

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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authority of
The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 26, 2012

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Yes, Mr. Speaker, on a matter of privilege.

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Morris, on a matter of privilege.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, as we know, a matter of privilege is a very serious matter, and I have carefully considered it before I bring—I thought to bring it before this House. A breach of privilege infringes upon our rights and our ability as members of this great House, as Her Majesty's Official Opposition, and as elected representatives of our constituencies and—to perform our duties and our functions.

There are two conditions that have to be met to satisfy a prima facie case of privilege. First, it has to be raised at the earliest opportunity, and secondly, is there sufficient evidence that the privileges of this House have been breached?

Mr. Speaker, after doing some investigation and confirming with our staff the facts in this case, I'm now satisfied that this is the first and appropriate opportunity to bring this matter before this House. And secondly, does this case breach our privileges as members? I will outline that I believe it does.

Mr. Speaker, last Thursday, an event occurred at this Legislature that resulted in the requirement for passes to the gallery. Members of our caucus had invited guests to the gallery and sent a staff person to the security desk to pick up 25 gallery passes; 25 passes were secured for members of the public, our

guests. Shortly after that, security called our caucus office and said they would have to get those passes back. I'm told by you, Mr. Speaker, that these passes are on a first-come, first-served basis. When the security staff were challenged on what the process for procuring passes to the gallery—when this process changed, their response was, I guess today.

The staff person, who was very apologetic, said that his instructions came from the head of security of this building. Mr. Speaker, we know that the head of security would not make this change in protocol without direction from someone higher up.

Mr. Speaker, this is an abuse of power from a political source. Either a senior bureaucrat or a minister told a staff person to get back passes for guests of the opposition so that they could be provided to guests of the government.

This puts staff in a position to have to do the government's bidding when, in fact, they are here for the security of all those in the building and those who visit this building, Mr. Speaker. It is not their job to decide the political affiliations of visitors and, based on that affiliation, be granted or denied access to the gallery.

Further, Mr. Speaker, on the same day, the committee rooms were used for overflow and audio was set up to accommodate guests of the government.

However, Mr. Speaker, I have a letter from you—and it was sent to all MLAs—dated March 23rd, which clearly states, and I quote: Please be advised that this session resuming on April 17th, 2012, it will not be possible to accept room bookings for either committee rooms 254 or committee room 255 for the period of April 17th, 2012, to June 14th, 2012. This is to accommodate the requirement for the Legislative Assembly for use of the committee rooms for consideration of Estimates in Committee of Supply and for standing committees considering legislation. End quote.

This is the standard practice, I believe, and yet on April 19th the committee room was used by prior arrangement for the guests of the government. This was clearly prearranged, yet no discussion took place with the opposition regarding our possible use of that committee room at the same time, Mr. Speaker. Our

guests were denied entry into the gallery and we were not offered the option of using the committee room. Clearly, both were reserved for NDP guests and not guests of the opposition.

This NDP government has politicized this building, which belongs to the people of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, and they have bullied the staff and demanded that they do their bidding.

We understand that in certain special circumstances these committee rooms may be used by non-political groups by agreement, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, how are we to do our jobs as members of this House and representatives of our constituencies when the government restricts our access to committee rooms and gallery and yet grants it to themselves? How are we to bring in our guests and seat them in the gallery when the government has directed staff to determine who can access based on political affiliation? Does that not impinge and infringe upon our rights as members, to be denied access for our guests as dictated by the government through their staff? This is in a shameful—a shameful abuse of power by this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne's* citation 24 'depines' parliamentary privilege as the sum of the peculiar rights by each House collectively and by members of this House individually without which they could not discharge their functions. The privileges of parliaments are rights which are absolutely necessary for the due execution of its powers.

Mr. Speaker, I believe our individual rights as members have been denied. As part of our function as members of this Assembly is to have ability to bring members of the public into the public gallery. In this regard, opposition MLAs were not given the same rights as government MLAs. Marleau and Montpetit in House of Commons practice and procedure, chapter 3, lists the individual privileges as members as, among other things, the freedom from obstruction, interference, intimidation and molestation.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, our individual privileges of freedom from obstruction and freedom from interference have been denied.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Fort Whyte, that this matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs for consideration and reported back to this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Before recognizing other members to speak to this matter of privilege, I would remind the House that contributions at this time by honourable members are to be limited to strictly relevant comments as to whether the alleged matter of privilege has been raised, first, at the earliest opportunity, and whether or not a prima facie case has been established by the honourable member for Morris.

* (13:40)

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): Well, I guess, you know, there are many opportunities for the Opposition House Leader (Mrs. Taillieu) to have raised her concerns with me privately before now, and we, perhaps, could have had a discussion, could have talked about what had happened and how it was handled. And I certainly will commit to her and other House leaders that if we want to, at some future time, sit down with you, Mr. Speaker—because I believe it is also your office that plays a role in some of these matters—I'd be very happy to sit down together and talk about what the procedure is in terms of passes and use of committee rooms, make sure we're all clear on the rules of that and we're all following those rules. I think that would be an appropriate way to resolve this issue.

I will say, in listening to the Opposition House Leader, that she really hasn't brought any evidence to the Chamber today. She's brought a lot of speculation. She's brought a lot of innuendo. She's brought a lot of conspiracies, but actually no evidence.

And I will say that what happened last Thursday was an astonishing display of democracy in action, Mr. Speaker, where we saw an unprecedented number of people come to this Chamber to listen to a debate on an issue that was clearly very important to them. And they came here to listen to a debate, not just to listen to members on this side of the House speak in that debate, but they also heard the expressions of debate of members on the opposite side of the House. They came to hear all of us debate a very important issue, and I continue to be astonished that there are people who are elected to represent the public in this House who believe that the public doesn't have a right to come down and hear what they're saying. I continue to be astonished at—by that.

I can speak directly to what was happening last Thursday. There was an unprecedented number of people here, certainly more people than I expected to

have here, and I think that the security that serves all of us in this building—and they serve all of us; they serve all of us without fear or favour—I think they did a tremendous job last Thursday keeping—in keeping everybody that came down here—allowing everybody that came down here a chance to listen to the debate, to participate as they could, and in allowing that to be done in a safe manner. I think they did a very good job, and I'm shocked, frankly, that the members opposite would suggest that they were doing anything less than their duty to uphold the safety of this building in doing that.

I can speak directly to the use of the committee rooms. There was no prearrangement of those rooms. It became clear when there was an unprecedented number of people here that the best way to deal with that was to allow people a chance, who couldn't get into the gallery, to listen to the debate. And, certainly, there was nobody standing at the doors of those committee rooms checking peoples' political affiliation. Anybody who was here who wanted the chance to listen to the debate could sit in those committee rooms and listen to those debates.

Access was granted to those rooms, as I believe has been the practice as long as there is an MLA attending, and the opposition had exactly the same opportunity to request the other committee room and to—which was vacant at the time, and to use it for their guests that were here.

So it is true that things were happening at a quick pace last Thursday, that we—there were more people here than I think anybody expected, and I think the officers of the Legislature and your office—and I thank them for their quick response to that—and I think that the security that was here did the best they could in that situation to maintain the safety and order of this building.

And I would extend, again, the offer to sit down with you, Mr. Speaker, and other House leaders and talk about how, in the future, we look at passes to the gallery and how, in the future, we use those committee rooms, because I, too, believe that those things should be made equally available to all political parties.

And I don't apologize for having people who want to come here and witness democracy. I think our job is actually to encourage that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, on the matter of privilege.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): On the same matter of privilege, Mr. Speaker.

Because this matter clearly affects all sides of the House and all caucuses, it is very important when we're talking about democracy and the democratic process that there be a level of fairness in the way things are handled. And the fact that the members, as the member of Morris has indicated—that the opposition were provided 25 gallery passes and then these were taken away is of a great, great concern.

There has to be a level of equity in which all caucuses are allowed to have people in the galleries. There has to be a level of equity in the way that this is handled. As the member from Morris has stated, the committee room which was used—there was never any communication with the Conservative caucus and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there was no prior communication with the Liberal caucus about setting this up in this way, and that the government, I believe, needs to be much fairer and open in dealing with all parties in making sure that things get done in a way that is fair and that it serves democracy.

Now, as the Speaker is very well aware, this matter of privilege overlaps slightly with a matter of privilege which is under advisement in the fact that messages were sent out to bring—inviting people in. Now, I'm limited in terms of being able to talk about it, but I do believe that this plays into this problem, Mr. Speaker, that if you have one side of the House inviting people in in this fashion it is a major problem and that there needs to be a level of fairness, which I hope you as Speaker will be able to achieve, which rises above what happened last Thursday. Because clearly there were some major problems with the way things were handled and I can vouch for those from our point of view, as well as the official opposition can vouch for the way that members were treated in the Conservative caucus.

I believe that, hopefully, out of this will come at least a much better way of moving forward than we have had in last week and that we can get some processes in place which are much fairer. Certainly, this needs to be looked at very carefully by yourself because there was a major problem there and it needs to be dealt with before this becomes even a worse problem. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: I thank all members for their advice on this matter of privilege. Matters of privilege, as

members will know, are very serious and I take them very seriously as your Speaker. I'm going to take this matter under advisement and bring back a ruling to the House.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 12—The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (Motor Vehicle Work and Repairs)

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), that Bill 12, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (Motor Vehicle Work and Repairs), now be read for a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Rondeau: This bill assists consumers by establishing the requirement for each repair shop to provide a written estimate prior to work beginning, getting authority prior to exceeding the estimate, establishing a warrantied period for the repairs, and other rules concerning communications between the consumer and the repair shop.

I'm pleased to recommend this to the House and I think it builds upon what the former minister of Consumer Affairs did protecting the consumers in this province.

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

Bill 14—The Protection for Persons in Care Amendment Act

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), that Bill 14, The Protection for Persons in Care Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection des personnes recevant des soins, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

* (13:50)

Ms. Oswald: This amendment will expand the adult abuse registry to cover hospitals and personal care homes, ensuring that future potential employers in those facilities have more information to better protect patients and residents.

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

Bill 202—The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): I move, seconded by the member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), that Bill 202, The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act, be introduced for the first time.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Rowat: This bill will expand access to ensure all parents are given the option of having their newborn screening—hearing tested before being discharged from the hospital. Manitoba does not have a universal newborn hearing screening program.

Newborn hearing screening is only conducted if a child shows risk factors or a parent, guardian, doctor requests this screening. The Health Minister has said the province-wide program is a goal, but no progress has been made. Approximately three in 1,000 newborns are born with educationally significant hearing loss. Without early detection, children are more likely to develop poor language and cognitive skills and do poorly in school.

In the on—universal newborn hearing screening program, all newborn parents are presented with the option to have their child screened, regardless of risk factor. The program screens and identifies children with hearing loss and begins the rehabilitation and intervention process earlier if hearing loss is detected. Thank you.

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

No further bills?

PETITIONS

Bipole III Routing

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Manitoba Hydro has been directed by this provincial government to construct its next high-voltage direct transmission line, Bipole III, down the west side of Manitoba.

This decision will cost Manitoba taxpayers at least \$1 billion more than an east-side route, which is 500 kilometres shorter and more reliable.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to build the Bipole III transmission line on the shorter, more reliable east side of Lake Winnipeg route, in order to save Manitobans from a billion-dollar boondoggle.

And this petition is signed by J. Bereza, B. Budz, D. Burch and many, many more fine Manitobans.

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

Newborn Universal Hearing Screening Program

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

More than three in 1,000 newborns are born with educationally significant hearing loss, but Manitoba's current hearing screening program does not allow for every child to be screened.

Without early detection, children are more likely to develop poor speech and language skills and also encounter social and emotional difficulties, which leads to poor academic performance.

Early diagnosis of hearing loss in newborns can make a considerable difference in a child's development because newborns can be provided with effective programs and support that foster development success.

