

Second 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
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	NDP
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	PC
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	NDP
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	NDP
PALLISTER, Brian	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PETTERSEN, Clarence	Flin Flon	NDP
REID, Daryl, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Kewatinook	NDP
RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	NDP
ROWAT, Leanne	Riding Mountain	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	St. Paul	PC
SELBY, Erin, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
SWAN, Andrew, Hon.	Minto	NDP
WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	NDP
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Morris	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 22, 2013

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 and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 300—The Brandon Area Foundation Incorporation Amendment Act

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar), that Bill 300, The Brandon Area Foundation Incorporation Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi constituant en corporation « The Brandon Area Foundation », now be read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Caldwell: This bill has been worked on by members in the philanthropy–philanthropic community in Brandon for the last number of years. It will contribute and enable the foundation to undertake more philanthropic opportunities. Thank you.

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

Any further introduction of bills? Seeing none—

PETITIONS

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

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:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition's signed by L. Fouillard, A. Plante, T. Simard and many, many other Manitobans.

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

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by B. Carriere, M. Koop, L. Funk and many other concerned Manitobans.

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by A. Blixt, L. Scott and D. Reich and many, many more Manitobans.

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by C. Fournier, D. Shanoha, S. Osler and many, many other fine Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

Municipal Amalgamations—Reversal

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by L. Biletski, W. Iwanchysko, K. Mundie and many other fine Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

* (13:40)

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by P. Fowler, L. Klan and R. Canors and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Provincial Trunk Highways 16 and 5 North–Traffic Signals

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): 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 the–this intersection.

The Town of Neepawa has also passed a resolution requesting that Manitoba 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 motorists and pedestrians who use it.

This petition is signed by B. Couling, J. Coutu, O. Petrakou and many, many other fine Manitobans

Provincial Sales Tax Increase–Referendum

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this is signed by N. Cooke, W. Cooke, R. Dhalla and many, many others, Mr. Speaker.

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by M. Friesen, E. Friesen, J. Giesbrecht and many, many other angry Manitobans. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: The rules are very clear with respect to reading of petitions, and I want to draw the attention of honourable members to rule No.–in chapter XI, rule 132(7) that indicates that there is to be no debate on petitions.

I've indicated to members of the House before that I've been very lenient with respect to allowing words to be added at the end of the reading of the

names, but most members of the Assembly know, and I want to again stress to the House, that there is to be no editorial comments with respect to the petitions being read into the record. The words are there on the lead of the petition and in the three names, and I have allowed some latitude with respect to many other Manitobans. But to add additional words beyond that, I think, goes beyond the rules and what the rules permit for.

So I'm asking for the co-operation of the honourable member for River East and other members of the Assembly, when you're reading the petitions into the record, please do not editorialize at the end of the reading of the petitions.

Hydro Capital Development—NFAT Review

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by S. McClelland, C. Gillis, R. Arpin and many other Manitobans. Thank you.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Submitted on behalf of G. Snowdon, M. Gzebowski, L. Kotlanchak.

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

Therefore, we petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by N. Titchkosky, C. Letkeman, K. Norrie and many other fine Manitobans.

Hydro Capital Development—NFAT Review

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by W. Friesen, D. Letkeman, E. Thiessen and others.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

* (13:50)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by R. Pauls, E. Hoepfner, J. Bergen and many other Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education): I am pleased to table the 2012 Annual Report of the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund.

Mr. Speaker: Any further tabling of reports?

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Elsa Kaka, Wendy Furst and Brian Furst, who are the guests of the honourable member for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady).

And also in the public gallery we have from Warren Collegiate 60 grade 11 students under the direction of Ms. Lee Stewart. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler).

And also in the public gallery we have from Kelvin High School 20 grade 9 students under the direction of Mr. Ben Carr. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

PST Increase Impact on Families

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, it's \$1,600, Mr. Speaker. That's the additional cost for each Manitoba household just in the last year of spenDP budgets. And they get the money, but what worries me is they don't get the cost—the cost—the cost to Manitoba's competitiveness, the cost to Manitoba's small business community, the cost to Manitobans looking for work and especially the cost to Manitobans trying to make ends meet.

Now, the tax wall in this province under the NDP was higher than every province west of Québec before these tax hikes, but now it is even higher, even wider, even deeper, and these are real tax hikes. These really impact on real Manitobans, and they hurt, Mr. Speaker.

So I want the Premier to at least acknowledge that while the PST hike is a raise for the spenders, it is a cut for working Manitobans and their families.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, when we judge the credibility of the question from the Leader of the Opposition, we have to ask ourselves, what did he do when he was in office?

And this is what happened when he was in office: Welfare rates for every single Manitoban receiving social assistance were slashed by \$150 a month during his time in office, a reduction of \$150 a month. In addition, the National Child Benefit for people raising children was eliminated and made ineligible for any person on social assistance, which took another \$533 out of their pockets.

That's what we have to judge the credibility of the Leader of the Opposition on.

Mr. Pallister: Back to the Future was a good movie, Mr. Speaker, but it's not entertaining watching a government that lives by that adage.

The Premier needs more money for one reason: he has a spending problem. But the PST price tag means that NDP big spending means they get their money with big NDP taxes from little Manitobans.

So Susan [phonetic], a single mom, tells me one of her boys is in hockey next year but one of her boys isn't, and I want to know who's paying for that. And Lydia [phonetic], who is a widow, confined to her wheelchair, who was going to fly her granddaughter back to see her this summer is reconsidering that decision now, and who's going to pay for that? And Jerome [phonetic], who supports four children on his own, all at home, is looking for another part-time job, and who is paying for that?

Now, I understand the Premier's accustomed to dealing with billions and millions of dollars, but he needs to come down from the ivory tower to the ground where real Manitobans live, where real Manitobans are suffering the damage that he's creating,

And he needs to ask himself, if he won't come down, at least ask himself who's paying—

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

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, it's exactly because we do not want to go back to the future that we have to

put on the record what the Leader of the Opposition would have done.

A minimum wage worker in Manitoba earns another \$6,800 a year now than when they did when the members were in office. They raised the minimum wage once every four years a maximum of 40 cents. We have raised the minimum wage every single year we have been in office, and low-income people now have another \$6,800 a year of income that the members have voted against every single year.

They have voted against, every single year, an increase in the minimum wage in Manitoba. That does not help working Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Pallister: The Premier likes working Manitobans, Mr. Speaker; he likes to see them work and he's making them work harder every day.

You know, the members opposite get expense allowances; Manitobans don't. Members opposite have ministerial cars; Manitobans don't. They have to pay gas tax. They have to pay for their gas. They have to pay for car registration. They have to pay for hydro bills too.

And the PST has been made wider and deeper by this government, and that's not as much of a problem for someone making six figures, but \$1,600 per household is a hard deal for people making less than that. It is an impossible deal for somebody working on four figures of income.

Tax hikes are driving businesses away from this province, Mr. Speaker, but they're good for the business at Siloam Mission and Winnipeg Harvest, which I visited today.

When the Premier promised the people of Manitoba that he would be focused on families, he wanted their vote. I want to ask him: When did he lose his focus on Manitoba families?

Mr. Selinger: Unlike the leader opposite—he talks about a 1 per cent increase equalling \$1,600. A 1 per cent increase means you have to purchase \$160,000 of goods and services. Who's he really worried about? The only people purchasing \$160,000 are members of the opposition.

Average Manitobans have an increase in their personal exemption of \$250. They now have a minimum wage that pays them \$6,800 more a year, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, instead of indiscriminate cuts which would lay off teachers, nurses and low-income workers in Manitoba, more Manitobans are working than ever in the history of this province.

Manitobans deserve opportunities for jobs. We are ensuring they get that in the way we grow the Manitoba economy.

**PST Increase
Impact on Families**

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): The NDP's expansion last year of taxes and fees, coupled with this year's increase in PST, will cost a Manitoba family of four \$1,600 more, Mr. Speaker.

Now, a family in Southdale with a child who plays baseball at the community centre and takes piano lessons will pay, on average, \$1,110 per year, and that same family in Southdale with another child who takes dance and piano will pay an average of \$1,370 a year, for a total of \$2,480 a year. Now, strip away the \$1,600 that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) wants to take from that family to feed his spending addiction, Mr. Speaker, that only leaves \$780 for them, for this family, to pay for the programs for their children.

I want to ask—

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

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I appreciate the question. When the members opposite were in office, a family of \$60,000, a family of four, paid \$2,400 more annually for taxes. We have reduced taxes. They now pay \$2,410 less. A family of four at \$80,000 income now pays three hundred and three—\$3,372 less.

Middle-income families in Manitoba have risen to the top of the list on the affordability index that is put in the budget and uses the methodology of the members of the opposition.

A family of five, \$70,000, has the lowest cost of living of any province in Canada, far better than when they were in office, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Stefanson: Families in Manitoba work hard to make ends meet. They only wish the NDP government would do the same, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I'm asking for advice from the Minister of Finance. It's very simple. This same family of four in Southdale—I want to ask, how will he force them to pay for his spending addiction?

Will he force this family in Southdale to cut the programs of their children, or will he force them to borrow more money in order to pay for his spending addiction?

* (14:00)

Mr. Selinger: The families in Southdale, which I've had the opportunity to visit with on the doorstep many times, are very pleased. They're very pleased, Mr. Speaker, that we're building a brand new school in Sage Creek for those families. And those same families are very pleased that this government has a policy that every new school in Manitoba that is built in this province has a daycare in that school.

And, unlike when the Leader of the Opposition was in the federal parliament and wiped out the national 'darekey'—daycare program, we are expending daycare in Manitoba. We've doubled the number of spaces, we've increased wages, and we've provided a pension plan for daycare workers.

Mr. Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mrs. Stefanson: This is the Premier of our province that went door to door in Southdale and told every single person in Southdale that he wouldn't raise their taxes, Mr. Speaker. He has no credibility.

Now, again, I'm asking the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers)—this same family of four living in Southdale, I want to ask him: How will he force them to pay for his spending addiction? Will he force them to cut the programs for their kids, or will he force them to borrow the money in order to pay for their spending addiction? Which is it, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Selinger: I'm very glad that the member for Tuxedo has asked this question.

All families, including those in Southdale, will see an increase in their personal exemption for the fourth year in the row—personal exemption—by \$250. That will apply to the primary income earner. That will apply to the spouse or the dependent, Mr. Speaker. They will also see an expansion in daycare opportunities. They will also see more jobs available in Manitoba than we've ever seen in the history of the province.

Members opposite in the middle of the recession wanted to slash \$500 million worth of jobs in Manitoba. Our stimulus program created over 30,000 additional jobs, and now they're going to have a new school to boot, Mr. Speaker.

PST Increase Impact on Food Bank Usage

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, Manitoba continues to lead the country in food bank usage. In 2012, food bank usage grew 2.4 per cent across Canada; in Manitoba, it grew a whopping 14.2 per cent. This was before the massive tax grab that was this year's budget. Despite the government's rhetoric, the PST increase will impact every Manitoba family, including food bank users.

How does this government justify funding its spending addictions on the back of the working poor in Manitoba?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Acting Minister of Finance): Members opposite should know that since we've come into office there's been a decrease of 16,000 people between 2000 and 2010 living in poverty, Mr. Speaker. Members opposite should know that child poverty in Manitoba has decreased by 28 per cent since 2000.

But there is still work to do, and we're committed to doing that work, and it includes, as I've said before, Mr. Speaker—I know they're not interested in the answer. They pretend to be champions of the poor, but we're committed to education and investing in education, investing in training, investing in our universities, providing more opportunities for workers, more opportunities for learners of all ages so that they can be active members of our economy. And we're the government that's been investing in training every—

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

Mr. Wishart: They've had 13 years to make these plans reality.

Mr. Speaker, in response to the budget, David Northcott of Winnipeg Harvest expressed his frustration by saying, how many more meals a month will low-income families miss because of the 1 per cent increase in the PST?

These high taxes imposed by the spenDP government are driving Manitoba families to make difficult choices, choices like eating or having a roof over their head. This is an awful situation for any Manitoban to find themselves in.

Mr. Speaker, I ask again: When will this government quit funding its spending addiction on the backs of Manitoba's working poor?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I believe the First Minister addressed the fact that the working poor have benefited from incredible efforts to increase the minimum wage time and time again in this province, over \$6,000 more being made by minimum wage workers today than there were being made years ago. Members opposite increased the wage every four years; we've done it every year, and we're going to continue to move on that.

And members opposite have no credibility when it comes to talking about being champions of the poor, Mr. Speaker. Again, as mentioned, when the member opposite's leader was sitting at the Cabinet table he made decisions with that Cabinet to cut funding to our individuals on welfare. He made decisions to have a snitch line set up because they wanted you to turn in the neighbours—

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

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, this morning I attended an antipoverty round table and heard from Manitobans—Manitoba—who expressed the government's attitude this way: You only get to vote on a tax increase if we say you can, or, the government needs to find the money somewhere else, or, 1 per cent means a few litres of milk or a couple of loaves of bread; this means a lot to—if you have a family.

This government's attitude is reprehensible. When will the spenDP listen to concerned Manitobans about the true cost of tax increases and reverse its decision to increase the PST?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I'll remind the member there is no PST on food. And the fact that he attended a round table on poverty, I'm glad there's a first time for everything. The opposition's finally interested in poverty.

Now—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. We have a lot of guests with us here this afternoon, some of them perhaps for the first time, and I'm sure the honourable members in the House would want to leave a good impression to encourage our guests to come back and visit us again, and we also have the viewing public. And I'm asking for the co-operation of all honourable members, please allow for the questions to be posed by honourable members and the answers to flow from that. So I'm asking you to keep the level down a little bit so everyone can hear.

The honourable minister, to continue his answer.

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

And I should remind members opposite that we also have an ALL Aboard antipoverty committee that works with a number—that worked with a number of community organizations who have the same goal and objective in mind, and that is to reduce poverty in the province of Manitoba.

And the members opposite pretend to be champions of poverty today, but we know what they did last time they were in office. We know that they cut \$150 per month in benefits, they cut \$40 in 1993, \$14 more in 1994, \$95.60 less in 1996—

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

Bonnie Guagliardo Request for Inquest

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, ER wait times have reached terrifying heights, leaving Manitoba hospitals in a state of crisis.

Bonnie Guagliardo died because no one checked on her in the six hours that she waited after suffering a traumatic head injury. So she left and then she died.

And, Mr. Speaker, it isn't an isolated incident; it's a trend. New information shows that in a one-year period 8.1 per cent of all 287,000 patients going to ERs last year in Winnipeg left before being seen by a physician. In January alone this year 300 patients left Victoria Hospital ER without being seen by a physician. These rising numbers show that we are seeing—we will see more of these situations occurring unless there's a comprehensive examination of the circumstances that led to such a tragic breakdown in care.

Will the minister admit that these questions surrounding the death of Bonnie Guagliardo can only be addressed in an inquest?

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

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to the member yesterday and the last time that we met in this House, the Chief Medical Examiner is reviewing the specific issues regarding the case that he's raising. And, of course, the CME has the ability to look at all the facts comprehensively and to call for an inquest, and he

has not yet made a ruling on that issue and I would suggest that we give him the opportunity to do that.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I can report to the House that we are working very diligently to provide opportunities for individuals who do not need to be seen by an emergency room physician but do need to receive care have opportunities by increasing access to our family doctors, by increasing access through QuickCare clinics and through our access centres.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Conference Board of Canada Report Manitoba Ranking

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, it was report card time in Manitoba schools a few weeks ago, and Manitoba is like the student who squirms when the teacher hands out the report cards because they know what's coming.

And tomorrow the Conference Board of Canada will officially release its major report on health status of provincial populations. The new report is called Paving the Road to Higher Performance. But for this government the—a more apt—appropriate title report might be Paving the Road with Good Intentions, and indeed the minister tells us she has good intentions, but Manitoba scores a D in this report. No province fared worse in the scoring of 30 indicators. Clearly, there's more and more evidence that Manitoba's health-care system is under stress and underperforming.

What is the minister's plan to get us out of last place?

* (14:10)

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Yes, Mr. Speaker, the member has been reviewing the summaries of this report, knows full well that Manitoba ranks in the same place as Saskatchewan, all the Atlantic provinces. We know that this Conference Board of Canada report concerns health status.

We know that we have to work very hard to improve the health status, perhaps no more greatly than dealing with the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. We know, Mr. Speaker, that we have to continue to invest in access to professionals, in healthy food, in running water, in good education, in suitable housing. This is a shared responsibility. I just wish the members opposite would ask their cousins in Ottawa to get on board.

Bonnie Guagliardo
Request for Inquest

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, I remind this minister that Manitoba scored dead last, and yet she is happy with the chant of we're No. 10.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to bring forward to this Legislature that ambulance off-load delays at ERs are increasingly getting worse. In 2011, the average off-load time for ambulances was 66 minutes. In 2012, the average off-load time was 75 minutes. Those delays now result in \$1.2 million per year in penalties paid by the Province to the City.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that Manitoba's health-care system is spending a lot of money to put people at risk. The pressure on ERs is mounting. The system is showing that it is under stress.

Will this minister begin to address this situation and the serious wait-time problems that continue to occur and call an inquest into the death of—

Mr. Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): The Conference Board of Canada report, of course, speaks about the health status, and indeed it does speak about performance.

Mr. Speaker, performance is hiring back three nurses for every one the Tories fired. Performance is hiring new doctors in Manitoba every single year when during the '90s we saw a net loss year after year after year. Performance is rebuilding or building new over a hundred new facilities across Manitoba, in contrast to the Tories, who froze all health capital. Performance is increasing the number of spaces in our medical school to have a record graduating class last week of 105. They cut the spaces in medical school.

Keeyask Centre
Project Update

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): In 2009-2010, this NDP government funded a community centre through Manitoba Hydro for the TCN First Nation. The NDP forwarded more than \$4.5 million for the Keeyask Centre that was never built. It has never been built. The member for Kildonan called it a misunderstanding and then he said, and I quote, I think it would be advantageous to all of us to be really comfortable here and to have answers to the question.

Well, the question is: Where is the \$4.5-million Keeyask Centre that the NDP funded?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the member took the quote out of context. I was talking about the member inaccurately 'protraying' some information that he provided inaccurately at five hours of committee where the member asked question after question after question that the Manitoba Hydro president answered and the chair of Manitoba Hydro answered.

I'd only like to remind the member that if you use some of those answers to find out the fact that we have the lowest hydro rates in the country and we've already paid a billion dollars—a billion dollars—to First Nations for areas that they flooded, Grand Rapids and other areas that they flooded, and as a result we're trying to work with First Nations to go forward. If he paid attention to that, maybe he would learn something from those five hours of committee questions.

Mr. Schuler: Five hours and no answers. In fact, three years later, no Keeyask Centre, something the NDP member for Kildonan calls a misunderstanding.

If the news isn't bad enough, the NDP member for Kildonan then funded the Keeyask community centre for \$750,000 for 2011 and then again for 2012 for operations. This money paid for a community centre that didn't exist, paid for staff that didn't exist, paid for programming that never happened.

How could the NDP member for Kildonan fund the operations of a community centre that doesn't exist?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, the member is wrong. He's misstating the facts. It does get frustrating, I think, for First Nations communities when Hydro provides them with funding to do projects and members opposite characterize that as not going forward or wasting the money.

We've got their monies put into trust from Hydro to First Nations communities to use as the communities see fit. I told the member at committee he ought to ask—he ought to talk to the community, who have the responsibility for those funding and that program, and not try to make political hay out of something that is done in order to benefit the community and to provide reparations for past dealings that happened with Hydro, that perhaps flooding and other—

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

I'm having a great deal of difficulty hearing both the questions and the answers that are posed here this afternoon in question period. I'm sure if there was a breach of the rules that all honourable members would want me to make a ruling on that, so please give me the opportunity to hear both the questions posed by members and also the answers that would flow from that. So I'm asking for your co-operation to keep the level down a little bit so I can hear, please.

The honourable member for St. Paul has the floor.

Mr. Schuler: Five hours later and two questions, and still no answers, Mr. Speaker.

The NDP funded a Keeyask community centre for \$4.5 million that was never built. After the Keeyask community centre was never built, the NDP member for Kildonan funded the operating costs that never existed. The TCN First Nation has a \$6-million virtual community centre: no centre, no staff, no programs.

Mr. Speaker, this is not political hay. The community wants to know: Where is their centre that was funded to the tune of \$6 million under the member for Kildonan's watch, was never built, nothing was ever done? How could he have let this happen? Why doesn't he stand up for the people there and explain to them where their centre is? Why doesn't he answer one question?

Mr. Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, funds were provided in trust from Manitoba Hydro to the TCN community that makes the decisions.

The only funding that went from members opposite to First Nations when they were in office were to pay to have a political party started in the worst scandal in Manitoba history, Mr. Speaker, and to drag in the government and to say that—*[interjection]* The best I can do is try to provide funding to First Nations that have not gotten opportunities in the past and are building for the future, not to—

Mr. Speaker: I'm having difficulty hearing, again, the answers to the questions posed by the honourable member for St. Paul.

I'm asking for the co-operation of honourable members. Please keep the level down so I can at least hear what's being said in the House. I know most members are familiar with the rules, and you would want me to rule if there was a breach of those rules. So I'm asking for the co-operation of all honourable members. Please give me that opportunity to hear both the questions by members of the House and answers by other members of the House.

The honourable Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines, to conclude his *[inaudible]*.

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated at committee, the member ought to talk to the TCN community, who are responsible for that and whose funds were provided for that purpose.

NDP Convention Agenda

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): I understand that the party opposite's having discussions this weekend. I'm concerned about the detachment that may be reinforced by the absence of certain topics from their agenda.

For example, I understand that in respect of the PST hike there are zero resolutions to be presented, and I know Tim Sale and Ed Schreyer aren't attending because there's nothing about the tripling of Manitoba Hydro's debt or the doubling of their rates. I also understand that there is no reference whatsoever to any resolution proposing to raise the basic personal exemption to a reasonable level or to increase the rent allowance for Manitobans who experience disability.

So, at one time, the party opposite had an image which was of a grassroots party, concerned with the poor, concerned with small businesses, concerned with the plight of struggling farmers, concerned about high taxes hitting real people.

I'm wondering if this agenda isn't reinforcing the image, and I'll ask the Premier if he thinks this is so, of a party that's more interested in keeping power for itself than it is in empowering other people.

* (14:20)

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, it's a great question because when you look at the Progressive Conservative conventions, they're held in secret, no media are allowed, there's no resolutions that are generated by grassroots constituency organizations, senators seem to be running the show from behind the scenes and you don't really know

what comes out. There's the occasional puff of smoke that comes out, and we hear that they're bragging about how much public subsidy they got in the last election. That's what happens in their closed-door conventions.

Our members generate resolutions based on democratic discussion at the constituency level. We have open debate. We have open conventions. We have real differences of opinion. But one thing we come together on, we're all there for the best interests of the future of all Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Pallister: So half a billion in new taxes and nobody on that side and none of their members is at all worried, Mr. Speaker. It's amazing detachment. This isn't the people's party; this is a press-release party.

Come on. Higher taxes hurt real people in the real world in a real way, and the NDP is going to debate heritage trees. Okay? No debate on the hydro—a referendum on provincial fish. Hey, no referendum on provincial taxes. The only thing with any contentious to it is the proposal to have a mandatory voting rule brought in, and the only reason that's contentious is because the Premier took away the right of Manitobans to vote.

I mean, they're so detached that a half a billion in new debt and they're all in agreement. A half a billion in new taxes, nobody disagrees. A new vote tax to fund the operations of their party, and as opposed to last year, no problem, we're unanimous on all these things.

My grandpa used to say when people are always in agreement somebody ain't thinking. I think that describes the meeting this coming weekend pretty well, Mr. Speaker. When did this party stop thinking?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, if only we could know what happens at a Progressive Conservative event. I mean, really, we don't even know why they don't have it at the Manitoba Club. That's where the doors could be closed like they were for a hundred years.

Mr. Speaker, they have private conventions to do privatizations of the telephone system. They have private conventions where they protect people that make racist comments in the media. They have private conventions where they brag about how much public subsidy they get. They have private conventions where a puff of smoke goes up and suddenly there's a new leader without any competition.

It's a party of the rich for the rich, behind closed doors, Mr. Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

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

The honourable member for River Heights has the floor.

Child Apprehensions Government Approach

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, various people have testified at the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry that the way the NDP runs the child and family service system is deeply flawed. CBC has reported, and I quote: Many spoke of harbouring deep suspicions about, if not outright fear of, Child and Family Services.

Mr. Speaker, CFS's record of rampant apprehensions has created this climate of fear of CFS. When families think of CFS, they should be thinking first about the help that CFS provides to keep their families together instead of the actions it might take to tear them apart.

I ask the Minister of Family Services: What specifically is she doing for vulnerable families in Manitoba to end the climate of fear of CFS?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour): I thank the member for the question.

Certainly, throughout the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry we have heard testimony—not only deeply troubling testimony but also testimony of some of the things that are being done in the child welfare system. And, certainly, in the coming months we'll see a report with some recommendations to further those changes.

One of the opportunities I've had is to go and visit with agencies with front-line workers on the ground and learn about some of those changes, things like family enhancement programs where workers are assigned to work with families who are in crisis, who are dealing with very significant issues and help to keep that family together so those kids don't have to be apprehended.

And I asked similar questions to the member, you know, does this work if the family is suspicious of CFS? And the answer that they've given me is that it is working, and they want to do more of that and we've been funding that.

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I table information which shows that the rate of child apprehensions in Manitoba under the NDP is 10 times higher than in other countries.

Reporter James Turner of the Winnipeg Sun, who follows the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry closely, writes that CFS is seen as, and I quote, a gigantic government machine, the feared child police which operates largely in secret and appears completely unaccountable for the decisions it makes.

I ask the minister: What real change will she actually make to make sure that CFS is an organization that primarily focuses on supporting children and families instead of being hated and feared by so many vulnerable people?

Ms. Howard: It was the former minister of Family Services that brought into this House a law that was very clear that the mandate of Child and Family Services is to put the interests of children first, and, unfortunately, too often in our province that means that the best interest of a child is not with their family where they're being hurt and abused and neglected. But it also does mean that we work with the community, with child welfare agencies and other organizations that we fund to put in supports to families, to help families get education, to help them make a better life so that hopefully one day they can provide a loving home for their children.

But the No. 1 priority of the system is to keep children safe, and nobody likes it when a child has to be apprehended, but we do have to stand behind the child welfare workers that have to make that very difficult decision every day, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, as the minister has indicated, the CFS sees its primary role now as apprehensions, at 10 times the rate in other countries. But the primary focus should be helping children and families, as in many other areas of the world. The Minister of Family Services must make the changes to the CFS system so that apprehension is the last alternative after all other alternatives have been explored.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Family Services: Will she admit that there is a climate of fear of the CFS department and that a loving, helping, individualized approach by CFS to every family needing help would be much better?

Ms. Howard: I want to be very clear, Mr. Speaker. What I said is that the child and family services agencies, they put the safety of children first; that is their priority. Sometimes that means those children have to be apprehended. But those are the agencies that are also involved in working with young people who are in the care of the system to extend that care so that they can go to school, so that they can get a job, so they can live independently. These are the agencies that are working with foster families, who not only work with foster children but also reach out to the parents of those children to help to keep some of that relationship intact. These are the agencies that are doing innovative things like working with the entire family even when sometimes they have to remove those children to deal with some of the issues that that family is facing.

The child welfare system does incredible work on a daily—

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

Roots of Empathy Program Update

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): As a mom, I really appreciate the supportive, educational environment that is offered to Manitoba students. And one of the programs that I know my children have enjoyed the most, especially my son Heiko, is the Roots of Empathy program where he had the chance to participate in, and it's something that he and his friends talk about the opportunity that they had to have a baby come into the classroom, meet the mom, meet the baby and all the wonderful things that that brought to them.

Today we're celebrating the 10th anniversary of Roots of Empathy being offered to Manitoba students, and I was wondering if our Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities could tell us more about what's—of—more of an update on what's happening with the program.

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): I was proud to have Mary Gordon in town, who's a internationally recognized founder of Roots of Empathy, a national award-winning educator, child advocate and author.

This evidence-based program brings babies and moms into the classroom, Mr. Speaker. It teaches empathy, decreases aggression, improves classroom behaviour from students from kindergarten to

grade 8. These babies are Manitoba's youngest teachers.

The Province is investing over \$350,000 into this program. It reaches 5,500 students per year, 26 school divisions, 15 First Nations, and it has reached over 41,000 Manitoba students. Thank you.

Flooding (2011) Compensation Claim Settlements

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): With the flood of 2011 when this NDP government forced water into Lake Manitoba, it was a tough decision. The hard-working folks took this government at their word for compensation and waited and waited and waited some more. Two years is enough for their claims to get settled, yet there is still over 500 outstanding claims this government is still sitting on.

* (14:30)

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask the First Minister to address this issue because the folks have been misled for way too long, and it's this First Minister that's going to be accountable for his ministers.

Will he do it today? Will he stand up for the flood victims? It's been two years, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): Well, Mr. Speaker, the only word to describe the efforts that were put in in fighting the flood and the recovery stage from 2011-2012: unprecedented.

We, Mr. Speaker, as of date, have put in place \$1.2 billion, both in terms of flood fighting and compensation. In around Lake Manitoba we put in \$120 million. We had claims as high as \$570,000, payments of very significant compensation and assistance.

And I want to say to the member opposite, he should talk to people around the lake, because the fact is, Mr. Speaker, there's been an unprecedented response, and the next step is the unprecedented investment in infrastructure. It's too bad they don't support that, as they voted against the budget that's going to put in place the protection for the people of those lakes.

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

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, this minister should point a finger at himself. He has missed this file. His First Minister's missed his file. Shame on this government.

Mr. Speaker, 500 victims have been abused by this government. The Finance Minister went out to Langruth two years ago—two years ago—and said the claims would be simple and fast, yet this government's still sitting on 500 claims.

I want to ask the First Minister again: Will he stand up for those flood victims? Will he do the right thing? Let's get this settled once and for all, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ashton: We stood, Mr. Speaker, with those flood victims, and when we put in place the emergency outlet from Lake St. Martin, that led to a significant drop in the lake levels. We work with victims in and around the lake.

And I find it rather interesting, Mr. Speaker, that earlier on this year, when me—we had to take unprecedented action to make sure we could operate the Portage Diversion, members opposite were so unconcerned about that that they actually supported blocking the operation—the Portage Diversion.

We were there fighting the flood. We're there in the recovery stage. And with the budget we put in place, we're going to be there protecting those flood victims in the future. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, they're against that, because they voted against it.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Canada Pension Plan Increase

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Mr. Speaker, Manitobans are concerned about their retirement and know it's time to improve their pensions.

Manitoba's Finance Minister will be meeting soon with Canada's Finance Minister and his provincial counterparts to discuss the issue of increasing the contributions and benefits to the Canada Pension Plan.

Our Manitoba NDP government has been active in the CPP negotiations, working for a meaningful increase. Our government's objective is to negotiate a significant increase.

My own preference is the same as the Canadian Labour Congress and other labour groups, to work to double the CPP as soon as possible.

To increase the CPP, seven provinces with 70 per cent of the population and the federal government, must agree to the increase. Provinces

like Ontario, Québec and Manitoba have been advocating significant enhancement.

The Canada Pension Plan is the cornerstone of Canada's retirement income system. No other retirement savings vehicle provides the same advantages at so little cost.

We're pleased the Manitoba government is working with the federal government to work with the provinces to open up CPP so that Canadians can increase their savings in a low-risk environment, in a professionally administered program. We know that an modest increase in premiums can finance a significant increase in CPP benefits for all Canadians.

Today, Mr. Speaker, the CPP, at the time of retirement, pays only 25 per cent of average pre-retirement income, or slightly more than \$11,000 per year at best. If you add the maximum OAS/GIS to that, the two together replace a maximum of 38 per cent pre-retirement income. Most pension experts say 50 to 70 per cent is an appropriate goal. So that's a 32 per cent gap to close.

Under the current Conservative changes, if you were born after April 1st, 1958, you'll have to work two extra years to be eligible for Old Age Security.

Manitoba working people should be able to retire at full pension at age 65. Our government will continue to work hard to ensure that all Manitobans have access to true retirement security.

Randy Davison

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): I would like to take a moment to remember a well-respected member of the Portage la Prairie community, Mr. Randy Davison, who recently passed away at the age of 56.

Randy grew up the rural community of Souris, Manitoba, and maintained lifelong links to that community. Randy moved to the community of Portage la Prairie in 2000, where he established a well-known restaurant, Boston Pizza. He always made sure Boston Pizza was involved in many community events and fundraisers and, by example, Randy taught people how to give, how to be part of the community and how to be involved in your community. Randy was a major supporter of local hockey team, the Portage Terriers, and he always supported them financially as well as being a fan. He welcomed the players and their families into his restaurant and took the time to get to know them and

to welcome them into his adopted community. Randy's Boston Pizza hosted many fundraising events from youth hockey to ringette teams.

While Randy was dedicated to his work in the restaurant, he still managed to serve as president of the Portage Golf Club for almost three years. He was passionate about the golf course, his golf games and always had time to talk to local golfers and, once again, a welcoming word for visitors who came to golf—to golf a game or attend tournaments.

Randy had many friends, and I know he counted amongst them the honourable member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister).

Prior to Randy's passing, he was involved in major fundraising social for Central Plains Cancer Care Services where nearly \$28,000 was raised. Sadly, Randy missed his party, but was there in spirit at the party in his honour where over 400 people attended whose lives Randy had touched with his thoughtfulness, generosity and kindness.

Mr. Speaker, as a fellow member of the Portage community, I am honoured to inform the House about the great contributions that Randy has made to the community I represent. He will be greatly missed.

Growing Opportunities International Concert

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): Mr. Speaker, it's always great to see our youth get involved in creating positive change around the world. For several years now, Growing Opportunities International, or GO!, has been engaging young people here in Winnipeg to support initiatives in East Africa.

GO!'s latest project is Hero Home, a home for orphans and street children in Tanzania that will use sport and recreational activities to teach life skills and promote a sense of belonging. Amanda Furst, GO!'s executive director, is in East Africa now working on Hero Home as well as on some additions to a previous project, the St. Laurent Nursery School in Rwanda.

GO! works with communities overseas to ensure that their projects are sustainable. To support these projects GO! is constantly fundraising, holding events and engaging people here in Winnipeg. Schools across the city have gotten involved with GO!, including École Bannatyne School and Westwood Collegiate in my constituency.

Just last month Westwood was at it again with their Go! Homeless event. Students simulated a day in the life of a homeless child in Tanzania by spending an entire day without food or electronics and carrying all of their belongings around with them. In the evening they slept over at the school where they participated in activities and listened to speakers who have had first-hand experience with homelessness.

This past winter GO! partnered with local comedian, Aisha Alfa, to raise funds for Hero Home. Aisha has been spearheading a campaign called You Rock to promote random acts of kindness around the city. Together they put on a fundraising concert at the West End Cultural Centre called the You Rock Comedy and Soul Jam.

I got a chance to attend the concert and it had a great lineup including Aisha Alfa, Fringe Festival comedy group, Hot Thespian Action, local R & B singer, Flo, and the debut performance of a young student named Reynalynne Gacilan. This event was highly successful, Mr. Speaker, and Amanda and her team did an amazing job in putting it all together.

Mr. Speaker, there are many dedicated Manitobans, young and old, who are working in a variety of ways to effect positive social change, and I want to commend Growing Opportunities International for their hard work in connecting kindness here in our home community—

Mr. Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Georgia Burns

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, art is something that can bring people together and young and old can create a masterpiece that is recognized around the world.

Sixteen years old is a young age to be nationally recognized for achievements in art, but that's exactly what has happened to a young girl from my constituency. Georgia Burns, a 16-year-old student at Roseau Valley School in Dominion City, was recently selected as one of 25 winners in the Canada-wide Windows to the World, Kids Helping Kids contest. This is national art prize which—Georgia being selected from over 13,000 entries from all across the country. Roseau Valley School has around 250 students from kindergarten to grade 12, so for a student to be nationally recognized is quite an achievement.

* (14:40)

Georgia also had the chance to fly to Ottawa—to Toronto for a gala awards night where she was honoured with a trophy and the admiration of her fellow artists. Her family made a—the trip along with her, giving Georgia an extra boost of confidence. This award also comes with a very special honour—having her art displayed in a newly built hospital in Jerusalem. The hope is that one day Georgia will be able to travel to Israel to see her artwork on display.

As someone who has been interested in art and drawing for as long as she can remember, this is a prestigious honour and a real testament to the future success that she will one day achieve. It is only a matter of time before her work will be on display in the famous art galleries of the world. Growing up in a small town in Manitoba, Georgia has proven that anything is possible in the field of your choice regardless of where you come from.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating Georgia on this well-deserved honour, and I look forward to seeing her future successes in the world of art.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

PST Increase

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, there are many problems with the NDP's decision to raise the PST from 7 per cent to 8 per cent on July the 1st.

First, the NDP government should have made it a priority to get the Province's finances in better order. It's unacceptable that the Province overspent its expenditure budget last year by \$130 million. Taking care to meet its expenditure budget would have provided \$130 million of the \$200 million in revenue the NDP expect to bring in by raising the PST this year.

Second, the NDP should have been much more transparent and open in showing precisely where the new money is going to demonstrate that an increase in PST revenue will all be going toward new expenditures for infrastructure.

It's become glaringly apparent during this legislative session and in Estimates that the NDP does not have a list of the projects the money from increasing the PST will be spent on, and the budget expenditure documents are not clear on precisely where the money will be spent.

Furthermore, the PST is not treating those on low incomes or seniors with fixed incomes fairly or with respect. There's no rebate on the PST for those on low incomes, for example, as there should be and as there is with the GST. Mr. Speaker, in the gallery today are seniors advocates Muriel Koscielny and Margaret Sapishchuk [*phonetic*], who are here because they are very concerned about the approach being taken by this NDP government.

Many, many times in this Legislature I've raised with the provincial government the need to increase the shelter rate for those on social assistance to 75 per cent of the market rate. Make Poverty History and more than 140 other organizations are calling for these increases as a decent and appropriate action to take. Too many Manitoba families are having to use the food money they need for their children to cover their rent, and as a result we have too many children going hungry and having to use food banks. These same children are at much greater risk for apprehension by CFS, because CFS apprehends children if there's not enough food in the fridge. Manitoba has the highest proportional increase in food bank use of all provinces under the NDP, and it's a sad testament to the ineffectiveness of the NDP's approach to help those who are on low income and who are vulnerable.

It is of paramount importance that the NDP begin to manage the Province's—

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

GRIEVANCES

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Charleswood, on a grievance.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I do rise on a grievance today, Mr. Speaker, and we've spent the last number of weeks hearing about how this NDP government has certainly changed its approach and style to governing in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, they are certainly not the government of Gary Doer. At least Gary Doer was a pragmatist, and at least he listened to people. I doubt very much that he would have gone down the road that this current government is taking and increase the PST as we've seen this government do, but not only that. At least we know that Gary Doer besides being a pragmatist, he did listen.

And we're not seeing that from this government at all. They're not listening. They've become very,

very dictatorial. In some instances, as we've seen with the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), they've taken a bully approach to dealing with some of the iconic organizations that are out there rather than doing things in a consultative manner. That is really the sign of a government that has been around too long, Mr. Speaker. It's a sign of a government that has become very long in the tooth, very, very arrogant, and they are not listening to the people that put them in this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, we saw in the last election every single NDP candidate in Manitoba ran around to every door and told people that they were not going to raise the PST—every single one of them. The Premier (Mr. Selinger) and everybody in this House today behaved in a manner that really was not very respectful of the public. This NDP government, in the last election, lied to Manitobans, and every single NDP candidate in Manitoba went to the doors and told people that they were not going to increase the PST, whether it was the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers), whether it was the Premier, whether it was the member from Southdale, Gimli, St. Norbert, Kirkfield Park, Assiniboia, Riel.

Every one, Mr. Speaker—we saw every one of them go to the doors and mislead Manitobans in the last election. And they have since stood in the House here on a number of occasions, and they have actually supported that same decision they made. And that was, even though they told Manitobans they weren't going to increase the PST, they have actually repeated their support of their budget in supporting a raise in the PST.

Mr. Speaker, that is a level of deceit that I don't know that this Legislature has seen before, and I really doubt that Gary Doer would have brought in a PST hike. It—and he would have known, because he did have a bigger world view and a bigger picture view of what this would do to competitiveness and where it would hurt Manitobans.

But not only is it hurting Manitoba families—and we've heard today and we had some great examples of where this is going to hurt the working poor, at a gathering today at Winnipeg Harvest. Certainly, we have been hearing from people there that this is going to hurt them, and when members across the way say, well, there's no PST on food. They don't seem to understand that when you have to pay PST on a number of things, it affects that budget in that home. So, yes, food might be the thing that is sacrificed. They may not be paying PST on it, but

they may not be able to buy the food because the PST has gone up and they've been forced to pay for other things.

And so hearing some of the comments from people in the House and the member from Gimli today yelling across, well, food isn't charged with PST. In fact, they don't seem to get it; they don't seem to get that families have a certain budget in their homes. There will be people that are going to have to make a decision about whether or not they can get that extra litre of milk or that loaf of bread or that medicine, or going on a vacation or maybe denying their child an opportunity to take music lessons because the money only goes so far.

A lot of people aren't like this government; this government tends to spend far more than they take in. We've seen that with the way they have increased the deficit here every year. We've had a structural deficit now for a long time. We've now seen this NDP government double the debt in this Province. They are hurting future generations and they are hurting our kids. They are hurting the people that are working here in the government who are going to be stuck with the bill that this government is going to leave future generations.

And this government just doesn't seem to understand what this PST increase is going to do. It's going to hurt families, it's hurting businesses—we're already hearing that, particularly small businesses. We're hearing about businesses that might have to lay off staff. We're hearing about some small businesses that might not be able to hire summer students because they're not sure they're going to have the money.

There is a trickle-down effect by what this government is doing—there is a triple-down effect and people are going to feel the pinch. And one of the things they haven't seemed to take into account is the fact that prices are going to rise eventually. They are going to have to—the NDP government is going to have to recognize that what is going to happen is people are going to end up paying more and more because the trickle effect, that PST effect, is going to be passed on.

We've seen it already; StatsCanada came out with a report, and it's already showing that Manitoba has the highest annual rate of inflation, and that's two months running now. Are we going to see a trend? And when we have the highest inflation rate in Canada for two months in a row, we're starting to see what the effects of NDP taxation has done.

* (14:50)

And the fees that actually increased were the vehicle registration fees and homeowners' home and mortgage insurance are costlier because of what the government did in the last budget, and that was expand the PST to those particular items. And what it has done, it has now raised the rate of inflation in Manitoba and, in fact, it is now four times higher than Canada's annual rate. Mr. Speaker, that is a testament to what the NDP did in their budget, second last budget, when they expanded PST to a number of areas.

This government has now shown they're not willing to listen to people. There were 500 people on the steps of this Legislature a few weeks ago. The Premier (Mr. Selinger) couldn't even be bothered to show up. The members, every member here in this House snuck out the back door. There was somebody on the second floor peeking through a window, listening through a window, but they didn't have the courage to come down and face the public. And I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that a good leader is someone who listens, even if he doesn't like the tune. So I would suggest that this Premier took a very, very—a disrespectful approach to people that came here to speak their mind. This Premier didn't even have the courage to go out there and listen.

And while this government certainly likes to look back to the past, I would indicate that past Cabinet ministers in other governments at least had the courage to go out there and face people and talk to people that came to speak to them. In fact, the Premier of the province of the decade before this government, the Premier Gary Filmon, insisted that his Cabinet ministers always show up at rallies to hear what people had to say. And we saw with this government, they did not do that, they don't do that. Ignorance is not bliss. In fact, what we saw, ignorance is arrogance by this government.

So this government, Mr. Speaker, has not been listening, and instead what they've done is they've picked the pockets of Manitobans for half a billion dollars—half a billion dollars—that they want to spend and—instead of leaving it in the pockets of Manitobans to choose how they want to spend their money, and the reason they've done it is because they can't control their spending. They have a spending addiction and that is something that runs in their DNA. I fully, fully believe that because we saw it with every single NDP government this province has ever had. They don't know how to reign in their

spending. Howard Pawley government was a perfect example. It runs in their DNA. That's how they are shaped as individuals. They will spend and spend, and they don't know how to be responsible for that spending.

So we have a government that is addicted to spending and now Manitobans are going to be paying dearly for their addiction, their mismanagement and their spending. And Manitobans are being treated very, very unfairly in this, Mr. Speaker, and I would really encourage this government to have a look, have a better look at the people that put them in here and to respect them more and to listen to them better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Any further grievances? Seeing none—

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Deputy Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you might call Bill 20.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Mr. Speaker: We'll now proceed to call Bill 20, motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), that The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act (Various Acts Amended), standing in name of the honourable member for Sprucewoods, who has 12 minutes remaining.

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

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): It's indeed a pleasure to resume debate on Bill 20 and, certainly, we look forward to opposition members joining in the debate on Bill 20. We haven't heard much of them lately, have we? Mr. Speaker, they've been very quiet. You know, I saw it was—*[interjection]* Oh, now they've got lots to say.

You know, I was interested in question period today, as I know you were, Mr. Speaker, sitting on the edge of your chair, in fact, having to get up a few times to interject some House responsibility during the course of question period. I found it quite interesting members did have quite a bit to say at that point in time, but they only get into debate on Bill 20. They've been very, very quiet, and there's certainly some interesting points were raised today in

question period and non-answer period and, clearly, I think we've seen some things with this NDP government that keep repeating themselves. And they're very good at putting politics ahead of great public policy, and we know that they will do almost anything and say almost anything to stay in power, and we're just a couple of years, you know, out—away from an election. We're—just had one about a year and a half away and, clearly, there was a lot of promises made by the NDP at that time.

You know, the idea of the flood issue was brought up, and we know, we were out campaigning just after the flood, and there was all kinds of promises made by the First Minister and, actually, all kinds of ministers on that side of the House, that Manitobans were going to be looked after in the face of that disaster in 2011.

Well, the fact of the matter—they said that was going to happen. The reality is, Mr. Speaker, hundreds of Manitobans remain sitting there without being compensated for damages that was caused directly by this NDP government, and that's really the point of the matter. The government will say one thing before the election, but their actions are not there to show what they really, really have to say, and that's unfortunate.

Now, and we also heard before the election, of course, the big—the granddaddy of them all: we're not going to raise taxes. And the thought of raising the PST, the First Minister said, was nonsense. Well, you know, we came back, we were in the House just months after that election. That's the first thing they did, was broaden PST on many goods and services, all impacts—will impact all Manitobans across our great province, Mr. Speaker.

And you know, at that time, that was one thing. You know, that broadening of the tax base was one thing, and that cost Manitobans, you know, hundreds of million dollars—hundreds of millions of dollars out of their pockets, just on that expansion of the PST.

Now, a year later, we have another budget where the government still, you know, in my view, Manitobans are thinking that, you know, surely they wouldn't raise taxes again, back to back, because they told us that before, just a year and a half ago. Well, they did, Mr. Speaker. Here they are on the verge of July 1st; they're promising to raise the provincial sales tax by one point, up to 8 per cent. And not only that, now, what they're saying is they're going to take away Manitobans' democratic right to vote.

And I found it extremely interesting, and I think you maybe picked this up, Mr. Speaker, that the First Minister was up there today talking about democracy. Now, how can he talk about democracy on one side of his mouth? On the other side of his mouth, they're taking away Manitobans' right to vote. I don't think that's democracy and I don't think Manitobans believe that is democracy.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the NDP will use the ability and the thought of a vote when it suits them best politically. You know, we go back, we talk about the Canadian Wheat Board debate a couple years ago, and the, you know, the NDP were really excited about having Manitoba farmers give them the right to vote. And, you know, clearly, that's the democratic way.

But now we have a law in the books where it says that Manitobans actually have the right to vote if the government is going to increase the PST. That is a law, Mr. Speaker, and now they want to change that law, to take away Manitobans' democratic right to vote. And I found that extremely appalling, and I think the Manitobans that come out here and come down here cold nights in spring and get their placards out and say, you know, we don't want to stand for this increase in the PST, they're appalled as well at the NDP's decision to move forward.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP are all about democracy when it suits their interests, and that's the unfortunate part. You know, we knew—it was brought up today in question period, as well, in terms of the NDP convention coming up this weekend, and some of the resolutions that weren't—that aren't going to be debated, weren't on the list to be debated. And it's interesting that the whole idea, the whole premise of an increase in PST isn't going to be debated at the convention this weekend.

And I think we must have missed that. Maybe it was debated last year in last year's convention. Maybe we missed that in last year's convention. Maybe the NDP voted on that and then we unanimously passed it last convention they had. I don't know. Maybe that's something. It was just an oversight on our part, and we missed it altogether. Maybe we should have expected that increase in the PST; but nevertheless, it's not on the agenda this time, Mr. Speaker, and we're certainly curious to see what other resolutions bring—are bringing forward.

You know, clearly, they're interested in a vote. They went to the public to get involved in a vote on what the next fish of Manitoba is going to be, which

is quite interesting, and we've got some really good ideas. We've got some really good ideas what the fish of the province should be and, you know, Manitobans have been suckered before, you know, by this NDP government, and you know, I'm just throwing that out.

* (15:00)

And, you know, we shouldn't be saying—now I know the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), he's in a tough situation here. He's in a very tough situation here. He's having a hard time balancing his budget. And, you know, we saw it last year. We had a several-hundred-million-dollar increase in revenue to the Province. He was still half a billion dollars short in balancing his budget. Well we've—even with the increase in provincial sales tax this year, he still says he's going to be a half a billion dollars short in balancing his budget. And I repeat, Mr. Speaker, that's a half a billion dollars short in terms of balancing his budget.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we've seen the Minister of Finance—not entirely his fault—his predecessor was the minister of Finance for years and years before him and we saw the First Minister—he rang up the debit card here, the credit card in the province of Manitoba so that we're looking at a \$30-billion debt now. So I can't blame the whole financial situation just on the current Minister of Finance. The previous minister of Finance had a lot to do with where we are in terms of our financial situation right now.

But the Minister of Finance doesn't seem to be able to use the concept of getting value for money. And he's taking the same train of thought as the minister before him. He's just out there and he wants to spend money. He assumes—and the government assumes—the solution to everything is to spend money. Now we'll ask him about infrastructure; well, we spent this much money. Yes but, we say to them—where's the results? We know you can spend money but let's talk about results.

And that was the interesting debate we had yesterday morning, Mr. Speaker. It was all about accountability and transparency. And that's clearly what we're asking the Minister of Finance and, in fact, this government, is to be accountable and transparent to the taxpayers here in Manitoba.

And, you know, we're not asking the Minister of Finance to slice and dice and, you know, make like a swordfish. We're just asking him to have a realistic look at where he can save us some money and use

the money wisely to get the best bang for our buck, if you will, as taxpayers. And we think there's lots of opportunity for that, Mr. Speaker.

You know, I was just doing some rough math just after question period, Mr. Speaker, and just having a personal look at some of what the increases in fees and the provincial sales tax would mean to just my situation and our family's situation. And some of the things—the fees that the members, I think, forget from time to time, some of the fees that they have increased over the last couple of years.

And I look at vehicle registrations alone. With vehicle registrations are up about \$35 over the last couple of years. You know, and if you have three vehicles that's a hundred dollars a year in terms of taxes and revenue that goes right back to the Minister of Finance.

You know, have a look at the gas tax. I expect the members opposite probably forgot that they put up the gas tax by two and a half cents last year. And we're still paying every time we go to the pump, Mr. Speaker, an extra two and a half cents on gas. So that can easily, for a family of four, be easily a couple hundred dollars in terms of an extra tax for a family of four.

The other thing too—I just in fact got my homeowner's insurance renewal. And I hope the members pay attention when they get their house insurance renewal from their local broker. And I hope their local broker reminds them why they're paying more in premiums this year, Mr. Speaker. I had a look at my homeowner's insurance this year and that tax—the provincial sales tax—on my homeowner's insurance cost me an extra \$85 a year—\$85 a year that I have to pay out of my pocket just for my homeowner's insurance.

So I hope that the members opposite have a look at their insurance renewal when they get—because that's very important to look at.

So, you know, you start adding these hundreds of dollars and \$85 up, pretty soon, you know, it—\$1,600 for a family of four over the course of two years becomes a pretty good reality, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing that I want to just touch base on is that 8 per cent increase in the Manitoba Hydro rates. Now in our area, a lot of us don't have the ability to heat by natural gas so we are reliant on electricity to heat our homes. So my hydro bill's about \$210 a month. That's what I pay for electricity use each and every month of the year. So as a result

of just the 8 per cent increase in terms of the hydroelectricity rates over the past year, that means an extra \$200 out of my pocket just for the increase in the hydroelectricity rates here in Manitoba. So, clearly, Mr. Speaker, that goes back to management by this NDP government.

So these things, you know, taken in bits and pieces add up and impact all Manitoba families, and that's why we suggest today that—in question period, that the NDP should be having a look at what their taxes are doing to—each and every individual Manitoban and each Manitoba family here in the province of Manitoba. And that's why, Mr. Speaker, we are so opposed to Bill 20, which will provide an extra 1 per cent on the provincial sales tax, and we hope the members opposite will reconsider their position on Bill 20.

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): It is my pleasure to get up and to speak and put some comments on the record with respect to Bill 20. I wish that the opportunity was under better circumstances.

This bill is called The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act, and I think it's not a title that actually suits the substance and the content of this bill that is being perpetrated. Changes that are being perpetrated on Manitobans without their say, without consultation, without referendum, without the provisions that we have in law in this province that are designed to do just that, to make sure that the power of government to increase taxation is necessarily and adequately curtailed and held in check and subjugated to the will of the people. And it's exactly that kind of protection that this Bill 20 runs roughshod over, and it is not appropriate and it's exactly the kind of thing that Manitobans continue to come to MLAs on our side of the House. And I'm convinced—continue to come to the MLAs on that side of House and express their dismay and their displeasure and the fact that they don't want to take this anymore.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, at the outset, I should maybe indicate to members opposite that yesterday I had a stakeholder meeting with a certain individual who lives here in the city of Winnipeg, and at that meeting this individual informed me that their husband, who has always voted NDP—always and forever voted NDP—she shakes her head and says, it has finally come to pass, he has said that he will not vote NDP in the next election, no matter what, because of an 8 per cent PST. And my

comment for the members on the opposite side would be, when even those unfailing supporters, when even those stalwart supporters are leaving the nest, are fleeing from the party, you have to wonder if there isn't a chord that is resonating with Manitobans that is so deep that it will continue to ring even by the time the next election rolls around. Certainly, I would say that if the communications coming into my constituency office are any indication, there is no sign that the response from Manitobans will be diminishing any time soon, nor will the level of their anger and the level of their disapproval of the government's actions.

And I thank my colleagues for the comments that they have put on the record over the past two days. I've listened carefully, I've heard some very reasoned arguments, and I'm happy to add my own comments to that. As many of my colleagues have already indicated, last year this government chose to widen the tax base in Manitoba. Last year they introduced a \$184 million in broad-based increases to the provincial tax regime, and, of course, as you've already heard, Mr. Speaker, those things saw the expansion of the RST. They saw an increase, as my colleague just mentioned now, to MPI rates, to the gas tax. It saw an application of tax-to-home insurance policies for the first time. It saw fees and permits alone up by \$100 million, and those fees now get added to an additional \$277 million through this 14.2 per cent increase to the provincial sales tax.

* (15:10)

So first they widen the tax and now they deepen the tax, and the fact of the matter is, at the end of the day, whether you widen or deepen, taxpayers of this good province are faced with more than \$411 million in additional taxes. That is money out of their pockets, money out of the pockets of hard-working Manitoba families and students and seniors.

And it means that the average Manitoba family is now paying \$1,600 more for this government's spending habits, because one thing is clear, Mr. Speaker, this government does not suffer from a lack of revenue sources. It does not suffer from a lack of available monies to it. What it suffers from is an inability, proven over 14 years, of its inability to handle the money to match expenditures to revenues to make sure they can drive down that stubborn \$500-million structural deficit that sticks around despite what this Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) continues to say year after year about his plans to drive down that number and eventually get to zero.

No one on this side of the House believes it. I wonder if anybody on that side of the House believes it, and I can ensure those members opposite that Manitobans believe it less and less every day.

The Leader of the Opposition coined a phrase on the first day of debate, and he called this mandate of the government a counterfeit mandate. And I thought it was that that term was fitting, because this government ran in the 2011 election on a promise that it would not increase taxes to Manitobans. It said and it made as a key statement in the campaign that Manitobans could count on the fact that they would stay the course and that they would not raise taxes. And so now we find ourselves here, only a year and a half after the fact, and we see that this is a government that has—it's run out of ideas.

And this is a calculated approach. We cannot claim—or this government cannot claim that somehow, well, they got across the line at the election and realized they had no other options. No, they knew the finances of the Province before they went into the election cycle. They knew where they were at. They knew what would have to be done. They knew that this bitter pill that they would make Manitobans take, the only thing that they did not have was a willingness to go to Manitobans and actually indicate before the election that this would be painful and that they would bring about a tax increase not once but twice, and they used the advantage that they had in government to win that election.

And it is outrageous to think now that we're standing here only 18 months later and looking at the largest tax hike in modern history in this Province, closely following on the heels of the second largest tax hike in Manitoba history, all on the basis of a government that promised not to raise taxes, all from a Premier (Mr. Selinger) who said that the very idea that he would raise taxes was nonsense.

And, Mr. Speaker, I've said it before. I put comments on the record and I'll say it again, that these ministers and these members opposite went into their constituencies just like I went into mine and they went to the same type of candidates' forums as I went to. They went door to door as I did in the communities of Morden-Winkler and in the RM of Stanley. They went to the coffee shops. They went to the Tim Hortons and the Starbucks. We don't have a Starbucks in Morden and Winkler, but we do have a Tim Hortons and I can—we have two Tim Hortons, and I can indicate I spent a fair amount of time there

and drank way too much coffee for my own good, but in those meetings and in those coffee shops, constituents asked hard questions.

They asked us about our platforms. They asked us what we would do and they asked us what we would not do, and we gave answers based on the confidence that we had in our party and on the confidence we had in our policy, and we were confident to deliver those messages to our voters just as these members were confidently delivering those messages. The only difference was, get across the election line on October 4th, 2011, and all of them came there and there was that great Throne Speech that they were so happy to invite their friends and neighbours to and, boom, we were looking at a large tax increase of \$184 million.

And I cannot think that it could be easy these weeks, week after week, on the weekend for these members to go back into their constituency and to face those same voters. And I think a couple of weeks ago, the member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) was making a comment somehow that, oh, she wasn't hearing that comment. She wasn't hearing any news about her constituents expressing concern over rising taxes. I find that difficult to accept. I find it difficult to accept as I go through my constituency, but also as I go through hers and also as I go through the constituency for the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum) and as I go through the constituency for the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) that I find it difficult, because I hear those comments on the streets from their voters saying, they said they wouldn't raise taxes and then they raised taxes, and people are mad.

A matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, it's worth noting that this government was a government who said that they would respect the balanced budget legislation, and I think that's what makes Bill 20 so incredibly offensive. If I actually just open up the copy of the bill that I have right here on my desk, one of the first things I read in part 1, is that section 10 of this act—or section 10 of the fiscal management and taxpayer accountability act does not apply in respect of the increases enacted in section 2 of this act. So they simply tell Manitobans, by the way, all the protections that you have in place through the taxpayers protection act, they don't apply; we can do what we have, we have impunity, we will proceed, we will enact this legislation, we will raise the PST from 7 to 8 per cent, and there's nothing you can do about it. That's the message that they send to Manitobans.

And yet, this is the same government that promised in 1999—and I've read the press releases, Mr. Speaker, and there's nothing so purifying as going back to actually read the press releases and realize that they said one thing and then very clearly did another. That has to make these members squirm. But they didn't just do it in 1999; they repeated that pledge to uphold balanced budget legislation in 2003. And that wasn't enough; they went back and they repeated that same pledge in 2007. And now they gut it. As a matter of fact, if I talk to my colleagues who have served longer terms here in the Manitoba Legislature, they actually remind that they've been gutting it the whole way along. The member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler) is one who has reminded me—the whole way along. The member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) has reminded me that this government has actually been eroding. The content and the intent of that legislation whittling away like a guy at the lake who is sitting on his lawn chair and carving away, and they've been carving and carving and carving away, but now they say, well, there's really nothing we can whittle away without hurting our thumbs. So they'll just throw the thing away in entirety, and they say, we can circumvent it, we can go around it. And that kind of thing is exactly what's offensive to Manitobans.

At the same time they do all this, we cannot, as legislators, lose sight of the fact that this Finance Minister is driving up core government spending. It is one thing to sell Manitobans on this message that restraint is necessary, oh, and it's so important we need to have new streams of revenue and look at all the things that we want to accomplish, but to send a message that somehow we are going to—we have to accomplish this at the same time that we're not willing to revisit a structural deficit of \$500 million and actually address that annual increase and that annual and persistent amount that exceeds this government's budget. So every year we're spending this budget of I think it's around \$11 billion now, but still missing the mark by \$500 million, and then on top of that saying there is only one course of action that is possible for us and that is to hike your taxes because we're out of ideas. Surely, this government cannot be out of ideas when they're controlling a structural deficit of \$500 million. Mr. Speaker, if it was any other individual in this Chamber who in their own personal finances faced a similar situation they would have to reckon with it. If the bank called us in and said, well, listen, your line of credit is out of control, and you keep doing this but it's not sustainable because you make this much money in a

month but you keep spending this much money in a month. And it would be incumbent upon any individual to match their spending with their revenue, but this government feels so entitled after this long governing this province that they don't feel compelled to do that.

Even though they tell Manitobans to do it, they don't feel compelled to drive down that spending. And so, while the NDP Finance Minister promised a 1 per cent reduction across core government spending—that was their pledge, that was their pledge they made, I read it in the Throne Speech from last year. I actually think the exact words were that they will achieve an equivalent savings, and yet at last year's end the government was still spending more than \$502 million more than it took in and core government expenditures were actually up.

* (15:20)

And so that's why we introduced a few weeks ago a budget amendment that cited the NDP failure to tame a \$500-million structural deficit. And, Mr. Speaker, I think that the PC Party has very accurately and correctly identified the complete disconnect in this government's approach, which is taking more money from Manitoba taxpayers while at the same time not demonstrating a commitment to drive down their half-billion-dollar annual deficit.

I heard a colleague of mine say earlier, it should be about results, and, Mr. Speaker, it should. It should be about results. It is not about spending. It is about what the spending gets you. And where every other Canadian jurisdiction increasingly seems to grasp that message, it is still a lesson that is not grasped by this Finance Minister, not grasped by these ministers and not grasped by the First Minister. And whereas the NDP had choices to drive down their spending, they've chosen not to do it. Instead, they're just raising up the taxes for Manitobans and it comes at a cost. As the critic for Finance has said on this side of the House, all this spending comes at a cost.

And the latest report from Stats Canada clearly shows that Manitoba is leading the nation—leading the nation—finally something that Manitoba is leading the nation on, and I know that the members opposite will want to pay attention to this. Oh, but it turns out we're leading the nation for the highest annual inflation rate in Canada. Not only that, but I believe that Manitoba has now for two months consecutively led Canada in the highest inflation rate, and all of this, the critic for Finance has

reminded us, comes before a PST increase and its effect can be calculated in. Once that PST hike comes in, I assure you that things are going to become even worse in terms of how these numbers come back to us in the data. So not only does Manitoba have the worst inflation rate in Canada for two months now; it was four times the national average. What causes this thing? Well, it's all those changes and all those increases that this government has already brought into effect: things like the MPI rate and the gas tax rate; things that make it more difficult and more expensive for people to live in this province.

Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, I noted that the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Chief), he stood up and he talked about what they called a Roots of Empathy program, and no doubt that this program has an effect in our province and there is some merit to it.

What he didn't choose to stand up and speak about is a roots of apathy program that I believe he should be speaking about, a roots of apathy program on that side of the House. And, Mr. Speaker, we're talking about a party who's going to go into a convention this weekend, and as the Leader of the Opposition reminded us, they are going to debate critical and important issues for Manitobans, issues like naming an official fish and talking about heritage trees. But absent—absent—from their discussions this weekend will be any discussion about the PST increase and Bill 20. Absent from their deliberations this weekend will be any discussion about a Manitoba Hydro expansion plan of \$20 billion. Absent from their agenda this weekend will be any discussion about the referendum in Manitoba that they say will not take place because they do not have the inclination or the time or the money or the will to consult Manitobans on this issue.

So, really, I think that the member from Point Douglas should be standing up and talking about his very successful roots of apathy program that they are driving forward and are proud to stand up. That apathy means that they are unconcerned, Mr. Speaker. They're just unconcerned with the effect this is having on Manitobans, because if they were concerned—if they were concerned—they'd listen. If they were concerned, they would consult. If they were concerned, they would host a referendum. If they were concerned, they would've come out and joined my colleagues and I on the front steps of the Legislature when we heard from those Manitobans

who said: What can we do? How can we send a message? How can we tell this government that we don't stand in agreement with them on raising the PST? They came here. They came to the Manitoba Legislature, hundreds and hundreds of them, with banners and placards and hats and pins and buttons. There might have been thousands, but the fact of the matter is they did come, and those members were absent. They chose to go out the back door and the side door, and perhaps it would have been a good idea to hold that rally in such a way to make it mobile, and we could have gone from door to door to intercept them to make sure they would be there to answer questions for their constituents, but that wasn't easy to effect, and so we weren't able to get that done. But we got a lot done that day.

This government is apathetic, and I—the reason I talk about the roots of apathy program that is well and good within the party, because they fail to realize the real issues that are of real importance to Manitobans—real taxes having real effects on real Manitobans. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, about two weeks ago I had the privilege of attending the Manitoba Business Council conference here in Winnipeg held at the Fort Garry Hotel, and on that day, Kevin Lynch, who is the chief of the—was chief of Privy Council, discussed the fact that with an annual deficit of \$500 million on a budget of \$11 billion, it is incumbent on a government to drive debt down. And, actually, former Prime Minister Paul Martin said that the fundamentals do not bode well for governments who do not drive down their spending. As a matter of fact, he said that people will eventually, unless there's changes made, lose their confidence in US Treasury bills, and he said, and when that happens, interest rates will rise, and when interest rates rise, it will result in additional payments on debt-servicing costs.

In the Province of Manitoba, a 1 per cent rise in interest rates would result in an additional \$200 million per year going to debt-servicing costs. That is \$200 million out of programming, \$200 million out of health care, out of education, out of social services. And, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that this government has wasted an opportunity, and we've heard speaker after speaker from this side of the House get up and talk about the fact that this government has squandered a period of time in which it has enjoyed record-low interest rates; it has enjoyed record-high federal transfers from the federal government; and it has enjoyed record sources of revenue. And, in such an

environment, in such a bringing together of those factors, you would have assumed that this government would have made progress; that they would have cut the debt; they would have invested in infrastructure, but instead they doubled the debt.

And, Mr. Speaker, in some ways, they—this government reminds me of the astronaut, the Canadian astronaut in the—in—Chris Hadfield, who recently returned from the International Space Station. And I was interested to follow the media reports that indicated that when an astronaut returns from a prolonged period of time in a zero gravity environment, it can have a detrimental effect on their constitution, that when they come back into the atmosphere—I noticed this, that with those atmospheres—with those astronauts that returned and landed in Russia, immediately they did not have the ability to stand. Their heart couldn't pump the blood properly into their limbs and they were weakened. And I think about—in the same way, it would almost be the same kind of effect for this government that has enjoyed record interest rates and record transfers from the government and record sources of revenue from taxation, if a 1 per cent or 2 per cent—shudder the thought—would—interest rate hike would ever occur in this province, they would be like returning to a gravity situation, from a zero gravity to a full gravity. The only difference would be they would not be returning like an astronaut to a hero's welcome; instead, they would be like a 90-pound fiscal weakling who would not be able to stand and actually pay for the things we need. So they have enjoyed this bubble and they have wasted this bubble.

Mr. Speaker, there's so much we could say about this government's plans and the way they have squandered an opportunity to do a better job of the finances of this Province, but we find ourselves in this place where they're saying, we will not consult; we will not go to referendum. As a matter of fact, it bears repeating that they have said in the past that others were undemocratic when they would not allow a referendum to go forward. As a matter of fact, the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) said just less than two years ago in this Chamber, he stood up and said about the Wheat Board debate, he said, that's what makes members opposite different. They had a choice, which is more than they're offering farmers on the Wheat Board; they're not allowing them a choice. That's the most undemocratic bunch of people that I've ever seen in my—they're very undemocratic.

* (15:30)

And that was the member from Kildonan who stood up and talked about the fact that somehow the farmers were not going to get their say, and I would wonder what the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) would say today about the fact that there he stands behind that First Minister and goes right around the provision that we have in law in this province for a referendum.

But he won't stand up and give those same kind of speeches. He will not put those same remarks on the record. He will not say about his own government that they are not allowing them a choice. He will not say about his colleagues and his First Minister that that's the most undemocratic bunch of people that he's ever seen in his life. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, that is a comment I would like to see the member for Kildonan put on the record.

I want to spend my last few minutes—and indeed I could go on—but I want to spend the last few minutes of my address putting comments on the record from constituents of mine because I assure the members opposite. I have received a lot of correspondence, a lot of phone calls, a lot of emails, even some faxes in this day and age from constituents who are saying they cannot handle these increases.

So here's a letter, April 30th, handwritten from a constituent whose name is Nick. And he says: This brief letter is in response to the proposed 1 per cent increase in the provincial sales tax—and I know the members opposite want to hear this—I've been a member of a municipal council, and I can fully appreciate how difficult it can be to balance a budget for a community not knowing where the money will come from. One must either cut back on spending somewhere or increase taxes to make it work.

Either way, the decision will not be a popular one, and that is why our current government must give serious consideration before it makes the decision to raise the provincial sales tax. I believe it will have considerable negative ramifications for our economy and for a significant number of families in our province.

I'll skip down because it's a longer letter. And he says: Now our government is proposing to increase the sales tax. I understand that the majority of services provided by the family are becoming more costly, but at what expense and where will it end? There are many families living in Manitoba who

simply cannot afford these types of increases on a continual basis. Not every Manitoban receives an annual cost-of-living increase at their place of employment. It's sad but true. And this additional tax burden will result in reduced spending in the private sector by the consumer with subsequent economic decline.

What Nick did next is he examined his own household spending. And he told me later he spent hours at this. He got the calculator out, he got his reading glasses out, he got his pencil out, and he calculated the finances of their family. And what they made clear—

An Honourable Member: A point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable acting Government House Leader, on a point of order.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Deputy Government House Leader): I believe it's a rule of this House that if the member's going to read from a letter, he ought to table the letter in the House.

Mr. Speaker: I'd like to—on the point of order raised by the honourable acting Government House Leader, I'd like to ask the honourable member for Morden-Winkler: Is the letter that he's reading from a private signed letter?

Mr. Friesen: This letter is a private signed letter.

Mr. Speaker: Then I believe that the letter would have to be tabled for members of the House.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Further information, Mr. Speaker. I was listening carefully. I didn't hear the member actually say the words that he was quoting from a letter. But maybe you could take it under advisement and check Hansard to see if he actually said he was quoting from a letter.

Mr. Speaker: I didn't exactly hear the honourable member's comments. I will take this matter under advisement and review it and, if necessary, bring back a ruling to the House on the point of order raised by the honourable acting Government House Leader.

But I just want to caution all honourable members that if they're reading or quoting from documents, private signed letters, as per our rules in this Assembly, that the copies of that information must be tabled for information of House members.

So I'd like honourable members, if they're reading from documents or quoting from them, to at least provide some clarity to the Chair on matters such as this.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable acting—the honourable member for Morden-Winkler.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, and what I would say is that, what I was impressed with was the way that this constituent calculated the numbers and worked out the cost of their household finances, which I believe came to an additional \$572–76–\$576 in one household as a result of a 1 per cent increase in the PST.

And Mr. Speaker, that's exactly the kind of effect that this PST would have on household after household for hard-working Manitoba families all across this province. And it's that kind of thing that we continue to say to this government: it is not too late. You can still conduct a referendum. It is not too late to ask Manitobans what they think about this kind of thing.

Mr. Speaker, I've—I said this afternoon that this government has a problem with spending, that they would rather raise rates for Manitobans than actually drive the cost of their own spending, year after year, down. They came in this session; they said, first of all, that this big PST increase was necessary for flood mitigation. And then, in a number of days, it was completely proven that in 13 years of flood mitigation, their record on doing that was less than 1 per cent of flood mitigation of all revenues generated going to flood protection.

So they said, oh, no problem. This is actually for infrastructure. Well, it wasn't more than a few days later that the mayors of this province stood in tandem, toe to toe, and they said: it is not for infrastructure.

They will not table the list of projects, there's no clarity or transparency in this and we lack a degree of confidence that that's actually the case.

Then the government came back and said, well, it's for hospitals and schools and that kind of thing. But we all understand, and taxpayers are not that naive, they understand it is incumbent upon government to spend dollars on hospitals and on schools. And for this government to imply that somehow they will not get their hospital or school unless they go along with an ill-conceived,

1 per cent—or a point-per-cent increase to the PST is unconscionable.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to hearing the comments of my colleagues as they continue to put on the record the important reasons, and the important stories, of Manitobans, why Bill 20 cannot be allowed to go forward.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 20, The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act (Various Acts Amended).

Interesting title, as we often see in this House. I may—you know, I think maybe it could be better called the 'Manitobers'—Manitoba voters' rights destruction and removal act. It'd be more appropriate because that's what's being taken away by this government for Manitobans.

Manitobans really believed that they were protected from excesses of government by certain acts that were enacted in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, and they really believed that they were protected and that they would have a vote, a referendum, on government excess. When government wanted to raise things like the PST, Manitobans knew, they trusted, that they would have a vote on that regard, and this government, through this act, wishes to remove that right and, indeed, something that Manitobans have trusted and depended upon. And now, that's going to be taken away if this act does pass, which is very disappointing.

*(15:40)

The impact of a PST increase on Manitobans, on families, on businesses, is quite detrimental. We see the increase from 7 per cent to 8 per cent, if you do the math, apparently is 14 per cent, and that negative impact on increase is just totally detrimental, a huge effect on Manitobans, 'specially' on low-income Manitobans. And, indeed, I've spoken before in this House, Mr. Speaker, about the drag on the economy that that will create, because, as we see from various economic studies, Mr. Speaker, when government spends, it does, essentially, crowd out the consumer market. It crowds out investment and it crowds out spending from the consumer side of the market, and you see an actual decrease on GDP from increased government spending, far from what the government would intend.

I—most governments, I think, they believe when they increase spending, as this government has in the

past dozen years—a huge amount increased spending—they believe that they would be an impetus to the economy, that they would contribute to the economy, that they would, you know, fire it up and get it going again. But, in fact, Mr. Speaker, as studies and history has shown that it is indeed the opposite that when a dollar—when a government spends a dollar on—in the economy it actually only increases GDP by 63 cents. So not a great return.

I'm sure most members opposite in their pension funds, some of them have multiple pension funds—government, federal and provincial and other, municipal perhaps, and school board—that they would not like to see a negative return on their investments and, certainly, Manitobans don't expect to see a negative return on government spending. But that is indeed what will happen with this type of environment, Mr. Speaker. It will create a drag on the economy, and that's certainly the last thing we want to see right now.

We need some stimulus to the economy, but government is not the source of that, Mr. Speaker, because what happens is that the public, in fact, anticipates tax increases and it creates a contraction because they need to save their money in order to pay these tax increases. So they, in fact, spend less money and the economy as a whole contracts. So this government stimulus quickly produces a negative contraction in the private sector, in investments and, indeed, in consumption because the individual does not have that money to consume anymore. The government has taken it up and they've lost it. So we see that that contraction does indeed grow larger and larger over time, and then we see government spending more and more money in the economy and the contracting so that for each dollar of stimulus we just see a greater and greater drag on the economy and, you know, it's a never-ending hole that this government seems to be getting itself into.

So the negative effect of that is quite huge on the economy and, you know, certainly, a spending increase of the nature of which this government is talking about, we'll see, of course, the first-year impact on GDP will be small and negative and it turns down and it continues in a downward fashion, Mr. Speaker. So it's certainly not something that we need to see in the Manitoba economy, because what happens here is, with these government multipliers we see the consumption and the investment in the economy from consumers and from businesses is indeed crowded out and, of course, eventually disappears altogether, and that's far from what we

need in the Manitoba economy. We need to be looking at opportunities and expansion, but not what would happen with this government spending.

And, you know, this government talks about, well, cuts and they say they haven't made any cuts. But I think every Manitoban that's out there that's trying to use the health-care system, that's trying to drive down the highway sees evidence of this government's cuts and failures. I mean, and we have spoken about the accidents on No. 10 Highway and how poor in condition that highway is because the government does a little patch here, and—but, you know, when you travel on a highway you don't just travel on a small piece. You travel on the entire highway or a good portion of it so you see some small good parts, but the—then you see the parts that are just falling apart.

And, indeed, on No. 10 Highway over the years there's been portions of it on curves where the roads are separating and you could virtually put a wheel into the separation of the asphalt there, Mr. Speaker, and certainly very, very dangerous for passenger cars. And then you have the large trucks on there with the shoulders that have the gravel right beside and, you know, it's dropping off. It erodes away the gravel so you have a large drop off on the side of the asphalt, again, dangerous conditions that Manitobans have to drive on every day because Manitobans have to go to work in order to spend, in order to make money to pay for this government's spending priorities, and those are the things that Manitobans have to do. They have to travel to get to work often and we have to travel over these poor roads.

So we saw some fatalities, very tragic, over the weekend in the Brandon area, south of Brandon, north of Brandon, west of Brandon. I understand even today there's another accident at No. 1 and 16 where the Trans-Canada Highway was closed for a number of hours, and that is a part of the highway that the Manitoba government has often talked about the need to create infrastructure there to create an overpass, but we don't do that. We have a level crossing and I go through that crossing every week, Mr. Speaker, and it is a dangerous crossing because you're never sure if the traffic that is approaching the highway is going to stop. You have a lot of truck traffic on 16, a lot of truck traffic on No. 1 and it's just a very good question of whether that truck is actually going to stop before it gets to the light or indeed the car. Is it going to pay attention to whether the light is red or not? So very dangerous conditions on Manitoba highways. And so that's the cuts that

we've seen from this government. They say that they need the increased spending, and they take these huge tax increases and we wonder where they've gone, because it's not going into the roads that I drive on, but maybe it's going into some of the other roads.

And health care—now there's another good question. This government promised to end hallway medicine with a fairly small investment within months, I believe, it was. *[interjection]* Six months and just \$15 million and that was going to end hallway medicine. Well, I know that that's not true, Mr. Speaker, because I—you know, I visited my aunt a couple of years ago waiting in St. Boniface Hospital hallway for her open-heart surgery. And, you know, dignity is one of the first things to disappear in our health-care system, because to see my frail aunt waiting for open-heart surgery in the hallway, you know, that's just not that way that Manitobans deserve to be treated. And this government has dropped the ball on that time and again and we see it time and again.

Even this weekend—you know, we have four children, and this particular weekend they were spread all over North America, you know, in Alberta and BC, in Washington and over into Nova Scotia. So, my wife and I travelled up to the national park to see what was happening up there and things there and visiting friends there. And occasionally she does have an allergic reaction to certain environments, and in this case it was helping clean up the yard and a reaction to dust and her run triggered an allergic reaction, and she does carry an EpiPen, but here's our choices. EpiPen—can we go to the Dauphin hospital? Well, that's probably not going to be a good environment. The particular hospital in Erickson couldn't handle it. Minnedosa—no, not the case on a Monday. And, if you're going to go to Neepawa, you might as well go into Brandon because they know how to handle it. So, you pack up and you drive the hour into Brandon wondering if your wife is going to survive the trip, Mr. Speaker.

That is the state of our health-care system. That is what we've run into and that's what we see time and time again because of decisions from this government that those services are not available, because they've closed emergency rooms, they've closed hospitals in the rural areas. And those services are not available to Manitobans, and my wife could have died because of decisions that this government made. How despicable is that, Mr. Speaker? How bad is that? *[interjection]* And I hear yipping over here, and that's just ignorant is the reaction there. I—

it's just appalling when you see the reaction. And these are things that happen to Manitobans every day because of the cuts that this government has made. And we hear about those cuts: we hear about people dying in emergency rooms; we hear about people not going to emergency rooms and dying when they're at home. Indeed, by the time we got into Brandon my wife decided she didn't want to wait for the several hours it would be in the emergency room, so, again, you wonder if they're going to survive. It's just a very, very disappointing environment.

And I'm sure, as members opposite go out and speak to people in Manitoba, they must hear about the effects this PST increase is going to have on consumers, on individuals, on people of fixed incomes and indeed on businesses. I did meet with several businesses over the weekend, and they talked about the impact that government-increased taxes are going to have on their particular business. I mean, we've seen increases in alcohol taxes, we've seen increases in tobacco tax, we've seen changes to the VLT systems, now we have the PST increase and we see fee increases that have gone all along. And there is one particular hotel that I spoke with—and many of them are about the same environment that this particular individual is in—and he said what's going to happen to this particular business is that their fee and tax increase for this year, