimes difficult to accept.

Bill 14 will allow for increasing government transparency of process. The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Amendment Act will make information available that is clear and well understood by all stakeholders, devoid of alternative agendas.

Sharing information, effective engagement and trust requires that everyone involved is working from a common understanding of the issue, whether it's hiring, severance or secondary agreements. I believe that trust is a key to a successful life, successful business, a successful government. The challenge, of course, is that we are living in a province in which there was a complete loss of trust with our previous government. We as the new government are seeking to engage communities in an effective decision, discussion-making and participation process. We must work hard to earn our constituents' trust through effective communication, respect, transparency of process and sharing of information. Bill 14 will help us accomplish this.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Manitobans know the lack of information leads to miscommunication and misperceptions. When I was in practice in business, most dissatisfaction between groups and individuals developed as a result of poor communication. Poor communication leads to problems that develop from misinterpretation. Bill 14 will ensure open, timely sharing of information in a format Manitobans can understand. It will go a long way to alleviate misinterpretation as to what is happening with Manitobans' tax dollars.

Our government is taking our mandate from Manitobans very seriously. That is why we are hosting public budget consultations and working closely with our stakeholders. We want to hear from our constituents about the issues facing our province,

issues that were left from the former NDP government.

Madam Speaker, Bill 14 ensures timely disclosure of severance 30 days after completion. I am pleased to see that Bill 14 will be retroactive to include current staff hired by the newly elected government. Passage of this bill will stop situations like the almost \$700,000 severance paid out under the NDP watch. Manitobans are still asking for answers as to the rationale that was used to pay huge severance packages. The NDP claim to represent those on minimal wage and yet had no problem giving political severance packages to their own supporters using tax dollars collected from the working poor. At times, severance packages up to four times the average gross income of low-income wage earners was paid out.

Manitoba's new government is committed to creating an open government initiative that includes new measures, new processes to ensure accountability.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we on this side of the House know the importance of trust, know the importance of financial literacy and the importance of communication with Manitobans so they know where their money comes from and where it goes to. The financial disclosure and accountability act is a step our government is taking to ensure that all Manitobans will be able to access the information they need to adequately scrutinize a government's decision in spending their hard-earned money.

In the past, the NDP, however, used severance to cover up six-figure political payouts. This is part of the NDP record where they made politically motivated quick fixes that resulted in unsustainable spending, growth and massive debt. Bill 14, the public sector compensation disclosure act, will require the disclosure of payments made to political staff when their employment ends. Our government is following the advice of the Manitoba Ombudsman given on April the 26th, 2016, which states that compensation paid to public servants should be subject to public scrutiny.

This bill puts an end to the inherited decade of distrust. There will be no more chequebook political politics as we enter the new era of value for money. Manitobans will find a new characterization of trust where Manitoba taxpayers to relying on the actions of their government to be accountable for money allocated for public sector compensation.

Manitobans deserve a government they can trust with honesty and transparency. Manitobans deserve a government that is accountable, one they can rely on. Our government has begun the hard work required to repair the damage, correct the course and move towards balance in a sustainable way. Manitobans' new government was elected to restore trust and integrity into government, and that is just what we will do. We are focused on fixing the finances, repairing our services and rebuilding the economy.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): We're certainly not setting any records for riveting speeches this afternoon, no offence. It's fairly dry material. Somehow the previous speech, we managed to hear everything about a recent fishing trip to driving four-by-fours through snowbanks. So, you know, the legislation is kind of speaking for itself, and with the exception of the honourable member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine)—her speech was fantastic; I think we can all agree on that. You know, here we go.

And, because I love all of you so much and I love all of your speeches, I haven't been here to hear a single word that any of the rest of you said on this particular debate 'til today, so I'll have to read all about it in Hansard.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you can probably tell already that I'm not overly impressed with the government's decision to make this, of all things, a priority piece of legislation. As they like to point out, they were in opposition for the same number of years that we were in government, 17, and in their first six months in office, when they should be raring to go with lots of good ideas and big proposals to bring forward, we are left with a change to The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Amendment Act. I could read that title to my infant daughter three times and put her to sleep. There are so many other things that this government should be paying attention to, so many good issues that my colleagues are doing such an admirable job raising every day in the House in question period, so many stakeholder groups outside these walls clamouring for attention on the very issues that we were addressing very successfully, in many, many instances. But no, no, a piece of legislation about severance, that's going to make the top list for a new government within their six months.

It's interesting, Mr. Deputy Speaker. A typical session, when we were in government, there would be between 30 and 40 pieces of

government-sponsored legislation that we would bring forward to be debated and, hopefully, passed. And, as I just pointed out, the government now was in opposition for 17 years. You'd think they would've written down a few things on a Post-it note here and there on stuff they actually would want to do if ever they got into office. Well, the general public in Manitoba is probably going to regret that they are in office, but there they are, and where are the big initiatives? Where's the big ideas? Instead, we're left with something like this.

And the members that I've heard speak on this and heard reference to their presentations, don't even seem to be understanding the nature of their own legislation. The presentation I just listened to, with all due respect, referred to a lack of information about severance that is paid to people who no longer work here. There was a rhetorical question asked, a rhetorical question, Mr. Deputy Speaker, looking for the rationale for severance. Well, the honourable member may want to ask his leader, the Premier (Mr. Pallister), what his rationale was when he took severance twice, once when he left here and once when he left Ottawa. He received severance on both occasions.

* (15:20)

The honourable member might want to go and talk to former political staff who used to work for the Conservatives, you know, all of whom would have received severance—even people, Mr. Deputy Speaker, even people who had to appear before a judge in Manitoba to atone for their appalling behaviour trying to rig a provincial election using a phony First Nations political party. They actually went out and recruited people and tried to prop them up to split the vote, one of the most appalling actions undermining democracy in our province's recent history.

Names like Julian Benson, who was secretary of the Treasury Board, he received in today's dollars nearly 80,000 grand—or, \$80,000—80 grand in severance despite the behaviour that he had been involved in.

Taras Sokolyk—Taras Sokolyk, my goodness—the chief of staff for the Conservatives at the time, one of the key architects of the vote-rigging scandal, one of the many people who presented in front of the judge, and the judge in his ruling afterwards said he had never seen as many liars appear before his court before in his entire time on the bench. As *Many Liars* became the title of a book that was written about the

appalling behaviour of the members opposite. Taras Sokolyk, chief of staff to the premier, heavily involved in this, he received in today's dollars nearly \$130,000 in compensation. Pick up the phone, call Taras, and ask him what his rationale was for taking severance. Ask the prime—ask the premier why he took severance.

And, I mean, an interesting one here as well for people who have not worked in the building for very long and received a significant amount of severance, well, there's a gentleman by the name of Mr. David Langtry. He, it looks like, received \$135,000 in compensation in 1999-2000. He worked for approximately eight months, and when he was done with that job he then went and took a job working for then-leader of the Progressive Conservative Party Stuart Murray, as his chief of staff. So I think most Manitobans would look at that and say that's an interesting amount of money to pay someone for eight months of work.

And, lo and behold, here are the Conservatives now questioning what severance is, why it exists, why did people get it in the first place. And they've been doing exactly the same thing. Severance does have a rationale in—for people who work here. They will, with this legislation, they'll have the opportunity to explain it to any political staff that leave their employment or that they decide to let go while they're employed with them, their political staff. They can sit down and have a conversation with them about what the rationale is for severance. And it really is quite interesting to watch the members opposite bring this forward.

The other piece to this, obviously, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is how do we know these numbers in the first place. If there's no transparency, if there's no information, if there's no accountability right now, how is it that my colleague here from St. Johns was able to read into the record those examples and many more that I just repeated? There's already a full account of the money that is paid in severance on an individual basis. It's called the Public Accounts. If you think this speech is boring, Mr. Deputy Speaker, go read Public Accounts. It's only about six inches thick. I don't know how many trees get killed every year to do it. But it's publicly available information. Anyone can look it up. And that's called accountability. It's already in place.

Now, I understand why this new government's feeling a little nervous about their own track record, their short track record on accountability. They

were the ones who first stepped forward with a ridiculous claim on the amount of savings they had found in the budget, only to have it revealed they'd found nothing of the sort. What was the claim? Was it over \$120 million that they were claiming that they had found?

An Honourable Member: Hundred and twenty-two.

Mr. Altemeyer: Hundred and twenty-two—I stand corrected—\$122 million in supported savings. They swaggered into the coffee shops, they did their little media scrums, they held their little press events, saying, oh, look at this great work that we're doing. And, lo and behold, someone from the media had the temerity to ask them for a breakdown. Where did they find the savings? Oh, well, I don't know that. We're still looking for that information was the first response. And another week goes by; they'll make another claim; they'll get the same question. It's like, oh, we're still searching, you know? That \$122 million has wandered off somewhere. We're trying to find it. I don't know if it's in the honourable member's four-by-four, plowing through snowdrifts, but, you know, wherever it was, they couldn't find it. And then, finally, it comes out that they hadn't found anywhere near \$122 million in savings. Instead, what they had done is what we had said they were doing all along. They had made cuts, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

What did they cut? Well, here's the Conservatives' priorities: they cut \$35 million in funding for prevention initiatives, including for health, for healthy living and for children's wellness and prevention programs; they cut \$9 million from our schools and from our universities, and they reduced the level of capital spending for the current fiscal year. This is where we actually put Manitobans to work building the assets of our province, building the assets of our country and of our future. And these are the things that the Conservatives actually cut, and they tried to portray it as savings. It was one of the—you know, it would have been funny had it not been so tragic. But it was one of the most telling stories, probably the No. 1 story to come out of this Conservative government's first attempt at a budget, and it completely blew up in their face and deservedly so.

So, I get it that they're a little nervous about accountability right now. I get it that they're trying to, you know, establish that there's actually an understanding of what that word means. And as I've already demonstrated, the severance payments that are made to anybody are already fully accountable

and publicly-available information, and members opposite don't seem to understand that rather fundamental fact in the legislation that they've brought forward.

So my initial point, as well, Mr. Speaker, in addition to highlighting the duplicity and the unsubstantiated claims of a moral high ground here by the government, the far larger issue and what I want to spend the rest of my time talking about is that this could possibly be a priority to this government. There are so many pressing issues that deserve their attention. Any time a bill comes forward to the House, it represents hundreds of hours of work by a wide variety of people. You have to have the people come up with the idea. It would have to be drafted by legislative counsel—and I thank them for all the great work that they do on behalf of all 57 MLAs in this Chamber. And then it's all of our time spent debating it, recording it, anything happens at committee hearings. And this is actually one of only, what, 17 pieces of legislation that the government's managed to come up with, is something like this?

Here's something real easy that they could have done, and that they should have done and that they still could do: they could be raising the minimum wage—they could be raising the minimum wage—it's one of the best ways to make sure that low-income people, who are predominantly—as, again, my advocate friend here from St. Johns has been pointing out in question period regularly—women disproportionately represented amongst low-income earners. You raise the minimum wage, it makes a huge difference. And just how big a difference? Well, if our very simple policy of a 50-cent-per-hour increase this year had been implemented, that would put a full-time worker, someone working full-time minimum wage—that would put over 900 additional dollars into their pockets. Imagine what a low-income person, whether they're a single parent with kids or without or a university student working multiple jobs, whatever the case may be—imagine what an extra \$900 would do for them. Instead, this government's trying to claim that they've made huge strides in poverty and fairness in the world by raising the basic personal exemption, which only adds up to \$10 a year.

So, \$900 by raising the minimum wage, which, ironically, doesn't cost the government anything to do—it's not government dollars involved. Nine hundred dollars on the one hand by raising the minimum wage, or \$10. You know, I don't think the members opposite are going to get very many

people—low-income people, high-income people, or anyone in between is going to tell them that their approach is better than ours on this one.

* (15:30)

And, lo and behold, they could even bring in legislation guiding increases to the minimum wage to further improve it. Our increases in minimum wage, Mr. Deputy Speaker, happened every single year we were in office. Members opposite, if they want to wax philosophic and make great speeches to themselves in the mirror when nobody really cares about, you know, this decade of decay they love to refer to, they can go right ahead. But they are undermining the work that our government did to raise the minimum wage every single year for tens of thousands of Manitobans who rely on that.

It was \$6 an hour when our government came to office—\$6 an hour, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And when they were last in office, same as when they're in office now, they hardly ever raised it. They'll raise it a little bit right before an election to try and convince Manitobans that they care about it, and it never works. People know what Conservatives stand for when it comes to low-income people. Lo and behold, we come to office; now it's at \$11 an hour. And this is the first year in 17 that the minimum wage is not being raised and instead—here's another—oh, here's another thing that this government could and should be doing. My honourable colleague from Concordia brought in a resolution—or a bill, rather—brought in a private member's bill today calling on the government to not bring in health-care premiums. Well, health-care premiums cost people in other provinces hundreds and hundreds of dollars. They could have done that; it would have made a huge difference. Instead, what do they do? They vote it down. They actually voted down that very simple, very noble idea. So I guess we're left to conclude that health-care premiums is something we could very well see from this government in the years ahead.

I certainly hope that they've sort of fallen on that right-wing position, you know, not by accident, that they're at least putting some thought into it. But how on earth that debate could be, you know, less important than this piece of legislation before us right now is just quite simply mind-boggling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The entire work that this Chamber did yesterday, collaboratively—people in the general public don't realize this, but there are—granted, there are a few rare moments, but there are moments when all parties will agree on a motion in

this Chamber. And yesterday, we had one of those. So we've had excellent follow-up questions today saying, all right, how do we take this momentum and make sure that the fundamental and historic wrongs that have been done, that are being done, that without change will continue to be done to the indigenous people and the First Nations of this country, how do we try and get those addressed as quickly as possible? But no, no, we're not debating that today. We're debating The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Amendment Act. How can those possibly be on the same level of priority for this government?

And let me—with the time that I have left, I'll just give a few examples of some of the things that an MLA can help their community with, can help get accomplished, when they've actually got a government that's willing to work with the community outside of this building. And, obviously, I can only speak to my own experience. All of us will have stories like this from our side of the House, fantastic initiatives that our constituents brought to us, wonderful proposals that community groups brought forward and said, hey, we would really like to make this improvement in our community; can you go bat for us? You know, Rob, can you go try and connect us with the Cabinet minister who'd be responsible for this, or, you know, where's the pot of money that we might be able to get our proposal to and have it considered? And I'm honoured—honoured—Mr. Speaker, from top to bottom, to be a person that my community can come to for those conversations for the years when we were in office.

And just to give you a few examples of some of the things we accomplished by working together with community—and you tell me—you tell me if these are more or less important priorities than, you know, The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Amendment Act. We had the only high school in Winnipeg that didn't have a green outdoor play space come to the Legislature begging us to help them accomplish an incredible proposal. These kids, they marched—I remember one time they came—they came to the building on multiple occasions throughout the winter. There was one day it was freezing rain. The kids marched down here from Gordon Bell High School, just down the way on Broadway. They marched down Broadway, slipping and sliding every step of the way. They came to the front steps; they made their pitch. They were passionate; they'd done their homework; they had their research.

I helped get them a meeting with our Education Minister. We worked behind the scenes to help line

up the funding. The federal government ended up playing a huge role because the space that was available, unbeknownst to anyone, had actually already been sold. There was this wonderful lot right next to Gordon Bell High School, but no one thought to consult the school on, you know, what they might be able to do with it. And the land was sold—from a former car dealership, it was sold to the federal government; it was sold to Canada Post; supposed to be a mail distribution centre going up there.

So we not only had a fantastic proposal from the community, we had obstacles we had to conquer. We had to make sure that, you know, the land got transferred from Canada Post to the school division. We then found out that, of course, it being a car dealership and a repair garage, the soil was contaminated, so we had to make sure there was funding and expertise in place to remove all the toxicity, all the toxic soil, and fully remediate the site. And then you had the little matter of having enough money to actually build something green and beautiful in its place.

And, Mr. Speaker, you might think that that would never happen, that when your priorities are as messed up as what we're debating today, how on earth could there be time to take on a project like that; it was so complicated and seemed to have so many barriers. Well, students didn't accept the barriers. I didn't accept the barriers. The community didn't accept the barriers. Our government didn't accept the barriers, and we found a solution, and that's why every single time anyone of us going down Broadway, headed towards Portage Avenue, you go right past the beautiful Gordon Bell green.

It is a phenomenal facility, and I'm so proud every time I go past there. They just managed to do some additional fundraising at the school. They've got some outdoor lights set up now so the field can be used even more than usual. That's the type of work that actually makes a difference.

We had another example come up in question period this week: our party quite simply trying to get any kind of answer from this government what they're going to do about housing. What are they going to do about low-income housing in Manitoba? Well, here again we had a fantastic proposal come from the West Broadway neighbourhood. There was a piece of vacant, government-owned land, and they wanted to see if it could be redeveloped into a housing proposal, and not just any housing proposal. They wanted it to be environmentally friendly in its

design. They wanted it to be universally accessible so that people with disabilities could live there. They wanted it to be income sensitive so you could have a range of people with different incomes living at the place, and they wanted it to be a co-op.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if, you know, you look at that as a government and you think, oh, that's way too complicated, we've got important things like The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Amendment Act to deal with, that proposal doesn't go anywhere, especially when you consider, for a variety of reasons, most of them federal, there hadn't been a single housing co-op built in Manitoba for decades. The previous Conservative government didn't build any social housing units when Paul Martin's Liberals took all the funding away at the federal level and walked away from it.

We looked at this proposal and we said, this is fantastic; how do we work with you to make it happen? And lo and behold, anytime you go past—go down—go headed north on Sherbrook Street, now as you're approaching Portage Avenue, look to your right and you will see the wonderful Greenheart Housing Co-op. And that was not made possible by people asking bizarre questions and bringing, you know, less important legislation like Bill 14 to this Chamber. That project happened because the community had a vision. The community developed their plan. They brought a great proposal to us, and we found a way to work with them to make it happen.

*(15:40)

Let's talk about another fantastic initiative that folks might see as they're just driving down Portage Avenue. Look to your right: University of Winnipeg had more than a few physical changes to it in recent years. You've got the new McFeetors Hall student residence. You've got the new environmental science building. You've got a new theatre for the new arts program, and you've got the phenomenal RecPlex. I mean, I'm probably not the only MLA whose kids now go to the RecPlex and participate there in a wide variety of sports.

And the reason why those facilities exist is because once again, the community came to our government with solid proposals on how they can make the world a better place for their students, for their faculty, for their staff and for their surrounding community, and our government said, yes, this is a priority for us; let's sit down and find a way to actually make this happen. And all of those things

and many, many more just at the University of Winnipeg campus are now in place.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to show just how out of touch this government is, they call all those improvements—they call all of those amazing new facilities, all the new supports flowing into universities—they consider that decay. They consider that a decade of decay—is, you know, the phrase that they've latched on to, and they are once again revealing just how out of touch they are when it comes to the real issues that Manitobans are actually concerned about. They don't want to see governments bringing forward, you know—I won't say completely meaningless—like, sure, we can pass this, but how on earth can this be such a big priority when you look at all the other things going on in the world?

Let's talk about climate change. Oh, my goodness. The only thing we've heard from this government on climate change so far is that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) doesn't believe human activity is contributing to it. I mean, that's not exactly an appropriate answer for, you know, all of us who are alive right now, and it's certainly not good enough for, you know, people of the pages' generation and everyone younger than that. This is the single largest challenge that the globe faces at the moment. Every single jurisdiction in the world is being impacted by climate change, and the impacts are only going to get larger, and we all have to do our part to make a solid difference.

And we've heard nothing from this government on that issue or any other environmental issue. The only issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and I'm the—obviously, I'm the critic for the environment and green jobs in our caucus, so I try to watch these issues as closely as I can—the minister brought forward one initiative, one initiative only, in the last budget. Out of the whole budget, there was only one thing that she was allowed to get up and talk about by the Premier. And it was on an initial claim, later proved false, that more money was going to be spent battling aquatic invasive species, specifically zebra mussels.

Well, lo and behold, just recently, it's revealed that, sure, they announced they were going to spend more money; they've actually spent way less money than they announced. And, in fact, they've announced—they've only actually spent about a third of what our government was allocating to fight that important issue in our time in government on an annual basis.

So these, I would argue, are far more important issues with far greater reach into their impacts into the lives of all of our constituents. And, you know, the government, I hope, manages to reconsider, next time they're looking at trying to bring forward a piece of legislation like this where—especially given that many of their members don't really seem to understand its intent. They seem to overstate its importance, and there's so many far more important things that we should be debating going forward.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member—the honourable Minister for Sustainable Development.

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sustainable Development): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am proud to put on record my comments and support for Bill 14, The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Amendment Act.

On April 19th of this year, the 41st provincial election was held, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where the people of Manitoba overwhelmingly elected a new government, a new Progressive Conservative government that offered the taxpayers of Manitoba the hope, honesty and transparency they so deserved.

After 17 years of NDP reign involving payouts, untendered contracts and wasteful spending, Manitobans voted for positive change. They resoundingly told us they wanted a new government that they could trust. They were tired of the old government who repeatedly broke their promises. So, again, just over six months ago, when they voted for a new Progressive Conservative, they knew they could count on them to spend their hard-earned money responsibly and to be accountable, and they knew they'd be a government that would be open and transparent.

That is exactly what Bill 14, The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Amendment Act will provide to Manitobans: accountability and transparency. It will eliminate the potential for backroom deals as we unfortunately witnessed by the former government, where payouts or severance payments were based purely on political alignment. It will clarify, it will provide clarity and transparency and ensure government manages its finances in the same manner Manitobans do—responsibly.

During the recent April election, while I was out knocking on doors of hard-working River East taxpayers and listening to their concerns, the issue of government waste was often raised, and very often

they even reference the huge severance package worth nearly \$700,000 that was paid out to the former government's political staff. They wanted an explanation. Why did these people receive such large amounts of money and for what reason?

Obviously, they were disappointed when I explained there was no legislation in place that required full disclosure. Many of those taxpayers lived on fixed incomes and, like most Manitobans, they didn't agree with the huge government severance payments, especially when no valid explanation was provided.

Many taxpayers I visited shared similar backgrounds as my family, like my dearly departed mother who passed away at 92 years of age, born to parents who immigrated from the Ukraine in the early 1900s. She worked hard all of her life, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And whether caring for the children of the Henderson family, who were early settlers in East St. Paul, sweating over the hot presses in the laundry or while helping out during the Second World War, working in the wings of the aircraft to assist with the war effort, she learned the importance of every dollar she earned. And I know that she would have been so disappointed by the inherent lack of respect displayed by the former government who, after 17 years, became complacent, self-centred and arrogant.

For you see, that severance payment represented over 35 years of income to my mother. Yes, you heard correctly; like many of my constituents, this payment equalled almost a lifetime of working and toiling. My mother's hands were worn and frail from the years and years of hard physical labour, which she and my father endured to provide for their family. My dad was also a union worker, worked for CP Rail and was a chair, worked hard to represent those work—those union people to make sure that they received fair and honest treatment. I was raised in a family of hard-working union people and I can say that my dad would also be disappointed to hear about this large payout that those individuals earned.

It really breaks my heart to think how little regard the former government had for hard-working Manitobans. They broke the trust of all Manitobans when they used the dollars of hard-working Manitobans as payouts to their political staffers. With a stroke of a pen that money was gone. Had this act been in place, the outcome may have been significantly different, as transparency holds governments responsible for their actions. Like to

say thanks to this new Progressive Conservative government, now transparency will be restored.

Governing is a great honour, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As legislators, we are obligated to spend wisely, act with integrity and always make decisions in the best interests of Manitobans, and I am proud of this government and this legislation which requires ministers to disclose the salaries of their technical staff.

* (15:50)

As a recently elected MLA and minister, I participated in the Estimates process both as a bystander and a participant, and over and over again during the questioning over that—those matter of weeks, I heard the opposition members repeatedly ask questions of every minister regarding their technical staff, questions like: who were they; what were their names; how many technical staff were assigned; and what were their wages?

I'd even like to quote from June 23rd, 2016, Hansard regarding Estimates that—for my department, the Department of Sustainable Development—where the member from Wolseley asked numerous questions regarding political staff, and I quote: "Would the minister be so kind to just give us the names and the positions of the order-in-council, the political staff that are attached to her department in some way?" And then another quote: "And what is the salary or salary range of the SA and the EA and the other person in Cabinet communications attached to the minister?"

This act will eliminate that line of questioning. It'll save hundreds of thousands of dollars just for having to question and ask ministers about their technical staff. It'll require the disclosure of any individual employment contract or secondment agreement between the government and a person appointed as a technical officer.

No more secrets, Mr. Deputy Speaker. No more speculating or accusations. No more thousands of dollars wasted on questioning. This information will be available within 30 days of signing. Our government believes Manitobans deserve to know where, how and when their tax dollars are spent, and we have delivered on that.

This act will provide Manitobans with much needed consistency and transparency in relation to hiring and reporting. There's no separate pool of funds for the hiring of political staff. It all comes out of the same taxpayer funded pot, Mr. Deputy

Speaker. Therefore, the same disclosure rules should apply.

I am proud of our record. On April 19th Manitobans voted for a new government, a government that shares the same values as Manitobans, a government that is accountable, transparent and governs with integrity, and we are that government. We are bending the curve and we'll make Manitoba the most improved province in Canada.

I would also just like to say that after listening to all of the members in the House, I can't understand why people are not open to accountability and to transparency. I think it's important; it's something that we do in our everyday life as we move forward. You know, I know in my former government—or in my former job, also as a government employee, you know, transparency and accountability were important and it was something that, you know, we ensured we acted, you know, in a transparent manner all of the time. I know that we do that in our daily lives, as I said, and, you know, as legislators that's what we're about. We're about openness, and each and every one of us were elected to be transparent and to be accountable to the taxpayers that voted for us.

And so I'd just like to say that I really support this and I know that Manitobans do, too, and that's the reason that they voted for us. That's the reason that they—they feel so confident in this government is because they know that they can trust us and that we will always ensure that their best interests are looked at in any type of legislation, any type of decisions that we make.

So I'd just like to say that I really hope that all members in the House will support this very important bill. I think it's something that, you know, we can all work together to ensure that we do have that transparency and that we do, you know, always do what's in the best interests of Manitobans.

So I'd like to just say thank you for the opportunity to speak on this bill today and I look forward to hearing the other members.

Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Chief (Point Douglas): I'm excited to put some words on the record for Bill 14. I was very impressed with my colleagues' remarks and people that I'm hearing talk on Bill 14. I do want to say, for the record, there seems to be a little confusion from members of the other side of the House

when it comes to accountability and transparency that we, of course, believe in accountability and transparency. We believe—making sure that citizens and Manitobans can get access to information. And we take that responsibility very seriously, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You know, I know that some of the members that have stood up, talked on Bill 14 are making some assumptions about accountability and transparency. And so it's important to note that, you know, when it comes to Bill 14, we on this side of the House, of course, believe in accountability and I'm proud to say some words on the record for it. I do want to say the very notes in which the members opposite are reading from were prepared by their political staff. Those are hard-working staff that do a good job. And whether you're a New Democrat, NDP government or a Conservative government, these are people who work very hard, who are very committed to making Manitoba a better place to live. They believe in the health and prosperity of our province. And it's important to note that.

The other piece that's important to note is that there's a—not only a record on our side of the House, but there's a strong record on the members opposite side of the House when it comes to severance as well. And I know my colleagues, on this side of the House, have been gracious in making sure that—particularly the new members of the House knew about that record. And so one of the things I do want to say when it comes to people who believe in public service, that it's—we recognize that it's not a 9-to-5 job. In fact, many of the people who work so hard have to work long hours and work weekends. And it's really important that we follow and provide the support to people who are putting in those long hours. And that's for both sides of the House here.

I do want to say that, you know—and I think it's been highlighted—and although many of us have talked on Bill 14, one of the things I do want to remind the government of is that often we should be talking about other things as well. And I think we'll be well served to do it. We see some unprecedented challenges happening in Manitoba's North, particularly around jobs and young people. And it's been said, and we were—we've talked many times about the strength that Manitoba has. And one of the strengths and one of the incredible potential that we have is it comes down to our young people. We have one of the youngest and fastest growing demographics in our province, here, than anywhere else in the country. And so it's important that we're

doing what we can through legislation, that we're doing what we can through programming, through services, to make sure that we're investing in that young population.

And part of that would be to making sure that we're taking the time to discuss things that we know that can engage those young people, that for a lot of young people, whether you're in Lac du Bonnet or you're in Point Douglas or you're out in Steinbach, these are opportunities—we want to make sure that young people have those opportunities, that we understand if they get their critical first job here, they're often going to stay here. We also know that young people, in our day and age now, have a global reach. And, with a global reach, they have to know that they can still make the biggest impact in their hometowns and their home communities.

And so I think it's important to highlight a few things on the record when it comes to Bill 14 and accountability and transparency. We strengthened The Elections Act. In fact, we beefed up FIPPA legislation so that the government data was more—and government data was more available for—online—information online. We understood that—we know that members opposite and members of the media and others are well versed in how to use FIPPA, but we wanted to make sure that we recognize that not all Manitobans use FIPPA. So we put many—much of the information online. In fact, I would think the majority, if not all of the information that you're hearing from members opposite, the information they're getting is from the information that the former government has provided. We wanted to make sure that we release information so that we can improve the services. And we saw that when it came to EMS response times and the number of doctors and nurses.

* (16:00)

We thought it was important to make sure that ministers' expenses were also available, and their expenses were available online, including their travel.

So, you know, it's important to recognize that record of the former government when it comes to accountability and transparency, and, of course, there's more to be said on it, but this new government also inherited—as part of our former government's record, they've also inherited one of the fastest growing economies with one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation as well.

You know, and it's not just me saying that. In fact, private sector validator after private sector validator has said the same thing. In March of 2015, CIBC World Markets, Scotiabank, BMO Capital Markets, TD Bank, Royal Bank, CMHC, Laurentian Bank were all saying the same thing, that when it comes to Manitoba, they had one of the strongest economies in the nation and was going to continue to be one of the strongest economies in the nation. We led in job growth over the last year. I do want to say for the record that three out of four of those full-time jobs were—four out of five were full-time jobs and three out of four of them were in the private sector.

When we were reading—when we currently read some headlines right now, we're reading headlines about a region in Manitoba coming apart at the seams. We're hearing first-hand from people what it feels like to get a layoff notice. You know, this is how the economy is being described often in our headlines now, as opposed to headlines that talked about Manitoba being an economic elite, headlines that talked about strength and diversity, not only our cultural and ethnic diversity, but our regional diversity. And one of the things we know is you can't have a strong Manitoba economy without having a strong northern economy.

And so you saw headlines that talked about the strength and diversity: construction business booming in Manitoba; Manitoba manufacturers end on a high note. There was a company that had relocated from Ontario and moved into Manitoba back when we were in government. And, you know, when asked why companies like Canada Goose and so many other companies were wanting to do business here, it always came down to, you know, three particular things: one, Manitoba was the most affordable place to do business is what they said. They said that they wanted to invest in a province that had a young and fast-growing demographic, because they found that one of the things that we know about Manitoba—and these are companies saying this—that when you invest in that young demographic, there's strong loyalty to the company.

And one of the things that our government, we invested in, was in that demographic, because we worked with companies and we worked with businesses and we worked with the private sector to make sure that we are investing in training and upgrading, so we were doing that alongside of many businesses. Rosemary Sparks, who's the executive director of BuildForce Canada, in fact, came out and

said, there's never been a better time to get involved in the trades in Manitoba.

In fact, over the next period of time, there's going to be over 10,000 jobs in the construction field alone, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to read into the record a few of what those jobs are. And, again, this is important, because these are the kinds of discussions we need to be having in the Chamber here. This kind of information's important, because we want to invest in young people and make sure that this continues to be the best place to live and raise a family.

So, over the next 10 years in Manitoba, here's some of the construction trades that will be in strong demand. And these are in strong demand because this government inherited a strong economy. They inherited one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation. So here are some of them: boilermakers, bricklayers, carpenters, concrete finishers, construction estimators, construction managers, millwrights, supervisors and contractors, crane operators, electricians, floor-covering installers, heavy equipment operators, heavy-duty equipment mechanics, home building and renovation managers, insulators, iron workers, paint fitters and decorators, plumbers, refrigeration and air condition mechanics, residential and commercial installers and servicers, roofers and shinglers, sheet metal workers, 'steapfitters' and pipefitters, sprinkler system installers, trades helpers, truck drivers, welders. It goes on and on. This list goes on and on.

And you've got Mike Moore, who's the president of the Manitoba Home Builders' Association, when we were in government, said this: There's never been a better place to start your own business; it is possible in Manitoba after five or six years as a tradesperson. So he was saying the best path into entrepreneurship is through the trades. And he says: There has never been a better environment to (1) get in the trades, and there's never been a better opportunity as once you're in the trades to start your own business and become an entrepreneur. And so these were the kinds of discussions, these were the kinds of things that we were talking about, as well as accountability and transparency when it came to investing in that young—the young demographic.

You know, today, the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) brought up and talked about living wage and talked about minimum wage, and people are worried. People are worried because one of the things that members opposite might not know,

particularly the new members, is the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has a record. He has a record on many things. In fact, he actually has a record on severance and things around Bill 14 as well that has been highlighted over and over again, often seeming like a double standard. But he has a record. And when it comes to things like minimum wage, the opportunity to support some of our most vulnerable families, when he was in government, he froze the minimum wage seven times. And so you can see now how and why there are big parts of Manitoba are getting worried, because they remember the Premier's record.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

You know, being the member for Point Douglas, there's a lot of organizations that do good work to support families, to engage families to make sure that the services and resources that government provide are being used. And so those organizations provide tremendous service, like our Indian and Metis Friendship Centre. In one budget 56 organizations were cut when the Premier once—was once in government.

You know, there's—so there's people now who are quite worried about this record. And I put this on the record, Madam Speaker, because whether you're the member from Selkirk or you're the Minister for Sustainable Development, is when you're talking to Bill 14, they're talking like there hasn't been a record for when they were in office. And that's why it's important when the member from St. Johns or the member from Wolseley or the member from Elmwood highlight and make sure that the new members know that when it comes to accountability and transparency, and it comes to things around severance, that there's a history. There's a record that they have when it comes to things around accountability and Bill 14. And, I mean, you know, my colleagues put into record, they actually read names, they had numbers, those things, because it's readily available, but when it comes to Bill 14, it's important to recognize that there's a record.

And their leader has a record as well: froze minimum wage seven times, cut 56 organizations. There was a time that the members opposite invested and campaigned on a snitch line. You know, these are kinds of things that make people very, very nervous. And it looks like they're on that same path again, that, you know, when you're—for the first time in 17 years, you're not increasing the minimum

wage, that hurts people. That has an impact on some of the most vulnerable families.

* (16:10)

And so I think it has been highlighted over again about who the minimum wage affects the most. It's often people who are working full-time; it's often particularly women. In a neighbourhood like I represent, it's a lot of single women trying to make a better life for themselves and their families. And, you know, the members opposite, I know, all have single mothers that they represent. And they probably all have—including the member from Tuxedo—probably have a single mother who's trying to make ends meet, who's working a minimum wage job right now, trying to make a better life for herself and her kids. And that wage increase would make a difference. That wage increase would have an impact on her family.

You know, and if you go and talk to people that—no matter where they live, they want to have the opportunity. They're proud of where they live and they want to have the opportunity to give back. And so, these are important discussions to have.

Now, I do want to say for the record, just so members opposite know, for 17 years, we increased the minimum wage. And I know the Premier (Mr. Pallister) stood up today and said, oh, we didn't consult people, we didn't talk to people, we didn't talk to small-business owners. That's factually incorrect. That's just not true. And for 17 years, along with labour leaders, along with poverty activists, along with minimum wage workers themselves, along with small businesses and big businesses, we consulted, we increased minimum wage. For four and a half years that I had served, not once did I ever hear a question about—from members opposite about why that was a bad policy, or we weren't consulting people.

So, I mean, the fact is, what the Premier said today is just wrong. We actually did consult. We did talk to people. And for 17 years, we increased it. We didn't index it; we increased it.

Now, I want to say, in 17 years, and the last four and a half years that I've been here, Manitoba has had one of the strongest economies, because not only do you continue to support one of the—not only do you continue to support our most vulnerable, but those folks, they want to have a contribution too, so they invest that back into the economy. And we have proven for 17 years that you can continue to increase

minimum wage and grow the economy. We have proven that you can increase minimum wage and have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the whole nation. And so, I think it's important that we—that, you know, we put that on the record.

Now, I do want to say that, you know, part of that—part of doing that was our investments and making sure that people that were working those jobs, not only did they stay in those jobs, but there was always opportunities for them to go back to school, to upgrade, that they could work a minimum wage job. I could tell you about one single mother in my neighborhood. She worked all summer for minimum wage. I brought her and her son's name up, of course, in the House. And she worked all summer, and now she's back in school this fall. She's training to be a social worker, and that's important.

And one of our strategies was making sure that when we're investing in young people and we're investing in—is that we put a lot of emphasis on investing into infrastructure, which was of course a policy that we brought forward and invested into infrastructure to make sure that we can continue to grow our economy. And I was able to attend an infrastructure luncheon that was put on by Economic Development Winnipeg—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

I would just like to urge member; I'm hoping that he's going to be able to reach the point where he is tying his current comments into the bill that is currently being debated, which is The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Amendment Act. So I would look forward to him reaching that point as soon as he could.

Thanks.

Mr. Chief: Madam Speaker, I just got to say, and I got to say this for the record, when the member from Selkirk was talking about Bill 14, I thought the best part of his speech was when he was talking about his fishing trip and catching big fish. When I listened to the member intently, the Minister for Sustainable Development, I thought what was most compelling is when she was talking about her mom's story.

All I am saying is when it comes to Bill 14 that there's a record, and it's important to put on some facts on the record that when you're talking about Bill 14—many of the new members might not know that there's a record when it comes to severance—and the members on our side of the House were very specific about the—in essence, the information that

we put forward about the record that the members opposite party—political party have had on the record.

So all I'm simply trying to say is that when it comes to things like Bill 14, it's important to recognize that—and I've said that accountability and transparency's important and I think it's a—but I also think it's important that we do spend some time talking about the record, because often what I've heard from the members opposite was one specific example in recent history where, in fact, much of what we look at from the history of members opposite.

But I do want to say, Madam Speaker, I think it's always a good day in this House when you're talking about minimum wage and you're increasing minimum wage for some of the most vulnerable families. I think it's important when we get to talk about young people and highlight policies and have discussion about how you grow the economy and how there's training opportunities for young people. So I'm just—I'm simply saying, when it comes to Bill 14, I'm trying to use and highlight the fact that there's a history here and I think it's important.

And I do want to go on with the important information about the infrastructure luncheon that was put on by the Economic Development Winnipeg and CentrePort and the Manitoba Heavy Construction. John Law was there, President of Lawmark International. He co-authored much about improving Canada's infrastructure and the impacts that it has on the economy and impacts that it has on jobs, and it was actually—the Premier (Mr. Pallister) asked the question. He was Leader of the Official Opposition at the time. He asked a question, if Manitoba was doing it right, that he had concern about our investment into infrastructure. And John Law was very clear. He gave—he made three points. He said (1) investing in a long-term plan like Manitoba is doing is based on evidence, and it works. Working directly with the private sector also is a good plan that he saw Manitoba doing. And he simply said, in his third point that Manitoba is doing it right, and I thought that was really important.

Now, when it comes back to Bill 14 we, of course, want to send it off to committee. When it comes to accountability and transparency we—of course, we believe in that. But it's not just what I'm saying, it's what we've been able to show, the information that we have provided online to family, information and data. We know that when you're providing that kind of information to the public that's

always going to make the services and resources that you're providing—it's going to engage more people and when you engage more people those services and resources work best. When you're providing information to the public, we also know that that helps shape great ideas around good public policy. And so, you know, when it comes to Bill 14, we're glad to see it and we're going to be putting it off to committee.

I do want to say again that—

An Honourable Member: Not for a while.

Mr. Chief: Not for a while, as the member from Elmwood say. He's a House leader, you know, that's okay.

But what I do want to say is that you end up going back and forth when it comes to people who dedicate their lives to public service, and we're tough on those people. We're tough on those people in this House.

And so it's important to recognize that when it comes to Bill 14, and it comes to accountability and transparency, that's important. I don't think anyone here would disagree with that. I think one of the things that we have to recognize, and members opposite should know, is that when you're talking about Bill 14, and you're highlighting people and you're mentioning people, those are all people who worked very hard. And they have a history of people who have done the same thing.

* (16:20)

And so, when they came in with Bill 14, you heard many of the comments from members opposite. And, you know, they were really tough on people. You know, they're—you know, and all I'm saying is, when it comes to Bill 14, they have a record. In fact, it often looks like some of the comments that they made, there was somewhat of a double standard on this. So we wanted to take the time to highlight that. But what I want to do is—what I want to do and put on the record is that the essence of people, when it comes down to the people, particularly people who—and all people who work really hard around here, those staff are putting in long hours. Those staff are giving up weekends. Staff are giving up time away from their family and their children. Not just the staff that work for us but the current staff that work for them, the past staff that have worked for them.

So it's important to recognize that I think that we all agree on how important accountability and transparency is, but I think we have to make sure that, when it comes to Bill 14, that we still recognize that there is a group of people who work hard here every day, who work hard here every day to make Manitoba a better place to live. They work hard every day to make sure that there's opportunities for young people, for our seniors, for everybody in between, that there's a group of people here that, every day, make the official opposition better, every day make the member—the Liberal Party better.

But those—a group of people are also making every single one of those members opposite better, too. In fact, much of the work and much of what you hear from members opposite are people who are working hard every day to try and make everyone in the House better. And so, when it comes to Bill 14, I just want to make sure that we recognize that there's a history here, not with just with our party but members opposite party. And those are the very people who helped—when we were in government, helped build and make Manitoba have one of the strongest economies in the nation. They helped build and make—helped us build one of the—have as one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. They've helped build really good, strong public policy.

And so, Madam Speaker, when it comes to Bill 14, we believe in accountability. We believe in transparency. I think all members of the House are looking forward to it going to committee.

An Honourable Member: Not for another two minutes, anyway.

Mr. Chief: Well, it's not going to go to committee for two minutes, but eventually, it's going to go to committee. And so we think that's important.

We also think it's important to recognize and always remember that there's a group of people who are making members opposite jobs a little bit better every day. And those people shouldn't be used as—in any kind of partisan way but that we recognize that there are people here who are making us all better, and so I think it's important that, when it comes down to Bill 14, that we remember that there's a history. All of us have a record. Our political parties have a record.

An Honourable Member: Let's talk about the Filmon years.

Mr. Chief: Yes, well—my member—the member from Elmwood wants me to talk about the years in which the Premier (Mr. Pallister) sat at the Cabinet table. And that's what happens when you bring up bills like Bill 14. You know, people start to remember the days where, you know, they froze minimum wage seven times. And that's why I was talking about that, Madam Speaker, because these are people's concerns.

You know, they remember the members opposite record when he sat around the Cabinet table and 56 organizations got cut. They remember what it was like, you know, when there was an investment into a snitch line. And so, Madam Speaker, when it—when you bring up bills like 14 and, you know, there are going to be things that are said that of course that people are going to want to do.

But I do want to say for the record that it is important. We believe in accountability and transparency. But I also think it's always a good day when we can talk about things like minimum wage and making life—people's lives better.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to put a few words on the record in support of Bill 14, The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Amendment Act.

I think this is a very important bill, and I want to thank the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) for bringing it forward. This is about an open and transparent government, which is something that we haven't seen for the last 17 years in Manitoba. And it's certainly something that we heard from Manitobans. When we went door to door in the last election and consulted Manitobans, this is something that they really felt that they wanted is a more open and transparent government, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

But I also want to thank the Minister of Finance because I think he probably is aware, as well, that it is part of my mandate as part of the open government initiative, and so I want to thank him for being able to help me fulfill my mandate for open government in this province and open government initiatives, Madam Speaker.

I want to thank him for his help, and you see that's how we, as a new government, work together on various initiatives, and certainly from an open government initiative I know my colleagues in

Cabinet and my colleagues in caucus we're all on the same side here when it comes to wanting a more open and transparent government because that's what we heard from our constituents before the last election.

And so I know my colleagues in other government departments when we reduced the size of government from 19 down to 12, it's very interesting the way things have transpired, Madam Speaker. What we found is that automatically when you reduce the number of Cabinet ministers, not only do you save the taxpayer money but, in fact, what you do is you reduce all of the silos that the NDP had built up within those government departments prior to us taking over.

And so now we find that we have a culture of openness across our government as well where we work together as Cabinet ministers, where we work together on various committees of caucus, where we work together as a team. And I know that members opposite didn't really have that opportunity. In the end they were fragmented. They had many different caucuses within their own caucus. It was a tough time, I believe, for the NDP.

And I know that there was, of course, a leadership campaign within that time period close to the end of this government, and we know that the premier he continued on. This is something I think in the history—I'm not even sure it's happened in the history of Canada, certainly the provinces, certainly in Manitoba, it's never happened before, where a sitting premier is running for the leadership of his own party because he had people within his own party that didn't believe in his leadership.

So he stayed on as premier, something that I don't think, again, certainly not in the history of Manitoba, but I don't think across this country we've ever seen this in a free and democratic society. But what we saw at the time was complete dysfunction and mismanagement by the NDP, certainly the last 17 years but, in particular, during this very difficult that they went through as a party. And I'm sure it wasn't easy for members opposite. I'm sure it was a tough time. But it was just so—I was baffled at how the premier felt that he should be able to stay on at the time as premier while running for the leadership of his own party. So it was very difficult.

I know my colleagues and I at the time were sort of wondering what hat is he wearing, today. Is he wearing the hat of the leader—running for the

leadership—the leadership candidate of his party, or is he running a province as the premier of the province, Madam Speaker?

And so I think the important thing here to remember and how this relates back to this is during that this bill—is during that time the premier or the leadership candidate for their party they seconded, he seconded people within government from other areas and paid for by government, and it was questionable at the time. You know, what role were those people playing at the time? Were they working for his leadership or were they working for him as premier?

And so it was very difficult for us, as opposition, at the time to try and figure out the roles of these individuals. But, certainly, at that time as well, there were many people that were let go from government, and we know that when those people were let go from government that they were given various severance packages at the time.

* (16:30)

Now it was very interesting at the timing of those people letting go. It was around the time of reporting for Public Accounts; there were specific dates that were chosen for those resignations and the firings of those individuals so that they wouldn't have to be publicly disclosed until later Public Accounts.

So it's very difficult for us, at the time, to get an indication as to what the dollar figures were at the time. And we believe that's wrong, and that's why we're introducing—and that's why I want to thank the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) for introducing this bill, because it's very important that the public has the facts on the record in a reasonable time. Not deliberate actions to mislead public—the public, Madam Speaker.

And, at the time, you know, certainly, I know there was many difficulties that the NDP was going through. You know, all political parties have difficulties in their time, and it's not always easy. And I—you know, I feel for them at that time. But you cannot go through this kind of a process by utilizing taxpayer dollars, or somehow—you know, there's a grey area when you're acting as premier and you're running for the leadership of your party. And so I think the taxpayers of Manitoba deserve to know exactly what kind of severance pay went out to those individuals who were let go at various times, and the contract should be disclosed for those who are seconded from other departments or other

areas of government or outside government, where government is paying for those services. And certainly, you know, Manitobans deserve to know where their taxpayer dollars are going.

So we believe very strongly that, in this compensation disclosure amendment act, that there needs to be amendments to ensure that the public of Manitoba is fully aware of where their taxpayer dollars are going.

And so, you know, in the area of compensation, Madam Speaker, I know the previous member—the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Chief) who just spoke recently, he spoke about affordability. And, arguably, when you're talking about compensation, you can probably talk a little about affordability in Manitoba. And I know he talked about that.

And I guess I would wonder and ask him: How, as a government—and I'll ask all of them, perhaps—how, as a government, did they feel when they made that decision—2011 election campaign they went down—they went around door to door, they knocked on those doors, they asked for the support of Manitobans, they told them: no, no, they'll be no tax increases. No, that's nonsense. Ridiculous, the premier at the time said, I believe is what he said. Ridiculous. But I will tell you, Madam Speaker, what does—what was the first thing he did when he got into—when they got re-elected into government? They went against what they ran on in that election. They decided, at that point in time, to expand the scope of what was going to be subject to a PST. And so that is a tax increase for Manitobans.

But not only did they do that at their first available opportunity, they then took the next opportunity that they possibly could and they increased the PST from 7 to 8 per cent. And, of course, we know, at the time, there was—the laws of the province, of course, at the time were such that they were required to hold a referendum in order to introduce any major tax increases. Well, in my opinion, I think a PST increase is a major tax increase.

So—but, you know, it wasn't enough for members opposite. When they don't like the laws, you know—when they don't suit their own political agenda, then they—and, certainly, their agenda was to raise taxes on Manitobans, despite having run against that—run on a platform against raising taxes. They turn around and raise those taxes for Manitobans. They stripped away the very right by way of a referendum from

Manitobans. And we heard from—time and time again.

And, again, Madam Speaker, this goes back to compensation, and it goes back to, you know, disclosing things for Manitobans. So I'm trying to make a case for the fact that members opposite chose not to disclose the information about, you know, their hidden agenda to raise the PST on the backs of Manitobans. And not only that but stripping away their very right to vote on that tax increase. So shame on members opposite. And, of course, you know, it has to do with compensation and disclosure around those areas.

You know, Madam Speaker, we know that the NDP had a—almost two decades, really, of deceit—a decade of decay and decline. We know that—and part of that has to do with, you know, their secrecy, their deception to Manitobans, because of wanting so much to put forward their own political agenda that they—

An Honourable Member: Did they lie?

Mrs. Stefanson: I'm not going to say that on the record. You may say that. But I couldn't possibly comment.

But, Madam Speaker, I think it's very important in all of this to understand that the importance of disclosure to Manitobans—the importance of ensuring that Manitobans and the tax dollars that they spend are accounted for. And I believe that governments need to be accountable to Manitobans when it comes to their taxpayer dollars. And so this is all a part of that.

So, again, I want to thank the Finance Minister for bringing this very important bill forward. This has to do with an open government initiative. I want to thank him again for helping me fulfill my mandate, which is ensuring an open government initiative, Madam Speaker, because it's very important. Certainly, it's important to members of our government to ensure that Manitoba taxpayers know where their taxpayer dollars are being spent. And that's why we believe that it should be disclosed, that the compensation, that the severance packages, that all of these things should be disclosed in a free and transparent way so that all Manitobans know where their taxpayer dollars are going.

Now, I hope members opposite will see fit to do the right thing here, because it's not too late. They could still support this bill if they wanted to. They could still support a bill that acts in the best interest

of Manitobans. We'll give them that right. And, certainly, you know, now would be the time for them to finally see the light of day, to finally see the importance of the taxpayers of our province and do the right thing and support this bill. It's very important.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): It's a pleasure at all times to have an opportunity to rise in this House and put some words on the record with regards to the debate at hand. But I must admit, Madam Speaker, that I'm a bit perplexed by this particular bill in the sense that I've heard members of the government stand up, one after another, and talk about how important it is to have transparency and accountability in government. And I've heard members of the opposition stand up, one after another, and talk about how important it is to have accountability and transparency in government.

So, when we have an opportunity to get up and debate something like this, I think it's important. And I think I certainly do appreciate the opportunity to put my words on the record with regards to this and to be a part of this debate. But I do think that, you know, it speaks to where this government is at in terms of its priorities, in terms of its ideas. And when it brings forward a bill that, again, I think every constituent would nod their head and say, okay, sounds like a good idea—that, you know, my constituents ask me sometimes about my work on Public Accounts. And I say, well, yes, we get an opportunity to review the Public Accounts at the PAC committee. And, you know, I talk about how every single individual is listed and all of the severances are listed. So they understand that the information is out there.

But I did—so I just, I wanted to put a few words on the record with regards to this particular bill. And I also wanted to talk a little bit about how I feel that there are more important issues that the government could be bringing before this House and giving us an opportunity to discuss, because there's certainly no shortage of good ideas coming from my colleagues and—on the opposition side of the House, and certainly a lot of things that we could be doing in this province to move our province forward. So I'm happy to discuss those as well.

* (16:40)

But let me start by just talking a little bit about The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Amendment Act, which amends the act to require the additional disclosure of any individual employment

contract or secondment agreement between the government and a person who is appointed as a technical officer after May 2nd, 2016. It also requires that any severance paid to a technical officer with an employment or secondment agreement employed after May 2nd, 2016 must be disclosed within 30 days.

As I said earlier, Madam Speaker, our NDP team believes very strongly in transparent government and it—in a government that is held accountable, ultimately, to its citizens. And we take our responsibility to be open and accountable to Manitobans very seriously while, of course, being respectful of the privacy of our public servants and of human resources best practices. We also believe that having a professional and fairly compensated political staff is an integral part of delivering quality services to Manitobans.

Now, this is a point that—I must admit I haven't been able to hear absolutely every word spoken in this House with regards to this issue, but I know it has—or to this particular point—but I know it has been brought up a number of times just how much members of this House respect and appreciate the staff that they have working for them, because, truly, as much as we are servants of the public—and I do truly believe that we as MLAs are public servants in the best sense of that phrase—but the people that work for us and with us are also public servants in the best sense of that term. And I would say that absolutely everybody who has worked with great political staff understands the sacrifice that they make for the people of Manitoba, the integrity that they bring to the profession and the amount of pride that they have in the work that they do in terms of providing a service to Manitobans.

You know, however, they do this, you know, largely behind the scenes. And it's often not recognized or not seen. And so, I think it's sometimes easy, and I know the government when they were in opposition would often talk about hundreds of communicators, what they called communicators, in government, and how this was a waste of taxpayers' money. And now I believe that they have most of those communicator positions in place, and I think there may be even more than were in place before. And they're certainly paying them as they should be paying them, but they're paying them a lot more than I think the previous government did. But they derided them and they called them communicators, as if they were just out there spinning and they're spin doctors.

Well, I think that every member of this House, if you took them out of the media spotlight, if you took them out of the bright lights of this Chamber, Madam Speaker, and had an honest conversation with them, every single one of the members in this House would take the time to say how important political staff are, how their research and the background that they provide is ultimately—allows us to do our jobs as members. And without them, we truly wouldn't be able to represent our constituents as well as we like to be able to do.

So we—you know, I think that's something that the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) emphasized in her words on the record today and yesterday in saying that we value that work, and we feel that those people should be compensated for the great work that they do. And that's something that certainly everybody on this side of the House firmly believes, and I will stand up and say that any day of the week, Madam Speaker.

So we feel that political staff should not be subjected to partisan attacks or to be used in—political pawns. And, again, Madam Speaker, this isn't an opportunity for us because these are people who, again, operate largely in the background. They don't seek attention for themselves or even look for any kind of special recognition. But that opens them up, then, to be vilified and to be sometimes used as a political football, as I mentioned earlier. And, certainly, I think that that's just not right. And, I think, again, if you were to actually have a conversation with any member in this House, there's no question in my mind that they would praise their political staff at every opportunity when given the chance.

But, again, we do support transparency. And we would like to see the scope of this bill extended. Its limited scope, we think, is maybe unfortunate. But that doesn't mean that we, you know, again, on this side of the House, that we are in—we feel that this is an important bill to be discussing here this afternoon, Madam Speaker. And this gives us an opportunity to talk about transparency. And I do have a lot to say about some of the steps that we've taken here in Manitoba to address that and to make sure that the public is as informed as possible about the workings of government and to be transparent in everything that we do.

But it does speak to the point when we, you know, we're speaking to this bill, here. We're taking an afternoon, one—another afternoon to speak about

this when there are important issues, you know, that Manitobans are asking us to talk about.

And, again, I look to my colleagues here, the member for St. Johns talked about, you know, a living wage and talked about how important it was to have a living wage for her constituents, how that was something that they brought forward. The member for Point Douglas (Mr. Chief) talked about jobs and opportunities for young people and how important it was for them to feel a sense of pride in the place that they live and a sense of optimism and hope in the future. The member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew) is—talked many times in this House about justice for indigenous people and for moving us forward as a nation, as a province and addressing some historical injustices and also looking at opportunities into the future. Member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer) talked about his concern for the environment.

So these are the issues that Manitobans are coming to us talking about. They're saying, absolutely, let's be accountable, let's be open, let's be transparent in absolutely everything that we do. But when we have an opportunity, you know, and I think that people, when they send us here, they do expect a certain level of seriousness and a certain amount of accountability in terms of what we're talking about and how we're bringing their issues forward in this House. They expect us to be discussing those issues, and I think just by hearing just some of those stories, I think it gives you a snapshot of where—what folks would like to be talking about, some of the important issues that they'd like to be bringing forward.

And, of course, you know, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention members of the other side talking about the size of their fish and other things, which, you know, again, I mean, people send their legislators here to have this debate. But it just goes to show you where I think us, as legislators, the important issues that we actually think should be on the table and should be discussed.

But I did want to take an opportunity, Madam Speaker, to talk about the record of transparency and accountability here in this province and some of the steps that we've taken, because it's been an evolution, it's been an area that I think has been pushed forward with the last government, was moved forward. There's certainly always room to improve, but it's an area that I think has come leaps and bounds since the last—two decades ago. And there's been, certainly, movement here in Manitoba, as there's been elsewhere.

So things like The Elections Act, which was revamped, which was strengthened, things like the FIPPA legislation, which allowed for more government data and information to be available online, which, of course, is an emerging—was an emerging area a decade ago, and it was something that the boundaries were pushed, and folks just have an expectation now, as they should, that that information is available online.

* (16:50)

Even things like ministerial travel and expense reports, I know absolutely every one of us, as MLAs, with regard to our own expenses, that information is published online and it's open and transparent. It's available to absolutely anyone that would like to look at that. And I think that helps constituents and the public understand just where their money is going to and that we are, in fact, good stewards of that money in terms of our representation of them as MLAs.

We made sure that the public was free to access the information. We put information online because Manitobans—they don't have the ability to file FIPPA's. It's not something that the average Manitoban has access to. I know in terms of my own experience, I know that it's a—it's a process and it takes some, you know, understanding of what's available and how to ask for that information, so while the system has gotten better, I think—just the expectation that the average citizen would be able to navigate that is probably not realistic. So we give them that opportunity to search online as much as possible the information that they're looking for.

We also posted all government contracts online, again, where they can be viewed directly by the public, and it's actually right now the most transparent system of any province, the information that's posted online. So all government contracts, this is something that we had an opportunity to discuss in the Public Accounts committees, something that, as vice-chair, I was very proud that we were able to bring that before the committee, bring the department before the committee, get some answers, understand how we can better that system, and the Auditor General's Report was very clear, and I think the department's response to that was very clear, and, in fact, we now have a better system because of it, so I'm very proud of my work when I was the vice-chair of Public Accounts.

We also released key department statistics online like the EMS response times, the number of doctors,

nurses, nurse practitioners, graduation rates, funding to First Nations, CFS authorities, and others for front-line workers, and this is absolutely key, Madam Speaker. We know in the 1990s, when there were huge cuts in the health-care system and other government areas, that information was difficult to get. It was actually, you know, without the help of outside organization, without the help of labour, I don't think that information would have been—would have ever gotten out, and people maybe would have seen a decrease in service, but they wouldn't necessarily have understood the underlying causes of that, and now that information is available online and that certainly helps the public understand, you know, exactly what the government is doing in terms of its commitment to front-line workers.

As I mentioned, we made The Elections Act more powerful, so the previous government banned corporate and union donations, something that I have to admit, Madam Speaker, as one of the younger members of this Chamber, and I did have the opportunity to learn more about the political systems in other provinces, but, I mean, it just—it comes as an absolute no-brainer, I think, for most young people. They would understand that corporations shouldn't have a say in our politics and big money donors aren't the future, and when we—we only have to look down to the United States to see how that system can get completely out of control and you can have one or two or a handful of individuals with immense wealth and they can dictate and influence the elections in the United States—very scary stuff.

And when you actually—when you look across Canada, you know, it's—we're not—it's not—we're not immune to that in Canada, not to the same degree, of course, Madam Speaker, but other provinces haven't gone as far as we have in terms of capping donations, keeping corporate interests out, keeping labour out of the equation in terms of their institutional ability to donate and to fundraise and influence campaigns.

This is something that you only have to look to Saskatchewan where their laws are much looser than ours, but other provinces as well, and here in Manitoba I'm very proud to say that we—we did that, and I would imagine it would be very difficult in the going-forward for any government to change that, because I think most Manitobans, again, of my generation and younger, would just understand this to be a basic tenet of how we conduct ourselves in Canada and they certainly wouldn't want to see a situation like the United States coming here and

taking hold, so I think that that, hopefully, is off the table by having strengthened that.

We were also the first government—the previous government that is, was the first government in Canada to introduce legislation protecting whistle-blowers. And we created the lobbyist registry to keep lobbying in Manitoba open and transparent. And, again, something that I think most Manitobans would just understand as good practice, but we were, you know, on the forefront of doing that in Canada; elsewhere, this isn't the norm. So I'm very proud that we did move in that direction, and there's always work that can be done to make sure that that information is available and accessible to all.

We extended the freedom of information legislation to public bodies, so FIPPA now covers municipal governments as we know—school divisions, universities, health regions—and we shortened how long Cabinet documents are sealed. All steps I believe, Madam Speaker, that move us forward in terms of accountability and transparency, which most Manitobans, and indeed as I've said now multiple times, I think most members in this House would agree with. So this is an opportunity for us to talk about it, to put some words on the record, but we are, I think, all coming at least from the same place—maybe not landing exactly in the same place in terms of how to implement it, but certainly we are all in the same place in terms of believing that accountability and transparency is a hallmark of a good government.

But we take no lessons in transparency, Madam Speaker, from this government, because, you know, it misled Manitobans about the size of the deficit in order to try and settle a political debt. And this is a point that I think is so important to remember that when we're talking about accountability, ensuring that what a government presents to the public is true and is valid is so important. And then to have the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen), who I think has the biggest responsibility in terms of ensuring that, you know, any numbers that are presented to the public, are used in public documents, that they are verified, that they are correct—and we found very early on in this government's mandate that they felt that they could play fast and loose with those numbers and that they could use it in a political sense.

Now this is not new; this is old political hat. We've seen this in the federal scene for a very long

time. You know, but when you have a government that says to the Manitoba public: look, you don't really know us; you know, just trust us; elect us; we're going to be accountable to you; we're going to change how government is done. And the first act that they do is they come in, and they present numbers that don't add up—I think just—just—throws question into the entire system.

And maybe the minister was confused. Maybe he didn't know what he was presenting. Maybe he got a note from a political assistant that he just went ahead with and didn't fact check himself. He didn't spend the time to verify and to actually calculate the numbers and make sure that he was on solid fiscal ground, but instead he just came into this House, he went to the media, he was very proud of himself.

And it wasn't until, you know, a few members—I don't even know if it was members from our side. I think there were some members of the opposition that were scratching their heads and sort of doing the calculations, but I think it was the public that actually came forward and said, this just doesn't add up—it doesn't add up. And it was only when we said, well, okay, we think that maybe there's a political bent to this, there's a political angle that's being played out here and the numbers are being manipulated because of that, that the whole picture became very clear for most people. I think most Manitobans then understood that this was a political tool; it was used to settle that political debt.

You know, Madam Speaker, I understand I do have some time left here and I look forward to putting many more words on the record, but I think what I'd like to most say this afternoon is is that this is the kind of debate that I think most Manitobans would be surprised that we're undertaking today. They would probably say: So you all agree that accountability is important, all agree that transparency is important. What about the issues that matter to us? What about the issues that actually impact our lives? What about minimum wage? What about the environment? What about health care in our province? There are so many important issues—

Madam Speaker: Order. When this matter's again before the House, the honourable member will have seven minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 27, 2016

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are also available on the Internet at the following address:

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