While most other development-developed countries and many Canadian provinces have a newborn hearing screening program, Manitoba is lagging behind. There are only a handful of screening programs in the province while all other newborns can only be tested if they have a risk factor of hearing loss or if parents specifically request a test.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the minister of Healthy living, Youth and Seniors to consider implementing a universal hearing screening program accessible to parents of all newborns in Manitoba.

This petition is signed by R. Pankratz, N. Waldner, J. Wollman and so many, many other Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

Cellular Phone Service in Southeastern Manitoba

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

During early October 2011, parts of southeastern Manitoba were hard hit by wildfires. Thanks to the swift action of provincial and municipal officials, including 27 fire departments and countless volunteers, no lives were lost and property damage was limited.

However, the fight against the wildfires reinforced the shortcomings with the communications system in the region, specifically the gaps in cellular phone service.

These gaps were—made it difficult to co-ordinate firefighting efforts and to notify people that they had to be evacuated. The situation also would have made it difficult for people to call for immediate medical assistance if it had been required.

Local governments, businesses, industries and area residents have for years sought a solution to this very serious communications challenge.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the appropriate provincial government departments to consider working with all stakeholders to develop a strategy to swiftly address the serious challenges posed by limited cellular phone service in southeastern Manitoba in order to ensure that the people and property can be better protected in the future.

And this petition is signed by A. Jansen, P. Fuchs, and Y. Chubaty and many, many more fine Manitobans.

PTH 16 and PTH 5 North—Traffic Signals

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

The junction of PTH 16 and PTH 5 north is an increasingly busy intersection which is used by motorists and pedestrians alike.

The Town of Neepawa has raised concerns with the Highway Traffic Board about safety levels at this intersection.

The Town of Neepawa has also passed a resolution requesting municipal infrastructure and transportation install traffic lights at this intersection in order to increase safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to consider making the installation of traffic lights at the intersection of PTH 16 and PTH 5 north a priority project in order to help protect the safety of the motorists and pedestrians who use it.

This petition is signed by J. Harding, K. Gillies, C. Hentin and many, many other fine Manitobans.

PR 227 Bridge

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

And the background for the petition is as follows:

The bridge on Provincial Road 227 was used by both heavy truck traffic and by agricultural producers to travel back and forth to their fields.

During the flood of 2011, the heavy use of the Portage Diversion resulted in damage to this bridge.

Due to irreparable damages to the structure, it was removed in February of 2012, leading to detours and associated challenges.

Because there is no natural flow in the Portage Diversion, water is only present when the provincial government opens the Portage Diversion gates.

The provincial government has not set a timeline for the bridge's replacement, nor has it indicated plans to establish a temporary bridge.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure and Transport to recognize the safety concerns and the negative socio-economic impact caused by the loss of the bridge, and to consider establishing low-level crossings for farm equipment to cross the Portage Diversion a half mile north of Provincial Road 227.

Signed by T. Peters, A. Peters, M. Peters and many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: No further petitions?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Erin Selby (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the Manitoba Adult Literacy Strategy and Adult Learning Centres in Manitoba 2010-2011 Annual Report. Thank you.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table the Manitoba Civil Service Commission, Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, 2012-2013 Departmental Expenditure Estimates.

I'm also pleased, Mr. Speaker, to table the Manitoba Enabling Appropriations and Other Appropriations, Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, 2012-2013 Departmental Expenditure Estimates.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to table the Manitoba Employee Pensions and Other Costs, Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, 2012-2013 Departmental Expenditure Estimates.

And last but not least, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the Manitoba Finance, Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, 2012-2013 Departmental Expenditure and Estimates.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): I'd like to table the supplementary information for Estimates for the department.

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I'm pleased to table the following report: Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, 2012-2013.

* (14:00)

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I have a number of guests to introduce to members of the Assembly.

First, we have with us this afternoon sitting in the public gallery Dr. Andrea Richardson-Lipton-Lipon, who is in the gallery and is the member-guest of the member for Riding Mountain (Mrs. Rowat). On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here this afternoon.

And we also have in the public gallery a group of women from the Soroptimist International of

Winnipeg, and they are the guests of the honourable member for St. James (Ms. Crothers). And on behalf of all members, we welcome you here this afternoon.

And we have also seated in the public gallery from Rosburn Collegiate five students under the direction of Mr. Bill Legge. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Riding Mountain.

And also seated in the public gallery, we have from École Van Walleghem School 81 grade 4 students under the direction of Ms. Amelie Gaultier, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Fort Whyte (Mr. McFadyen).

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Budget

Government Record on Election Promises

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): I would like to also welcome the students, teachers and parents from Van Walleghem School in Fort Whyte and just point out to the government that they are still awaiting that high school announcement.

Mr. Speaker, in yet another incredible display of hypocrisy, today this government claims to be concerned about the practices of auto mechanics. The news release that they just put out claims to crack down on, and I quote, hidden charges, incomplete information, and fraudulent practices.

Mr. Speaker, it's all well and good, but it begs the question: In light of last week's budget, when is the Premier going to crack down on his own government's hidden charges, incomplete information, and dodgy practices?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): And I must say that the announcement today will provide a good deal of protection for Manitobans now. The estimates they get will be within 10 per cent of what is offered to them. They will provide their consent before a repair is made. They will get a warranty on that repair, and they will also have information as to what their rights are. And these consumer protection measures are in place in other provinces in Canada, such as Québec and Alberta and Ontario, and we're glad Manitoba is finally catching up and doing these things in Manitoba.

The CAA in Manitoba has since 1975 provided endorsements to garages that follow these practices, and we're now pleased that all garages in Manitoba will follow these practices.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, after 12 years, their concern about the practices of auto mechanics, that's all well and good. The bill purports to deal with hidden charges, incomplete information, and fraudulent practices.

Well, during the election campaign, this Premier said he'd balance the budget with no tax increases. He went on to say that that was his commitment to Manitobans. Seven months later, after getting the mandate that he asked for, he turns around and he includes within the budget nine tax increases and a variety of other hidden charges and increased taxes on Manitobans.

So the question is this, Mr. Speaker: If they're going to bring in a bill to crack down on auto mechanics, why not bring a bill to crack down on his own government?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I actually appreciate the question from the member opposite, because he knows full well that Manitoba's sales tax is the second lowest in the country.

He knows full well that in this budget every Manitoban's personal exemption will be lifted by \$250 before they have to pay any taxes. He knows full well that every dependant in a family now will have their personal exemption lifted by \$250 before they pay taxes. And he knows full well that every spouse in Manitoba will have their exemption lifted by \$250 before they pay taxes.

And he also knows that the education property tax credit for seniors has been raised to \$1,025, an improvement of over \$225 in the last two years. And there is other tax reductions and measures that are targeted in this budget that I'll be happy to identify for him in the next question.

Mr. McFadyen: The reality is that seven months after promising no tax increases, last week the Premier bought-brought in a budget that contains nine tax increases, including an increase on gasoline, which will punish, disproportionately, rural Manitobans, northern Manitobans and families here in the city of Winnipeg.

So the budget contains nine tax increases. It also includes increased charges on birth, marriage, and death certificates. So, Mr. Speaker, they may think

it's a good budget, and maybe there are some who think it's a good budget unless, of course, you're born, get married, or die in the province of Manitoba, in which case it's a step backward.

So I want to ask the Premier: He's so concerned about the practices of others in the province who fail to disclose hidden charges; when's he going to show the same concern about the dodgy practices of his own government?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that there's more people living in Manitoba than ever in the history of the province. And I'm more—I'm pleased there's more people getting married, having families in Manitoba, putting down their roots in Manitoba and wanting to be in Manitoba, from 137 countries around the world, because they know Manitoba is a place where democracy flourishes, where you have a good cost of living, where you can have a respect for diversity and human rights, where you have good quality health care and education.

It is a great place to leave—live, and I'm pleased that there's more people living here than ever in the history of the province.

Budget Dividend Tax Credit Decrease

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Seniors, many of whom are on fixed incomes in Manitoba, purchase dividend-yielding stocks because they provide a steady source of income for these Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP government tax grab on dividends is an extra tax on seniors. Why did the NDP government break its promise to seniors?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Well, we didn't, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has pointed out earlier in this question period, as he pointed out in question periods last week, as we've pointed out over and over and over again for members opposite, we actually increased tax benefits for seniors in this budget. We did that very clearly; that was a commitment that we made. We have further commitments that we will be following up on at—in future dates. But, clearly, seniors did good by this budget.

Mr. Speaker, the—as well, when we make it very clear that we're going to protect health benefits and health care in Manitoba, that's also a clear benefit for seniors.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Speaker, by lowering the dividend tax credit from 11 to 8 per cent, this

government has effectively increased the tax on dividend income by 4 per cent. Seniors, many of whom own these dividend-yielding stocks, rely on them for their steady source of income.

But to add salt to the wound, the NDP government is making this retroactive back to January 1st of this year. It's bad enough that they broke their promise to seniors, but now they're doing it retroactively.

Why did they break their promise to seniors?

Mr. Struthers: The member opposite just indicated that January 1st—January 1st, Mr. Speaker, was also the same date that the basic personal tax exemption was increased by this government. That's a benefit for seniors. That's a benefit for low-income Manitobans. It's a benefit for people who pay taxes in this province.

That's a commitment that we made; that's a commitment we followed through on. I hope that members opposite take that into consideration before they vote on this budget tomorrow.

Mrs. Stefanson: It's clear that the NDP government has broken its promise, and now seniors are among the many Manitobans who are being forced to pay for it, Mr. Speaker. It's bad enough that they broke their promise to seniors by raising their 'tacket'—taxes, but it's deplorable that they're doing it retroactively.

Will the Minister of Finance apologize to seniors for breaking their promise? And while he's at it, will he make that promise retroactive, Mr. Speaker?

* (14:10)

Mr. Struthers: What we're doing retroactively is bumping up the basic personal exemption that seniors will benefit from; they'll benefit to the tune of \$250.

Mr. Speaker, that's a continuation of the kind of common sense approach—that's the kind of approach that we've had in place for 12 years to benefit seniors, and we've continued that in Budget '12. That's a real benefit to seniors, and it became effective on January 1st of this past year.

Provincial Sales Tax Municipal Insurance

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, in 2002, the Premier and his NDP government added PST to a number of services local governments require. In 2004, the NDP expanded that list and charged

municipalities more provincial sales tax. In 2012, the new Minister of Finance said, we need more yet, and added PST to municipal insurance.

Why is this NDP government adding major taxes to another level of tax-driven government?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): There is no government, no provincial government in this nation that has a more constructive commitment to municipalities in this province than this government right here in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, we told municipalities that we would provide the equivalency of 1 per cent in our support. Budget 2012 comes through with that. Not only that, Budget 2012 bumps up that commitment that we made so that municipalities have even more funds available, \$31 million more, to put into infrastructure, to rebuild roads and rebuild bridges in this province.

We've been clear with municipalities, we've worked with municipalities, and we continue to support municipalities.

Mr. Briese: A number of years ago, the federal government got the message and removed goods and services tax from services local governments need.

The NDP government has repeatedly said they understand the needs of municipalities. They say they want to work with local governments, and then, in their fiscal desperation, they add provincial sales tax to municipal insurance premiums. This is a tax on tax, and it comes at a huge cost to local governments.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier and his government: Why are you breaking your promises and raising taxes on the backs of local government?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, over a hundred million for administration, the equivalent of 1 per cent on the sales tax made available to municipalities, \$262 million, an additional \$31 million the year.

The member will remember when we took over the responsibility for social assistance from the municipalities in exchange for a commitment from municipalities to hire people off social assistance for jobs.

We've done a tremendous number of things to increase the support for municipalities, and I can tell you every municipality outside of Manitoba wishes they had the support from their provincial

government that municipalities have from our provincial government.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Agassiz, on final supplementary.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, on December 21st, the Premier said, in commenting on federal health transfers, well, I think there's a big concern just about the way it has been done, just dropped on people without any consultation or discussion.

Well, that's exactly what's happened to municipalities here.

The addition of PST to municipal insurance premiums is a massive tax grab by this desperate NDP government. Local governments will either have to cut services or increase property taxes to cover these costs. This will hurt businesses, families and seniors all across the province.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier made a promise not to raise taxes. Why has he broken that promise to municipalities?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. At that meeting before Christmas, when the federal minister just plunked on the table exactly what was going to happen with federal transfers in every province of this country, there wasn't one lick of consultation.

On the other hand, this government, time and time again, has met with the AMM, met with municipalities, met with mayors and reeves, and we've talked about the kind of support that we are committed to. And time and time again, we followed through on those commitments, and time and time again, municipalities have indicated that they are appreciative of that kind of support.

And we will continue to work with them to make sure that we meet the needs of Manitobans, that we build those—rebuild those bridges, we rebuild those roads, we recover from the flood and we continue to invest in our infrastructure because it's good for our economy.

Provincial Sales Tax Property Insurance

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): Mr. Speaker, in last week's budget, the NDP broke its promise to Manitobans not to raise taxes. One of their tax grabs is adding PST to insurance premiums, which will cost consumers more than \$48 million. The new tax

comes into effect from July 1st and applies to both new and existing policies.

Mr. Speaker, is the Minister of Finance so desperate to find new streams of revenue that he's making Manitobans pay tax on policies that they thought they had already paid in full?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, we're working very hard with the insurance associations to make sure that the revenue items that we're dealing with are implemented in a workable fashion and that they're doable and that they're fair. I've met with the insurance associations in this regard. I think I had some very good meetings. They gave us very good advice on how to move forward.

They understand, Mr. Speaker, they understand the importance of coming back into balance in the 2014 budget year. They are not prepared to throw health and education and other services under the bus, as members opposite seem to be. I appreciate working with the insurance associations to make sure that this is workable.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Speaker, consumers who thought they had already paid their annual insurance premiums in full are going to be shocked to have the taxman knocking on their door for another 7 per cent. They're going to be mad that they have to pay for the Premier's broken promise.

Why is this government so determined to apply this tax to existing policies? Will the Minister of Finance reverse that decision?

Mr. Struthers: Our commitments have been very clear. We're going to come back into balance in 2014. We're going to protect services that matter most to Manitobans in terms of health care and education. We're going to—and family services. We're going to continue to invest in infrastructure, the roads and bridges that this province needs.

And our commitment to the insurance association is that we'll work together with them to make sure that we put forward a workable, a doable framework that will meet their needs as well. I was very proud to meet with them just this morning, and we'll continue to have conversations with them about this issue.

Mr. Smook: The Premier (Mr. Selinger) will be speaking to insurance brokers tonight at the Insurance Brokers Association of Manitoba dinner. The broken promises of this government will require

them to spend countless hours and thousands of dollars to rebill customers for insurance product they have already bought and paid in full. Insurance brokers should not be forced to help clean up the financial mess this government has created.

Can IBAM members expect this Premier to reverse his decision to charge PST on insurance tonight?

Mr. Struthers: The Premier and the representatives from the insurance association are going to talk about what a great place Manitoba is to invest. They're going to talk about steady growth. They're going to talk about investments in Manitoba, investments in infrastructure, investments in health care and education. Mr. Speaker, they're going to talk about our steady levels of employment in Manitoba. They're going to talk about the steady levels of private investment in our province. And they're going to talk about how important the insurance industry and financial services sector is to our overall economy.

They'll also probably talk about our commitment to work with them to make sure we have a doable framework in place for the issue that the member opposite brings up here.

*(14:20)

NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority Minister's Knowledge of Mismanagement

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): A NOR-MAN RHA audit shows a glaring example of government failure to properly provide oversight in health-care administrative spending.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to tell us: Where was her government's oversight that would have prevented this financial mismanagement in the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I thank the member for the question.

Indeed, all regional health authorities are required to—are required to have audited financial statements. We've introduced legislation in the last couple of years to, indeed, enhance 'transparency'—transparency and accountability. We've introduced legislation, Mr. Speaker, just last week, to ensure that we're providing even more oversight and information to the public concerning CEO salaries, expenditures and use of finances.

These, indeed, were some of the issues that came to bear in the review of the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority. We're taking steps to correct those, Mr. Speaker.

We hope that they will support that legislation.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. Driedger: This audit that was done on the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority showed that this minister did not have her eye on the ball.

There was abuse of taxpayers' money by senior management in the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority. They charged for upscale restaurant dining, including alcohol, 25 per cent tips for meals, meal expenses double the per diem, a double-billing for hotel rooms, double-billing for meals, nepotism. Mr. Speaker, the audit pointed out poor accounting policies.

So where was the minister's oversight to prevent this abuse of taxpayers' money? She's been in there for a number of years. Where was the oversight?

Ms. Oswald: I would assure the member that, of course, all regional health authorities, as I said before, are required to have audited financial statements. We have, over the last few years, tightened the legislation and the requirements concerning CEO expenses, the posting of salaries. Legislation we've just introduced is going to further enhance that.

I certainly would say to the member that when allegations were brought forward by individuals, who, by the way, were protected under whistle-blower legislation brought in by this government, those allegations were investigated immediately. We received recommendations back concerning that review, all of which we have accepted.

There is much work going on now to work in the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority. The individual in question is no longer in the regional health authority's employ, and we're going to continue to improve our oversight.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. Driedger: This audit was done because of whistle-blowers coming forward, not because of government oversight over what happened.

Mr. Speaker, the NOR-MAN Regional Health Authority ran successive deficits totalling \$14 million. Administrative costs there have soared

from \$1 million to \$6 million a year. Red flags were everywhere.

What wasn't in place was government oversight. They've had 12 years to put government oversight in place over RHA administrative spending.

Where was that oversight to protect taxpayers' money and ensure that that money is going to patient care, not for a whole bunch of special meals and nice trips for administrators and bureaucrats in RHAs?

Ms. Oswald: I would say three things in response to the member.

First of all, she's well aware, because I've said it, I'm sure, enough times now, that, indeed, the Canadian Institute for Health Information shows that Manitoba's hospital administrative spending 10 years ago or more was among the highest in the country; today it's among the lowest in the country.

Second, Mr. Speaker, when allegations were brought forward concerning spending by the CEO in the regional health authority, in addition to some other things, we immediately sent in a review team to look at whatever the audited financial statements did not catch. And we were able to do that because the individuals that came forward with allegations were protected under whistle-blower legislation that this government brought in, the strongest in the nation, that, incidentally, didn't exist when they were in government.

And, thirdly, we've introduced even stronger legislation, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Flooding (Lake Manitoba) Public Consultations on Regulatory Range

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): On February the 8th, the government announced its flood review will examine the most acceptable and practical range of regulation within the levels of Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin might be controlled. Land use policies and zoning criteria were also supposed to be examined and public inputs sought.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister explain why letters have already been sent to rural municipalities around the lake—around Lake Manitoba instructing them that the 2011 man-made flood event is now the standard which will be used on Lake Manitoba? Why is the work of Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin regulatory review operating advisory committee being pre-empted?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is quite correct. We have appointed two independent bodies that will look at the two dimensions of flood follow-up. One, of course, is in terms of overall flood mitigation, but the other, as the member has quite correctly pointed to, is in regards to the regulation of Lake Manitoba.

I do want to indicate that there was a report that was received in 2003 which established the current regulatory range. Obviously, until there is this review, that regulatory range remains in place.

Last year was a certainly historic flood. The normal policy in terms of rebuilding throughout the province is to take the flood of record. That's what was done in the Red River Valley after 1997. I do want to indicate, though, that that report—we're expecting meetings throughout the province, we're expecting a report later in this year, and it may indeed establish a different regulatory range. There may be changes in terms of flood management and mitigation, but the letter went out just—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order.

Mr. Wishart: February the 8th, the government promised public input into the future regulation of Lake Manitoba, Lake St. Martin and into land use policies and zoning criteria. Scarcely six weeks later, on March 22nd, the government told local governments that flood protection standard on Lake Manitoba would now be the 2011 man-made flood.

Surely this government must recognize the uncertainty that this is creating for local governments and property owners trying to rebuild around the lake. On one hand, they had been promised consultations, and the other, they had been told it's already been made.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Is his plan to stop all rebuilding and redevelopment around the lake?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I think the only uncertainty we'd be dealing with would be if we, first of all, didn't do the review, and we are doing the review; second of all, if we did not have public consultation for that review, and we will have public consultation with that review; third of all, if we didn't do the technical work that needs to be done for—as a background of that work, which we are doing. And I would add that the normal policy is the flood of record.

It was similar to what we did in the Red River Valley, but obviously if there are changes in terms of flood management or mitigation or the regulation of the lake that comes through this report, which is expected later on this year, that may change the situation.

But we weren't going to say to Manitobans who wanted to rebuild this year that there would be no standard, because I believe that's really implicit in the member's question. What we said is, this has been the standard practice, but we are reviewing all issues related to the flood, including the regulation. It may change later in the year, Mr. Speaker, but that is on the basis of a review which will have full participation from members of the public and that, I think, is giving people who are rebuilding the kind of information they need.

We are going to rebuild, Mr. Speaker, in this province—historic flood—and we will make sure that everyone is consulted, including and especially people in and around Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, we fully recognize the need to protect people and property, and those affected by the man-made flood need realistic, reasonable and responsible solutions when it comes to damaged properties and future development.

In February, the NDP promised the stakeholders they would have input on key issues like lake levels, land use policies and zoning, yet it seems we have another broken promise. It's tough pill for the victims of the man-made flood to swallow.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister again: Why is the work of the flood review committee seemingly being pre-empted? Will he assure the flood victims a full voice in this process, or is this just a broken promise?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, last year the clear message from people around Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin is not to forget either one of those lakes.

Not only did we not forget, we mobilized an historic effort. We built a channel. We targeted November 1st; we opened it November 1st. And because of that, we did what people said last year, which is to bring down the lake level. If you combine the natural decrease, we're four feet lower than this year. We didn't forget last year.

* (14:30)

This year, we didn't forget either, because the other thing that people said last year, both around Lake St. Martin and Lake Manitoba—notwithstanding the work we did on the outlet—they said, we want a review of the regulatory range of Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin.

That's why we appointed that body in February. It will consult with Manitobans and there will be a review. Mr. Speaker, we're—

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

Flooding (Lake Manitoba) Treatment of Compensation Claimants

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, as is well known, the handling of compensation claims for people who are flood victims around Lake Manitoba has been very delayed and has been, in fact, a nightmare for so many people who were so badly affected as a result of the flood last year and continue to be badly affected.

Jennifer Hebert, one of many who live on twin beach who have lost or losing their homes, put it bluntly when she referred to the uncaring attitude, the inaction, the endless delays, the verifications, the interrogation, the overall abuse—yes, abuse—by the Premier's government.

I asked the Premier: Why has he run the flood assistance to victims in such an uncaring and even abusive manner?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I, too, heard the story of the member of the—of—Manitoban that the member mentioned in his statement today.

And in cases like that, there obviously is a review that is made of it, and that person needs to know, that individual needs to know there's a independent appeal mechanism. If they feel in any way that they've been mistreated or their claim has been mishandled, including delays, they have the right to go to the appeal commissioner, a person well respected around Manitoba. They have the right to go to a well-respected individual around Manitoba with an appeal, and that appeal person will act without fear or favour to consider their specific needs and decide whether they have been in any way mistreated.

So, I appreciate the member bringing the question forward, and that's exactly why we put an appeal commissioner in place.

Mr. Gerrard: This woman is in dire financial straits; she can't just wait and wait for appeals.

You know, one of the things which was unbelievable to me—Jennifer Hebert reports that she wasn't even allowed to record or videotape the interviews that she had with government officials so that she could remember what they said afterwards.

Is the Premier trying to cover up his own incompetence in that he doesn't allow people to record or videotape their interaction with people who are supposed to be assisting them in dealing with the outcome of the flood? Such intimidation tactics have no place in a modern democracy.

I ask the Premier to act immediately to order the people representing him in the efforts to help people affected by the flood will allow such interviews in the future to be recorded or videotaped.

Mr. Selinger: Again, I thank the member for the question.

If that individual feels that the person that was handling her compensation claim was in any way inappropriate in their behaviour, they have an appeal commission they can go to.

They also have the Ombudsman that they could go to in Manitoba, a long-standing, independent officer of the Legislature. And the Ombudsman's office would look into a situation like this and they would report to the Legislature, not to the government, on what appropriate measures should be taken.

We've always followed the advice of the auditor. We will also respect the role of the appeal commissioner, and the question of whether or not recording should go on will be one that will be reviewed.

But I can tell you this: If this person feels in any way that they've been mistreated, they have at least two options, on the compensation amount and on the treatment, through the ombudsperson's office.

Mr. Gerrard: The option that the Premier's offering is just more delays and delays instead of answers.

You know, recording or videotaping is important so that people can rerun the videotape to help them remember what was said. They're under stress. It's also important as a way of decreasing the extent to which people are receiving very different messages from two different representatives of government, as has been happening. Refusing to allow such

videotaping tells me that the government has something to hide, to be afraid of.

Mr. Speaker, I'm standing up for Manitobans. Will the Premier act swiftly to end the intimidation? To ensure that all such interaction with government representatives can be videotaped and recorded so that when it goes to appeal, they have something to show?

Mr. Selinger: I appreciate the fact that the member from River Heights acknowledges there is an appeal mechanism in his last question.

If the Ombudsman's office is approached, they will act very promptly. They are an independent member of the Legislature. If the government stepped in in the way the member asked, he would say that we're trying to cover something up. I believe the ombudsperson's office acts independently, reports to the Legislature. We've given them additional funding, strengthened their legislation. That office is the appropriate place to go if they believe there's any administrative malpractice in the province of Manitoba, and we always are very respectful of any recommendation made by the ombudsperson's office.

And if the member wants, we can work with him to ensure that that person gets direct contact with the Ombudsman's office today, Mr. Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Buy Manitoba Program Government Initiative

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Good to know my fan club is still here and intact.

Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba economy is understandably the envy of the rest of the country and much of the world for low unemployment rates and record economic growth, and the rural economy, the agricultural economy's been a big part of that. Even in my own urban constituency, there's a growing interest from consumers wanting to connect with the producers making the food that all of us enjoy on our table every morning.

Members opposite would have us hack and slash and make vicious cuts so we never did anything for anybody ever again.

I'm wondering if our hard-working Agriculture Minister might have some good news for us on how the rural economy and urban consumers are working together on local food.

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I would like to thank the MLA for Wolseley.

It's a great day today when we talk about the privilege of attending an unveiling of the new buying Manitoba program. We had the accompaniment of the First Minister and the honourable member from Rossmere to be in attendance today as we [*inaudible*] we purchase local-produced products today. It is a great economic benefit to the province of Manitoba, and we have partnerships developed with Manitoba Safeway, and we also have Manitoba food processors that are involved in it.

So, to promote and purchase consumption of foods grown locally to the betterment of Manitoba's economy, and I'm very proud, as Agriculture Minister, to be involved in promoting this for our farmers and the agricultural producers of Manitoba. Thank you so much.

Clean Environment Commission Bipole III Hearings

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, Manitoba Hydro filed its environmental impact study for what's become known as Bipole III in December of 2011. The deadline to become an applicant or a participant in the Clean Environment Commission hearings was April 16, 2012. Participant submissions take a great deal of time to prepare and they need to know when they will be presenting.

Can the minister tell us when the participants will be notified if they have been selected and how much time they will have to prepare their submissions?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we're well positioned in Manitoba with a very strong and independent Clean Environment Commission. They have their processes that are well established, and I think it's incumbent on all of us to make sure that those processes unfold, that we make sure that there is a due diligence applied to the application and that there be full public participation.

So I've been assured that all of the checks and balances and the requirements have been well thought through and will be applied in this situation.

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Speaker, the EIS that was filed in December keeps changing in the online version.

How are the participants expected to create a presentation when the information provided by

Hydro keeps changing? How do we know what is the correct information?

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the member has concerns, like any other member of the public, he can express those to the Clean Environment Commission, and we can certainly take his views today into consideration and pass those along to the commission. That's the appropriate process.

I think when we look at very important investments in the future of Manitoba, as we are with this application, that we do things according to the rules, and that's what we're going to do, Mr. Speaker, and make sure that the Clean Environment Commission is allowed to perform its obligations under the statutes that this pass—that have passed through this House.

Manitoba Hydro—Bipole III Project Status

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, Manitobans would like to know from the minister: Has any construction started for the Bipole III line or have any contracts been issued, signed—or signed for Bipole III, even though the CEC hearings have not started yet and there's been no project approval?

* (14:40)

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Mr. Speaker, the member will know, because he was present at the committee hearings two weeks ago into Manitoba Hydro. In fact, that question was asked by the member, or, I think, his colleague for Fort Whyte.

And the president of Manitoba Hydro had indicated that, because of the nature of the significance of this investment to the people of Manitoba—perhaps one of the most important projects in the history of Manitoba, development of \$18 million of investment in the north, the employment of people in the north of Manitoba, the requirement for the transmission of green power and the security for that, \$21 million in export contracts, the fact that this is a project that will benefit all Manitobans, will be our oil into the future, Mr. Speaker—that some investments had been provided for by Manitoba Hydro.

And in fact, that is in *Hansard* and available to the member any time, as was answered by the president of Hydro at the committee hearings where the member was present.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Flooding (Lake Manitoba) Financial Assistance for Dairy Producer

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, there are a number of infrastructure deficits in southwest Manitoba as a result of the 2011 flood.

But to—but last week, I asked the Minister of Agriculture about Fred Neil, a dairy farmer from Hartney, Manitoba, who was forced to evacuate his 230 head dairy cows and his family in the—because of the Souris River flood of 2011, Mr. Speaker. As well, his corn planting equipment, which was swamped by the waters while he saved his cattle, will be needed in the next few weeks to plant corn for feed for his cattle for the coming winter and the year of 2013.

Mr. Speaker, estimates of the repairs asked for by the department, and supplied, are in the neighbourhood of thousands and thousands of dollars.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Agriculture indicate when he will receive the funds to repair his equipment so that he can get to the field in the next week or 10 days?

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): We're quite familiar with the individual that has been brought to our attention. At this point in time, our staff is readily reviewing the comments that has been brought forward to my attention.

I want to assure you that we take this case very seriously and we will do process. We will attend to the situation identified, and I would gladly meet with the candidate if we have to and have a heart-to-heart discussion. Thank you for [*inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Time for oral questions has expired.

Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Speaker: I have a ruling for the House. Order, please.

During oral questions on Thursday, April 19, 2012, the Official Opposition House Leader (Mrs. Taillieu) raised a matter of privilege regarding the action of a government assistant deputy minister issuing invitations to civil servants and their clientele to attend specific debate to take place in the Legislature. The Official Opposition House Leader contended this was politicization and of—and

potential intimidation of staff. She expressed a view that these actions impeded the ability of members to do their jobs because they cannot rely on the impartiality of the civil service. At the conclusion of her remarks, she moved, in quotations, that this House find the government in contempt for its—this blatant use of government staff. End of quotations. The honourable Government House Leader (Ms. Howard) and the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) also offered advice to the Chair. I took this matter under advisement in order to consult with the procedural authorities.

There are two conditions that must be satisfied in order for the matter of—raised to be ruled in order as a prima facie case of privilege. First, was the issue raised at the earliest opportunity? And second, has sufficient evidence been provided to demonstrate that the privileges of the House have been breached in order to warrant putting the matter to the House?

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader (Mrs. Taillieu) asserted that she was raising the issue at the earliest available opportunity, and I accept the word of the honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

On the second issue, whether there is—sufficient evidence has been provided, there are a number of considerations that must be taken into account. First and foremost, I would like the House to be aware that when the Speaker is dealing with privilege, he or she is only dealing with the procedural aspects of the situations raised. As noted by Manitoba Speaker Fox in a ruling on privilege in 1972, the Speaker deals only with the technical and procedural aspects of the matter and not, in any way, with the merits of the situation or the allegations. Therefore, when a Speaker makes a ruling indicating that there is or is not a prima facie case of privilege, the Speaker is neither condemning nor condoning any actions taken.

Turning to the substance of the alleged matter of privilege before us, in raising the matter, the honourable House Leader of the Official Opposition noted that in *Beauchesne*, citation 24 defines parliamentary privilege as the sum of the peculiar rights by each House collectively, and by members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions and are rights which are absolutely necessary for the due execution of its powers. She also noted that Marleau and Montpetit, in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, list the individual privilege of members as,

among other things, the freedom from obstruction, interference, intimidation and molestation.

Both of those citations are absolutely correct. Parliamentary privilege is the sum of these peculiar rights by each House collectively, and by each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions, and which are necessary for the due execution of its powers. Similarly, the list of individual privileges does not include the freedom from obstruction—the—pardon me. Similarly, the list of individual privileges does include the freedom from obstruction, interference, intimidation and molestation. However, when dealing with issues of prima facie case, it is vitally important to demonstrate how either the privileges of members individually, or of the House as a collective, have been breached in actuality.

To clarify for the House, O'Brien and Bosc, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, advises on pages 60 and 61 that the rights and privileges and immunities of individual members of the House may be categorized as follows: freedom of speech; freedom from arrest in civil actions; exemption from jury duty; exemption from being subpoenaed to attend court as a witness; freedom from obstruction, interference, intimidation and molestation. The rights and powers of the House as—collectively may be categorized as follows: the regulation of its own internal affairs; the authority to maintain the attendance and service of its members; the power to discipline; the right to institute inquiries and to call witnesses and demand papers; the right to administer oaths to witnesses appearing before it; and the right to publish papers without recourse to the courts relating to the content. Therefore, in order to rule that a prima facie case of privilege has been established, it must be demonstrated that any of these privileges has been breached.

Now that the definition of parliamentary privilege has been clarified, let us look at the substance of the issue raised.

It was contended that some of the government staff who received the communication about attendance to observe the proceedings of the Legislature felt intimidated. This could be the case. However, it must be noted that government staff are not protected by parliamentary privilege and cannot claim the protections of parliamentary privilege. Only MLAs are protected by parliamentary privilege. As identified by Joseph Maingot on page 100 of *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, the second

edition, in order for non-elected persons to lay claim—to claim the parliamentary privilege protection, they must be taking part in a parliamentary proceeding, such as a witness before committees or counsel who speak on behalf of petitioners for private legislation. I would note for the House that observing the activities of the Legislature from the public galleries is not the same as participating in the proceeding—or a proceeding of the Parliament.

* (14:50)

It was also contended that the email invitation was an abuse of power. Now, whether that was indeed an abuse of power will no doubt be an item of debate between members, but it is not a violation of parliamentary privilege. The matter is related to an internal administration of the department in question, and as Maingot advises on page 224 of *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, allegations or misjudgment or mismanagement or maladministration on the part of a minister does not come within the purview of parliamentary privilege. This same finding is supported by a 1994 ruling from Speaker Rocan, and by three rulings in 1995 and 1996 by Speaker Dacquay. It has also not been demonstrated that any information provided by civil servants to members has been purposely incorrect or overtly political in nature.

The closest comparable Manitoba privilege ruling to the case before us involves a 1972 ruling from Speaker Fox, where it was alleged by then—the then honourable leader—House Leader of the Official Opposition, the then honourable member for Morris, that civil servants were used improperly for assisting and conducting election campaigns, specifically a by-election in Wolseley. Speaker Fox ruled that there was no prima facie case of privilege on the basis that misjudgment, misadministration or maladministration on the part of a minister in the performance of ministerial duties does not come within the purview of parliamentary privilege.

In addition, Speaker Fox stated that the staff person in question did not come within the purview of parliamentary privilege. Speaker Fox ended off the ruling by stating, I regret, therefore, to indicate to the honourable member for Morris that the question is not a member—matter of parliamentary privilege. In making this decision, the Chair wishes to state, it is only as to form and procedure and does not prevent further discussion on the matter in some valid procedural context.

In addition, in 2004, Speaker Hickee ruled that the allegations that the Clerk of the Executive Council had written to civil servants to advise them not to attend meetings on the Public Accounts Committee did not fall within the enumerated categories of privilege, and also reiterated that civil servants do not fall within the protections of parliamentary privilege.

Therefore, I would rule, with the greatest of respect, that the rule—I would rule that the prima facie case of privilege has not been demonstrated and that the matter raised is not in order as a matter of privilege.

I would ask all honourable members to be mindful of the—with this ruling. I am not passing a value judgment on the concerns raised by members or on the actions taken. I would also like to remind members of the commentary from Speaker Fox, and I note that this ruling does not prevent further discussion on this matter in some other valid procedural context.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Official Opposition House Leader): And while we respect the thoroughness of your ruling today, Mr. Speaker, as a protest against this government's actions, we challenge your ruling.

Mr. Speaker: The ruling of the Speaker has been challenged.

The question before the House is: Shall the ruling of the Chair be sustained?

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in favour of sustaining the ruling of the Chair, please signify by saying aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed, please signify by saying nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Speaker: In the opinion of the Chair, the Ayes have it.

Formal Vote

Mrs. Taillieu: Yes, recorded vote, please, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Recorded vote having been requested, call in the members.

Order, please. The one hour provided for the ringing of the bells has lapsed. I'm now directing the

bells be turned off and the House proceed with the vote.

The question before the House is: Shall the ruling of the Chair be sustained?

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Yeas

Allan, Allum, Altemeyer, Ashton, Bjornson, Blady, Braun, Caldwell, Chief, Chomiak, Crothers, Dewar, Gaudreau, Howard, Irvin-Ross, Jha, Kostyshyn, Lemieux, Mackintosh, Maloway, Marcelino (Logan), Marcelino (Tyndall Park), Melnick, Nevakshonoff, Oswald, Pettersen, Robinson, Rondeau, Saran, Selby, Selinger, Struthers, Swan, Whitehead, Wiebe, Wight.

Nays

Briese, Cullen, Driedger, Eichler, Ewasko, Friesen, Gerrard, Goertzen, Graydon, Helwer, Maguire, McFadyen, Mitchelson, Pedersen, Rowat, Schuler, Smook, Stefanson, Taillieu, Wishart.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): Yeas 36, Nays 20.

Mr. Speaker: The ruling of the Chair has been sustained.

Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Speaker: I have another ruling for the House. Order, please.

During debate of a government resolution on Thursday, April 19th, 2012, the honourable Government House Leader (Ms. Howard) raised a point of order concerning remarks spoken in debate by the honourable member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) that the Government House Leader felt were unparliamentary, although specific remarks in question were not identified. The Official Opposition House Leader (Mrs. Taillieu) also spoke to the point of order, and the Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nevakshonoff) took the matter under advisement to—in order to review *Hansard*.

On page 393 of *Hansard* for April 19th records the honourable member for Morris as saying, just prior to the raising of the point of order, in quotations, Mr. Deputy Speaker, newcomers are extremely important to our economy and our social fabric, but they don't deserve to be lied to by this

NDP government. They don't deserve that, and they deserve the truth. End of quotation.

If these remarks were, indeed, the focus of the point of order raised by the honourable Government House Leader, then there is no point of order, as according to page 619 of O'Brien and Bosc, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*: Expressions which are considered unparliamentary when applied to an individual member have not always been considered so when applied in a generic sense to a party.

* (16:00)

This finding is supported in—by rulings of previous Manitoba Speakers. Speaker Rocan twice ruled in 1991 that the phrase "one big lie" was ruled in order, because it was not targeted to—at specific individuals. Similarly, Speaker Dacquay, in 1997, ruled that there was no point of order when the term "one big lie" was raised as objectionable because the phrase was not made in context of specific individuals. She similarly ruled the same way in 1999 when the phrase, in quotations, I have never encountered so many liars in one proceeding, end of quotations, was also deemed—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order. These are very serious matters.

Speaker Hickeys also made similar rulings regarding the use—

Speaker Dacquay, in 1997, ruled that there was no point of order when the term "one big lie" was raised as objectionable because the phrase was not made in context of specific individuals.

She similarly ruled the same way in 1999 when the phrase, quotations, I have never encountered so many liars in one proceeding, end of quotations, was also deemed in order because it was not aimed at specific individuals.

Speaker Hickeys also made similar rulings regarding the use of the word "liar," in quotations, in 2001 and twice in 2002 because the words were not made in relation to specific members.

I, therefore, find that there is no point of order, but I would like to advise the House that I, as Speaker, will continue to be vigilant in listening to the debate and monitoring the language used.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Soroptimist International of Winnipeg

Ms. Deanne Crothers (St. James): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize what is, unfortunately, a little-known organization, Soroptimist International of Winnipeg. Soroptimists are women at their best, working to help other women to be their best.

Currently, 17 Winnipeg members are dedicated to improving the lives of women and children both locally and around the world.

By inviting community agencies to speak in their monthly meetings, Soroptimist members learn more about the needs of women in different communities and together they come up with ways that they can help. They offer many wonderful services and programs, but there are a few that I would like to highlight.

The annual Soroptimist awards aim to inspire women and to help them achieve difficult goals. The awards all include a financial prize and represent a belief in the recipient's ability to improve her own life. Their annual Women's Opportunity Award, for example, is given to a mother who is the head of her household and who has chosen to pursue post-secondary education to create a better life for herself and her children.

Soroptimist members also advocate for women. In Winnipeg, they partner with Osborne House in their campaign to end domestic violence. They produce and fund ads and documents to raise public awareness and deliver girls' self-esteem workshops.

Soroptimist members fundraise for these and other and other projects and donate thousands of dollars to local and international groups every year. Their support for essential community organizations led directors from Osborne House and Ndinawe to nominate Soroptimist International of Winnipeg President Kay Stewart for one of the Premier's volunteer awards. I was pleased to be present when she received this award last week and I am touched by the level of commitment the members of this organization possess.

The thing I most appreciate about these women is that they try to put themselves in other women's shoes. They imagine what the challenges must be, they relate to other women and then they find practical ways to help women empower themselves.

When women are safe, healthy and empowered, communities are strong and stable. I would like to

thank Soroptimist International of Winnipeg for their contributions to the well-being of families worldwide.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2014 Power Smart Manitoba Winter Games

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I congratulate Morden, Winkler and Stanley on winning the right to host the 2014 Power Smart Manitoba Winter Games.

Sport Manitoba announced on February the 22nd that it had accepted the bid from the three communities to host the 2014 games. From March the 3rd to March the 9th, 1,500 athletes will compete in badminton, cross-country skiing, figure skating, curling, gymnastics, hockey, ringette, swimming, and Special Olympics curling.

In addition to running the events and preparing venues for Manitoba's best young athletes, the host committee must feed, house, transport, and entertain the athletes, coaches, managers, and organizers, an enormous effort that will require 800 to 1,500 volunteers.

Mr. Speaker, on January the 12th, the Morden-Winkler-Stanley bid committee headed by co-chairs Dan Giesbrecht and Rick Klippenstein made their final pitch to Sport Manitoba representatives. I was pleased to attend that event, along with local officials, schools, sports teams, and cheering residents from all three communities.

The committee set out a vision to make the games something special, not only for coaches and the athletes that'll participate in the games but for the many Manitobans who will converge on southern Manitoba to support our top young athletes.

To see Morden, Winkler, and Stanley partnering together like this in this venture is a tremendous statement of co-operation and a promising template for future projects. It's that spirit of co-operation that helps to make Morden-Winkler riding one of the fastest growing areas in Manitoba.

I congratulate the town of Morden, the city of Winkler and the RM of Stanley on being selected to host the 2014 Manitoba Winter Games, and I extend best wishes to co-chairs Dan Giesbrecht and Rick Klippenstein, their planning team, their many volunteers, and their community partners, as they prepare to host the province for this celebration of sport.

Garden City Collegiate Basketball Team

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines): Mr. Speaker, Garden City Collegiate has proven yet again that it has a basketball program to be reckoned with, and their Fighting Gophers varsity and junior varsity boys team have made it an amazing year of basketball, vanquishing foes left and right on their path to multiple victories. I want to congratulate the teams, their staff and coaches for their success this year and urge them forward to continued greatness.

The junior varsity basketball team has competed in six tournaments this year with remarkable success. Their opponents in the Fort Richmond, Wesmen Classic, Daniel Mac, Kildonan East, Maples and Miles Macdonell didn't know what hit them when they cruised to victory in all six competitions. They also proved that lightning can strike twice by winning their second consecutive KPAC league championship. Then, adding to the broad swath of victorious destruction, they added to their lists of conquests the MHSAA Provincial Basketball Championship. This is the first time they've won this prize, but I doubt it will be the last. The junior varsity basketball team ended the season with a 34-2 record and the well-deserved right to be proud of their many accomplishments.

The varsity boys basketball team proved to be no slouches this year either. They captured three tournament victories this year, trouncing their opponents in the Wesmen Classic, St. Vital and Winnipeg Invitational Tournament at Tec Voc. They also won back-to-back KPAC championships this year. Seizing victory yet again makes this the seventh time in the past nine years that the Gophers stood glorious over their foes at this event. They also scooped the winner of the MHSAA AAAA Provincial Basketball Championships for the third time in five years. Their overall record of 34-4 must make other teams tremble and ask what the Fighting Gophers have that they do not have.

Mr. Speaker, from the varsity boys team of giants, two players stand out in their magnificence: Andre Arruda-Welch was named AAAA Player of the Year and No. 1 player in the province, and Josh Magpantay was No. 7 player in the province and selected for the All-Manitoba Team. And shepherding these fine young men to victory was coach Phil Penner, honoured as AAAA Coach of the Year.

They, of course, didn't do it alone. I would like to ask leave to include the names of the varsity and junior varsity Garden City Collegiate Fighting Gophers and their 'coaching' staff—and their coaching staff in *Hansard*.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave from the House to include the names of the team in question? [*Agreed*]

Mr. Chomiak: No. 1, Byron Oduca. No. 2, Chris Joseph—

Mr. Speaker: Did you wish to—no, we'll take the list of the names and we'll provide them to *Hansard* and have them included in the record, if you're okay with that.

Junior Varsity Boys Basketball Team: #1 Byron Oduca, #2 Chris Joseph, #3 Arel Cansino, #4 MJ Masangkay, #6 Jeremy De Las Alas, #7 Kyle Silva, #8 Marcus Brown, #10 Jowel Shuffler, #12 Chad Andrade, #13 Jared Kashton, #14 Malcolm Brown, #15 Jesse Diogo, #20 Julius Magpantay, #21 Dylan Lemay, #30 Darryan Edwards, #33 Aiden Mojica, #34 Michael Corrigan, #40 Richard Rabena; Manager David Halliday; Coaches Iggy Grinevsky, Jerry Kwong, Coffey Mensa.

Varsity Boys Basketball Team: Andre Arruda-Welch, Abel Bekele, Denis Cicak, Malik Coleman, Jayel Masangkay, Josh Magpantay, Justin Pablo, Tynan Reyes, Alec Soriano, Jonas Tugade; Coaches: Phil Penner, Chris Pereira, Chester Wojciechowski, Kadeem Coleman.

Virten Auditorium Theatre

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honour of the Virten Auditorium Theatre, also known as the Virten Aud, which recently celebrated its 100th anniversary on February 29, 2012. The Aud is an icon of Virten arts and culture, a proud part of our heritage, and a home for Virten's civic community.

The Aud was a dream of Mr. J.A. McLachlan of Virten and Virten town council. It was originally built as an opera house in 1912 by W.T. Manser, a bricklayer who immigrated to Canada from England in 1903. The movie theatre closed in 1960 when the owners at the time had decided to invest in a drive-in theatre instead. By 1980 the roof of the Aud and the theatre's drop curtain system had seen better days.

The town council of Virten in 1980 had planned to have the building demolished, but in 1982 the

Save the Aud committee, led by Gladys Carefoot, Jim Moffatt and Rodney Stuart, had raised a total of \$82,000 to repair and renovate the building, which far exceeded expectations.

On Sunday, April 17, 1983, the theatre reopened as a local centre for the performing arts and it was booked for over 90 days a year.

* (16:10)

It gives me great pride to recognize the citizens of Virden for their remarkable efforts at keeping the Aud Theatre a vibrant part of our community for over a hundred years.

Special thanks go to the Royal Canadian Air Force Band for their entertaining evening of classic music—swing music at the 100th anniversary—100th-year anniversary celebration with Virden Auditorium Board Chair Greg Tough as the MC for the evening.

The Aud Theatre is a beautiful sight to see in Virden, and I wish all Manitobans and Canadians would take some time to visit the community and the local theatre this summer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Assiniboine Community College Sustainable Greenhouse

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): Yesterday the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and I, alongside the Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. Selby), the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (Mr. Kostyshyn), and the Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade (Mr. Bjornson), attended the sod-turning for Assiniboine Community College's new Sustainable Greenhouse facility. This 4,600-foot instructional greenhouse will employ state-of-the-art environmental controls and water management systems optimizing energy efficiency and water resources. It is indeed exciting to see another project under way at Brandon's architecturally outstanding North Hill campus and to anticipate future development at this historic site.

Assiniboine Community College is an integral part of the Manitoba post-secondary educational system, providing programming in agriculture, the environment, business, health and human services, food and hospitality services, trades and technology. Since 1999, our NDP government has contributed nearly \$70 million in capital funding to ACC. This includes \$46 million for the now-complete 130,000-square-foot Len Evans Centre for Trades and Technology and the development of the

world-class Manitoba Institute of Culinary Arts. ACC is also receiving a 4 per cent operational funding increase in the 2012-2013 budget. ACC's funding has increased by 57.7 per cent since 1999, a number that rises to 118 per cent when you include the College Expansion Initiative.

Mr. Speaker, the ACC's Sustainable Greenhouse is an important step forward in developing the college's environmental horticulture program and bolstering their applied research into alternative energy systems. This new greenhouse adds to ACC's offerings and provides important opportunities for students to be at the forefront of research and innovation in horticulture and alternative—alternate energy. The Sustainable Greenhouse also provides supports for ACC's agribusiness, culinary arts and environmental technologies programs. Indeed, the facility continues the expansion of Assiniboine Community College and the college's leadership role in building a stronger, more prosperous western Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Assiniboine Community College for their hard work in establishing the Sustainable Greenhouse, and look forward to working together with them and continuing the redevelopment of their outstanding North Hill campus.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Mr. Speaker: To resume—[interjection]

House Business

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, on House business?

Mr. Speaker: On House business.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with rule 31(9) I would like announce that the private members' resolution that will be considered next Thursday is the resolution on downloading of provincial responsibilities, sponsored by the honourable member for Agassiz (Mr. Briese).

Mr. Speaker: It has been announced that in accordance with rule 31(9), that the private members' resolution that will be considered next Thursday is the resolution on downloading of provincial responsibilities, sponsored by the honourable member for Agassiz.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**BUDGET DEBATE
(Seventh Day of Debate)**

Mr. Speaker: Now, to resume debate under orders of the day—to resume debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), and the proposed motion of the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) in amendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable member for Burrows, who has 19 minutes remaining.

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, my goal today is to say more than just my apologies. Mr. Speaker, my apologies. Right?

So the constituents of Burrows are very—people with a lot of common sense and I think that's why they like our budget. They want life to be affordable as provided in Budget 2012.

They want health care. I think we've all been to doors—I don't know if the members opposite have been, but I know I've been to doors where I open the door—people open the door and they tell me that somebody in their family has just been diagnosed with cancer. And it's always a difficult thing to know—what do you say? And it's good to know that at least now we don't also have to be worrying about the added costs of those drugs. And we know that they will be able to afford to at least get the best of care.

The people of Burrows are interested in programs for youth and for children and for their futures; apprenticeships and mentorships. They're interested in the PAX program for the children in grade 1. They want education for their children. So, I think that that has been well covered by all the other members.

I did want to say that one of the things that they do not think is common sense is the change to our settlement services agreement, which was cancelled unilaterally. And I know I'm new, and I know I'm a little bit naive probably—and I don't get to say that very often at my age, so I'm going to say it today—I am a little bit naive when it comes to the things that go on in here. And I have to admit that I honestly believed that the entire House would stand up against that and stand up for Manitoba. And I truly don't understand why that is not what has happened. It is obviously not good for Manitobans to have their

services delivered outside of Manitoba. Just going to leave it there.

I have just one other thing I wanted to cover and that is the different times that it has come up about women's issues. And when members opposite first mentioned the taxing of women's issues I was just a tiny bit lost, because I was—women's issues always make me think of serious things like domestic violence and, you know, mammograms and that sort of thing. But it turned out that they were talking about pedicures and manicures, and haircuts over \$50. And it's probably obvious that I've never had a haircut over \$50; I admit it. So it just seems to make light, to me, of women's issues. And the women that I know, Mr. Speaker, who can afford things like spa treatments and manicures and pedicures are more than willing to admit, I think, that they live in the top percentile in the world in income and would not be concerned about that.

So, in closing, I would just like to say that we are one of the top 10 best places—in this city—to live in the country of Canada. And I think this budget is one of the reasons why. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I do want to put a bit on the record in regards to the budget of 2012-2013. But, before I start, I want to welcome the new members that just been sworn in and taking part in the debate in the House and, of course, any elected official. I take my hat off to all those that let their names stand for elected office. And certainly they can stand proud, irrespective of what side of the House they belong to.

Mr. Speaker, in regards to the budget, going back seven months ago, the First Minister of this province stated, our plan is a five-year plan to ensure that we have future prosperity without any tax increases, and we'll deliver on that. We're ahead of schedule right now. This come as a quote from the First Minister who has had ample opportunity—as a Finance Minister, as a previous leader of this government, he went on record, stated that he would not raise taxes. What he did was turn around and impose a tax of \$184 million onto each and every Manitoban and from this day on, those taxes are going to be very hard to erase. They're going to be hard to erase in the memories of those families that are struggling, from those families that are farm families that go out and produce food for each and every member in this House. We are so proud of the

safety of our food, for the safety of our family, by the great products that are grown within the province of Manitoba.

We export a huge number of our products that we raise. Unfortunately, this is going to put them at a disadvantage when it comes to the taxes imposed onto those producers.

* (16:20)

Last night I had a meeting in my constituency in regards to the budget, and the message was loud and clear. The average farmer in my area—and we're not talking big producers—this was a—there was a producer that has less than a hundred head of cows—the budget alone for his impact is over \$2,500. That's not taking into account the PST on his insurance, because, quite frankly, he don't know what that's going to be until he gets his new statement from his insurance broker.

What we can do is take a look at what this budget actually means to each and every Manitoban. What we should have done if the government really cared about the future of the province of Manitoba, look to the New West Partnership. Learn from those that are our neighbours to the west—Saskatchewan, who had a \$47-million surplus. I went out when the new premier, Brad Wall, got elected, and I said, how did you turn this around so fast? The message was real simple. What did they do? They returned letters. They returned phone calls. They said, we're open for business.

No, what do we do? We're closed. We do not want our province to grow and prosper. It's very unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that whenever we send a message out—we have an opportunity with CentrePort to be on that. We have an opportunity to showcase this province. What have we done? We put an extra bunch of taxes on them. One is the gas tax, 2.5 per cent. Any new business—any new business that wants to come into Manitoba, they not only have their payroll tax, now they're saying, we give you another 2.5 per cent.

Now, I just want to quote what the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association stated. In fact, April of this year, a letter from Chris Lorenc—I would like to read it into the record: Dear Minister—this is addressed to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Ashton). Our industry waited nervously for the 2012-2013 April 17th budget with good reason. MIT had reduced the '12-13 program by deleting 10 projects whose construction value were

estimated to hover in the vicinity of \$50 million, a huge blow to our industry and the people we employ.

In addition, he had deferred the tender advertisement dates of 15 additional projects back half of the season.

They had wrote—the Manitoba heavy construction industry—on March the 8th, expressing those concerns, asking for a meeting. Unfortunately, while they had not been afforded that meeting, the government went on and made assurances that they were working on the budget process, and nothing to worry about.

Well, obviously there is. [*inaudible*]-to the 2.5 cents per litre to fill their fuel tanks as of May 1st, 2012, one cent—one cent works out to \$22 million in extra revenue.

So, Mr. Speaker, what the government stands up and says in this House, guess what? It's all going back to the roads. There is no difference between 2010-2011 budget and 2012-2013 budget. There actually is a reduction of \$99 million in the infrastructure budget, the overall capital cost. They're misleading Manitobans. This money is not earmarked specifically for road upgrades. It is going to their general revenues. It's going to be part of their cash for their spending habit, quite frankly, that they've developed.

They want to go on to say that vehicle registration fees of \$35—they want to know what new revenue this will generate. This is the letter addressed to the minister, and I'm sure that he will answer him. I know I've wrote the minister on several occasions. In fact, I wrote back in 2005 in June—June the 5th—asking about the Shoal lakes and roads, and I got a response in November of that year, saying that they were going to take it under advisement. So I wish the heavy construction industry a little faster response than what I got.

Actually, the revenues that are going to be generated—and The Gas Tax Accountability Act obliges the provincial government to spend collected fuel taxes on highway construction programs, and, indeed, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) stated in his budget that every cent raised in these ways will be invested in roads, bridges and infrastructure, guaranteed.

What they don't guarantee is where the plan is going to be for the future. In fact, if we talk about just infrastructure and transportation for a few minutes, it's important to know that the government

will be able to recover some of the flood-related infrastructure damage costs from the federal government. We know that 90 cents out of every dollar is going to be reimbursed by the federal government.

'Mowverover', it is important to note that the NDP government has made investments in the flood infrastructure earlier in its mandate, such as upgrading the Assiniboine River, dikes, or the Shellmouth. Then a considerable amount of 2012 flood-related damage cost would likely have been avoided. Unfortunately, they didn't do that.

In fact, if you go back to the budget–federal budget, the federal government had an opportunity to help the province of Manitoba, which the Province did not take advantage of, in order to make sure those flood mitigation costs were there in order to try and save some of those costs instead of having to spend that extra money.

In fact, the Minister of Finance—the First Minister of this province, who was a previous Finance minister, had an opportunity to understand those numbers. He knows those numbers inside and out. If he don't, then he should have, because it's not the first time we had a flood in the province of Manitoba and I'm sure it's not going to be the last.

So, when we look at the overall flood cost and trying to deal with those costs, they can't off-load both sides. They can't off-load what they're claiming back from the federal government and what they're going to be actually spending on roads and bridges as a result of the flood. In fact, what we're talking about, and the stakeholders that have been committed to—by this government, is that the Heavy Construction Association has expressed those concerns, along with a number of others.

In fact, the MC—or MHCA has stated, and I quote: The impact of the above is not significant at a time when an industry struggles to attract new labour, keep existing talent from accepting opportunities in Saskatchewan and Alberta. We now must substantially lower their return to gainful employment if we'll have access to—in them all. End of quote.

Also, the Manitoba municipalities and the Winnipeg mayor are also concerned about Budget 2012, citing the long-term strategy of infrastructure investment. Significant. In fact, CAA has had, time and time again—their surveys about the roads within

the city of Winnipeg and those other roads outside the city of Winnipeg. And we know that if government really had their best interests at heart, they would, in fact, be addressing some of those concerns.

The AMM have made it very clear what they need in order to make their budget successful in order to cover off some of those costs. So what we need to do is, in fact, deal with those issues, and the thing that hasn't been addressed in this budget as well, just speaking of the AMM, is the boil-water advisories that are still going on within the province of Manitoba. We have a significant number of infrastructure, water and sewer services within the province of Manitoba that, quite frankly, is at a deficit and we have a long ways to go in order to make sure those, in fact, do get covered off.

And I know that there was a number of us that—in fact, the minister of governmental affairs along with the member from Portage la Prairie and I attended a ceremony in the RM of Cartier with the—and the member from Morris as well, on the upgrade of the water system there.

They are supplying some 11,000 customers as a result of their upgrades to this particular water system but the problem is, is that there's not enough of these projects going on. So we need to make sure that we 'priorize' them, put them to the front and centre and bring them forward into the House, so that we can debate them.

In fact, the biggest thing we have to do is prioritize these in an orderly way, that we're spending our money wisely. The other government says, well spend more money. We want to spend our money wisely, we want to make sure we're getting the best bang for our buck. It's about being accountable and the member from Morris brought a bill forward that gives the opportunity for the government to be accountable and transparent for all those very good reasons, in fact, we need to make sure that we are spending our money wisely.

There was a recent article in the *Winnipeg Sun*, "Taxed to the max", and I think that is a pretty significant article, in fact, Manitoba's middle-income families pay the second highest income taxes in Canada. And whenever we look at what this means, middle-income families and all Atlantic provinces, Ontario and everywhere west of Manitoba, play a lower income taxes than we do. This is not good. For example, a Manitoba family of four with two income earners making \$60,000 pays \$3,042 in provincial

income taxes. That's the second highest in Canada. Only middle-income families in Québec pay more. What a thing to write your family about and tell them what a great job our government is doing and a great position to put us in in order to attract those families back to this great homeland of ours called Manitoba. By contrast, the same family in Saskatchewan pays only \$725. The income tax bill for that family is the lowest in Ontario, at \$615, and that includes the health premium families pay in that province.

*(16:30)

The tax disparity gets worse as the family incomes rise. Instead of rewarding middle-income families that work harder in trying to get ahead, the Manitoba government punishes them by hammering them even harder on taxes. A two-income family of five earning \$75,000 pays \$4,165 in provincial income taxes, also the second highest in the country. A two-income family earning—with one earner earning \$40,000 and the other \$35,000—by rich—not rich by any means—they get hit with a provincial tax bill of over \$4,000. Meanwhile, the same family in Saskatchewan only pays \$1,470.

And it goes on about different examples, so I draw this article to the attention of those that are in government in order to make sure, whenever they go to the door in the next election, they're able to defend, in fact, what they've done to each and every Manitoban. It's not just the First Minister of this province; it's each and every member on that side of the House.

And I do want to point out that it is about priorities. It's about things that are a safety issue, things that make our lives better. And I do want—I do want—to congratulate the government on paving 7.5 kilometres of Highway 6 just south of Grosse Isle. I brought this up a number of times in the House. And I can tell you I didn't get a lot in this budget in regards to people of Lakeside, but I can tell you it makes me very proud that if we can save one life—one life—south of highway—or south of Grosse Isle on Highway 6, this money will be well spent. It's not what we asked—it's not what we asked for, but it is something. And I can tell you that—I know I was at an event on the weekend talking about the announcement that was made by the government, and a lot of these upgrades are very important. There's no doubt about it.

But, having said that, it's about priorities. It's about what need—it's about what needs to happen.

We're never going to have enough money; we all know that. We're never going to have enough money to actually meet the demands through our current financial program that we have within the Province of Manitoba. We have just under \$12 billion budget, which, again, unfortunately, the large portion of that comes from the federal government because we are a have-nots province. One day we hope to be able to hold our high—our head high and proud, in fact say that we're not a have-not province.

We want to be a have-province, and there's things we can do to change that. We can make our province more competitive. In fact, I talked just briefly about CentrePort earlier in my comments and that had to do with the fact that CentrePort takes a large portion of my constituency. And the roads and the infrastructure that's going to be taken to make that become a successful operation is going to be quite substantial, and I know the federal government, provincial government's committed a fair amount of money into that project. It won't see it till 2013, but the investment that is there in order to make this a have-province is just a start. And we need to make sure we continue on with that.

In fact, I had a meeting with the stakeholders not that long ago, getting an update. In fact, they send me information on a fairly regular basis, and I know that I can share with the House—and I know most members on that side of the House understand it as well—that in order for this to become a reality, we also have to look at those dollars and infrastructure dollars that are going to make it where this does not fail. We don't want any more failures in regards to different proposals that's come forward. This is one that we all agreed on in this House and we want to make sure that in fact it stays competitive and stays to the point where we're able to ship those goods through the Port of Churchill, to the south, to the east, to the west. In order to do that, we need to make sure we're competitive.

And this comes back to the two-and-a-half-cents tax. We're only five hours away from the Saskatchewan border; we're two hours away from Ontario border. And if we're going to make sure that we don't lose those operations right here in our great province and the city of Winnipeg and surrounding areas, we got to be competitive. We've got to be competitive in order to maintain that advantage. So whenever those trucking companies look at coming to invest in the province of Manitoba, they're going to say, are we better off locating in Saskatchewan, Ontario, or what is the advantage of having that head

office? What is the advantage of employing people within the province of Manitoba?

We have to make sure that we're saying, hey, we're open for business. We want to be open for business. We want to see those businesses that are going to create jobs. Those businesses are going to be able to say, I want to make Manitoba my base. I want to be able to say, I will be competitive; I won't be at a disadvantage.

So, when we look at all those costs, in fact, we haven't even talked about the sales tax on insurance, and I know that that—in fact, the member from—where's Stu from?

An Honourable Member: Agassiz.

Mr. Eichler: The member from Agassiz brought this up in the House, in regards to the premiums on the municipal insurance structure alone. Government taxing government is not a good idea. There's still only one taxpayer. There's only one taxpayer overall when we look at this budget. And, at the end of the day, it's just transferring money. In fact, I know I've had this debate in the House many times before and that's in regards to the education tax on farmland. The farmers pay it in. The administration goes through it. That cost, that cost alone for the farmers to send their money into the RM and then get it rebated back is in the neighbourhood of \$100,000 a year. Why can we not—why can we not, Mr. Speaker, walk down the hall, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn) give the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) a cheque. Costs 75 cents or a buck and a half. It's done.

We don't need to go through this. The farmers have to advance the money out of their operating budget. They have to go out, sell some crops, do what they got to do, sell their cattle. Why would we just not make it so simple? I have a hard time understanding that.

In fact, when it comes to the agricultural side of the budget, the Manitoba Beef Producers have asked over and over again for an insurance program for their beef. Beef prices are high. You don't wait until the market needs it. There's a great opportunity at this very point and would have been very little cost, very little cost just to set the program up. Right now, when the cattle prices are high, probably never be a dollar paid out of it. So why wait till the market collapse and then establish the program?

And we know there's highs; we know there's lows, and it's now the opportunity for the

government to be able to take advantage of that and come back in with a program that would have been sustainable, one that would have been workable.

All they had to do, in fact, I would like to just put that on the record, in regards to the producer priorities missing from the Manitoba budget. And, in fact, it says, Manitoba Beef Producers has mixed response to the 2012 budget tabled today. Manitoba Beef Producers hoped to see provisions which were not mentioned in the budget. It says the cattle price insurance and an effective environmental goods and services program and a herd protection program. That would have been pretty simple to do.

They were pleased there was a commitment to the forage restoration program for pasture and hay land flooded in the spring of 2011, and this is a critical program for those that are still suffering from the 2012 flood. Talking about their president, Ray Armbruster, who, by the way, has done an outstanding job, and I know he's met with the minister, the new minister, in regards to a number of those issues that are brought forward.

The other thing is that we need programs that are going to be sustainable. In fact, we know that the Manitoba Beef Producers, the Keystone Ag Producers, those organizations, the Canola Growers Association, all are so important for the viability of agriculture within the province of Manitoba.

I know by being the past Ag critic for our party that the number of days and hours and weeks that we all put forward—we all put forward in order to make sure that their voice is heard, and all of us, all of us in this House, have a responsibility to ensure we listen, to ensure that their messages are loud and clear.

* (16:40)

Whenever they come forward and they have an idea, they're not here just to try and make up policy on the fly. They research it. These organizations are well established and they've been around for a number of times and they're the grassroots. They're the ones that are out each and every day, meeting with their constituents, meeting with their membership, and I can tell you, I'm very proud to be—of the fact that I was a producer at one point in my life. I miss it deeply, but I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when I met with my organizations, that they heard me. And whenever they met with people like myself, now, in the same government—or I'm

actually—I'm in opposition, but I do take their messages very seriously. I make sure that we carry that message forward. So, whenever they come, let's listen. Let's make sure their voices are heard, and by doing that, they can go back and say, hey, I did meet with them, I did explain to them why we needed to do what we did.

But, before I lose all my time here, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the flood. And the flood's far from over. Far from over. And all those families that have been affected around Lake Manitoba and the western part of the province, the—around the Assiniboine and the Shellmouth, I can tell you, it's far from over. And I—my emails are still coming in. I get at least one, maybe two a day, and it's nothing like it was last year at this time, but I can tell you, the frustration level is still very, very high.

In fact, I had a call just last week from a constituent up in the member from Interlake's country, and they were there, talking about not being able to get an appointment with the adjustor to see their situation and what was needing to be done in order to happen. They were told that we make two appointments a day; one in the morning, one in the afternoon. We travelled from Winnipeg to The Narrows; they meet with somebody, they do their lunch, they meet with somebody and they come back. We need to streamline this in order to get this done. There's decisions have to be made, there's consultations that need to be done with these families, there's things that need to be done so that they can plan for their lives as they move forward.

Also, Mr. Speaker, just on—in—on regards to the flooding, I know that a number of those families that haven't had that opportunity—the opportunity to meet with government in order to make sure their voice is heard. If they don't, what they do, they come to us. And I know the First Minister stood up in the House today, saying there's the Ombudsman that can deal with this issue, there's an appeal mechanism, but they got to get there first. They got to get that initial meeting before they are able to move on.

So I know from those phone calls, from those emails that come each and every day to my office, which I'm only one of 57, and I know the member from Interlake probably gets a lot more than I do, but maybe they're not getting the answers they need. I don't know. He has not made that clear in the House. But what he will do—what I will do, is make sure that

we do bring these up in the House so, in fact, their voice is heard.

And I know that a number of those very same families that have talked to me in regards to the beef production, those families that have not received compensation cheques for their feed assistance for last year—which is unfortunate. These people are already taxed to the max through the flood of the century, as they call it, one in 300—this intentional flood on Lake Manitoba. And nobody's disputing the fact that it was not intentional. We know it was. We accept the fact that it was, but what we need to do is accept the fact that we have to flow the money. We have to make sure that those people are compensated fairly, equally, and making sure that each and every Manitoba that was harmed, in any way, as a result of the flood, that they are being compensated quickly and to the best of the government's ability.

Now I know May 30th, last year, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) went on CBC Radio saying, hey, we do have a problem and these people need to be compensated fairly and quickly. Some of them did. Some of them didn't. As the minister for MMIT stood up this House and said, there's 30,000 applications. That's a huge number. But what we haven't heard is how many are not getting, and we hear from those people each and every day. Unfortunately, not everybody has access to Internet. Not everybody has access to their municipality in order to make sure their voice is heard. A lot of people are very quiet people. They assume that they're going to be looked after. They were told by this government they were going to be looked after. They're still waiting. They're still waiting each and every day, for somebody to come knocking on their door, saying, we have a solution for you. How can we help you?

So now what's happening, some of those that have been bought out, which is very few, and I've had many a conversation with them and the municipalities, is that they're not sure at what level, or if—if—they'll be allowed to rebuild. So what we're having is mixed messages from the government on what level their houses or new homes are going to have to be built at. Some are getting to 18, some are—815, sorry, pardon me—815—and some are 821 in order to rebuild. So those people need clarity. They need to make sure that whatever level that's going to be, they're going to be protected. So we can't give them mixed messages, but that's what's happening.

But, before I do wrap up—we're just running out of time here, unfortunately. But the—those municipalities that are affected—the RM of St. Laurent, 80 per cent of their tax base has been affected by the flood. Now the government has not said anything in this budget about compensation for those tax dollars that are going to be lost. That is huge. What's going to happen those RMs and the equipment they bought either to fight the flood or to maintain the roads and maintain those main issues that they have to address? They're still those taxpayers that are left. They can't afford to pay the whole tax bill by themselves.

So I'm going to encourage the government—I'm going to encourage the government—to take a look at that and make the right decision in order to help those municipalities, like the RM of St. Laurent, the RM of Woodlands, the RM of Coldwell. I know—I've met with these people. Each time I meet with them, they come back to me, time after time, and say, what are we going to do about our tax base? The RM of Coldwell, 30 per cent of their tax base is along the Lake Manitoba—which is substantial whenever you look at those overall net cost, unfortunately, that they may or may not be able to sustain through the regular tax base and through the assessment that they have—those people, there's no encouragement for them to stay there. Why would they want to rebuild? Unless—unless—the government assures them that they will be protected, and that the flows coming into Lake Manitoba will match the outflows.

So, with that, Mr. Speaker, I encourage the government to do the right thing. Look at their budget, look at our amendments, and, as a result of that, let's do the right thing and spend our money wisely.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): It's a pleasure and a privilege to return to this Chamber, and I would first like to begin by welcoming you to your new role, Mr. Speaker. I wish I had been able to congratulate you sooner, but, as you know, it was a tight race in my neighbourhood, which ultimately came down to a recount to confirm my return to this Chamber.

As someone that has lived with a metaphorical target on my back since I was first elected in May 2007, I knew that no matter how hard I worked over those four years that I would be up against deep pockets and deep resentments from the other side about that fateful day in 2007 when the

neighbourhood chose representation that left members opposite wondering how they could lose an area they considered a stronghold and a birthright.

So to have left them wondering a second time, let's just say, Mr. Speaker, that I'm very pleased and thankful to be back and look forward to many more years with you and fellow members in this Chamber. And as many in this Chamber have come to recognize, and in some cases expect, when I rise in budget and Throne Speech debate, I like to frame my words within a larger context or theme.

And rather than quoting French intellectuals or pointing out the ironies and contradictions of the opposition's campaign slogans, as I have done in the past, I would, instead this time, like to draw on the words of a very special Canadian and social democrat. He is someone I became familiar with when he was a city councillor in Toronto—known for his bicycle, his trademark moustache and his unwavering commitment to social justice. He and his wife, a fellow councillor at the time, were significant in my political development as a grad student living under the Harris regime in Toronto. Their passion and commitment have been a touchstone to me over the years, and continue to inspire me to do my best in service to others.

Mr. Speaker, I frame my response today with some of the last words left to us by the late Jack Layton. My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we'll change the world.

Some may wonder why I've chosen these now-often-quoted words to frame my response today. The answer is both simple and straightforward: truer words are rarely spoken; and because they came to shape how I went into the fall election cycle last year; and also how I believe this budget addresses the priorities of my neighbourhood.

* (16:50)

On a personal note, as a cancer survivor, I held out hope for Jack's recovery against his second battle with the disease and, like many others, was saddened with his passing. His words took on even more personal meaning for me, because while on the campaign trail, I faced my own scare of a second battle, having to take time off the doorstep to undergo another round of cancer tests. Tests, which, Mr. Speaker, I am thankful to say came back clear. At that time, it was the thoughts of what would Jack

do and his message of love, hope and optimism that reminded me why I was seeking a second term in office, because we all face challenges in life and it is not the challenges that matter so much as how we choose to respond to them. We can despair over how the world unfolds or we can see each challenge as an opportunity to find a hopeful and optimistic solution.

I chose to be hopeful and optimistic, surrounded and supported by the love of friends and family, and to offer that love, hope and optimism in service to my neighbours.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank those in my neighbourhood that supported my return to this Chamber, who believed that love, hope and optimism, along with hard work and community connection would carry the day over bus benches, Burma-shaving and fear mongering.

There are so many to thank, Mr. Speaker, but I will limit myself to saying that to each and every person who took part in my campaign, I am grateful, because these people represent such a wonderful cross-section of our neighbourhood. I knocked doors with students, teachers and early childhood educators who saw the love that I have for education and learning and with whom I had worked on everything from pancake breakfasts and I Love to Read to creek clean-ups. I had the support of many seniors, service club members and veterans who shared my hope for how we can work together to build on the accomplishments of the past to build an even brighter future for the next generation of Manitobans. I was also privileged to have the dedication and friendship of firefighters and front-line health-care providers, all who shared my optimism in the ongoing commitments that have been made by this government to ensure that the timely front-line services continue to be delivered at the times when people need them most.

On the doorstep and in the campaign office, I was joined by newcomers and long-time residents alike, all of whom shared the values of what it meant for them to be proud Manitobans and they knew that I would fight to preserve those values, as was just done in this House this past week. To each of these dedicated individuals, I say, thank you. You know who you are, and you know how much your support meant to me, especially on the evening of October 4th when my greatest fear was in disappointing you and the neighbourhood by not being able to continue the many projects we had begun together. However, hope prevailed and now we can continue to work

together to bring your dreams—our dreams to fruition in Kirkfield Park.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank all of those who support was manifested in their decision to mark their ballots for me to return to this Chamber, for they, too, saw the love, hope and optimism that was the foundation of my campaign. I thank them for the numerous cards, emails and voice mails that arrived after the election and in waiting for me to reopen my office during the recount.

Over the summer and into the fall, many of them commented on the orange ribbons that our team wore in memory of Jack and saw the tributes to him in our campaign office and commented on the difference they saw there in contrast to what was being offered by my opponent, a perennial Tory candidate. These neighbours understood Jack's message and the work of a long-standing social democratic provincial government and knew my commitment to such a vision, and I thank them for their faith and trust.

Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, it's not so much the challenges that we face that matter, but how we choose to respond to them, and that brings me specifically to how this budget responds to both the priorities of my neighbourhood and reflects the sentiments of Jack's words and vision.

On the doorsteps in Kirkfield Park, in the school gyms, community clubs and along the banks of Sturgeon Creek, I have listened to neighbours tell me what their priorities are, what their visions of the future is for themselves and their families. Mr. Speaker, I have listened to those priorities and brought them to the caucus table, to ministers and to the Premier (Mr. Selinger) on behalf of those neighbours, and I have seen those priorities reflected directly in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most common comments that was shared with me was the need for ongoing, balanced and responsible reproach—approaches to governance and investment. My neighbours value the investments that have been made over the past dozen years in education, health care and keeping Manitoba affordable. They shared my optimism that we could keep building in that direction while addressing the consequences of the flood of the millennium, recovering from an economic downturn that has required prudence and forethought rather than panic and austerities, to successfully keep Manitoba from facing the crises that other jurisdictions continue to face. They did not want flashy promises or reactionary hack-and-slash

measures like—and like other Manitobans, my neighbours tend to be blessed with an abundance of pragmatism and practicality. They did not want the years of investment undercut by reactionary or even punitive fiscal panic. They did not want the proverbial baby thrown out with the bath water, nor the nurse or the teacher sent packing from where they are most needed, when they are most needed. They recalled the havoc caused by Filmon Fridays and did not want to return to those days. One quick-witted gentleman even quipped that he feared that Monday–Mondays could take on a whole new moniker post-October 4th if we had the unfortunate change in government that day. But due to the parliamentary rules we have in referencing other members of this Chamber, I will let present—all those present figure out this moniker for themselves.

Mr. Speaker, I know that in putting this budget forward my colleague, the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), listed—listened to the concerns I brought to him on behalf of my neighbours. I have so many things that I would love to share with this House in terms of his recognition of the optimism. He himself said Manitobans know that resiliency and optimism in the face of challenges is not a miracle. It's just the way we do things in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents, my neighbours know that optimism is better than despair, and they recognize that, whether it is in the investments, in responsible spending. We've seen the decreasing of core government spending going down by 3.9 per cent, or whether it is the other commitments that we make to fiscal management while reducing things like the administrative costs of the RHA, which I find amusing that now members opposite, after asking so many questions along that regard, are now questioning the reduction of RHAs to five. And I do wonder and maybe comment that it must hurt to hold so many contradictory ideas in one's head at the same time. So it's a good thing for members opposite that we are preserving front-line care with these administrative savings, as they just might need QuickCare clinics and access centres to address the throbbing in their heads that such paradoxes must cause.

In preserving these front-line services, my neighbours know that we will be protecting the access centre, that we will be providing the PAX program to students in our neighbourhood. We will be providing free cancer drugs, something that matters to families and friends that I know have gone

through things that are totally—speak to the hope, love, and optimism of this side of the House, including a wonderful couple in Westwood and what they went through in a heart transplant. I know how that feeds into our commitment.

With that, Mr. Speaker, there's so much more that I would like to say. But, unlike members opposite, I will keep my comments brief, succinct, and to the point, so that others may share the floor.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Mr. Speaker, and always a pleasure to get up in this Legislature and speak to the budget. This is now my thirteenth time that I've had the opportunity to speak to a budget and each one gets more and more alarming.

Before I do get into my comments on the budget, I do want to say that I appreciate the people of St. Paul—being Springfield-Oakbank-Dugald area, East St. Paul, West St. Paul—for giving me this opportunity to be able to stand here and represent them in the Manitoba Legislature. And I'm very pleased to be the first suburban MLA this province has. It's—I don't think you could exactly call it a rural seat, and I don't think you can quite call it an urban seat, so I represent the suburban constituency of St. Paul. So, always a pleasure to be here and I want to also congratulate the two new members who've been sworn in since the last time we had the opportunity to meet as a Legislature, and it has been a long time since we've been here. In fact, by all the kinds of rulings you've had to make, in calling members to order on things that were said, it just proves that many have forgotten some of the rules because it's been so long since we've actually had the opportunity to sit as a Legislature.

And what a shock it is when you get back and have a budget like we had brought forward, and I appreciate that many members have had the opportunity to give conflicting viewpoints on what the budget means for Manitoba. I know for one who's been here not as long as the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), but certainly longer than many, and we have, over the years, cautioned the NDP on the kind of spending, the kind of programming, the kind of attitude that they've had towards expenditures in the province of Manitoba.

And, you know, the first few years, Mr. Speaker, I have to admit there used to be Premier Doer—there is nothing more beautiful than watching a socialist

spending public money. And Premier Doer did it magnificently. He was outstanding, and he did it with panache, he did it with excitement, and he spent money. And the more he spent—it was sort of this perfect storm for him—the more he spent, the more the federal government would give him. And, you know, after, you know, cleaning out the Crowns and cleaning out all the different funds and getting in to borrowing money, the federal government always seemed to backfill. And yet you have to admit, they certainly knew how to spend money and they did it with unbelievable excitement and panache.

* (17:00)

Unfortunately, they never put a penny aside. They never put any money into a rainy day fund. They didn't take care of a lot of different things in the economy, but they certainly did spend a lot of money.

And you could say that, you know, they made a lot of friends, they made some people very happy. In fact, I believe it was one of the members opposite—it

was the member from Kildonan who spoke about Rolls-Royce just loving this NDP government. And it just shocking to hear a good socialist like the member from Kildonan speaking so fondly about Rolls-Royce and all the nice things they had to say about him and his government.

So it—just the kind of way things are going in this province, but the time does come when the bills have to be paid.

And, Mr. Speaker, I believe that time is running out, so I will conclude the rest of my comments at the next opportunity and that'll be—that'll more than likely be—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler) will have 25 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

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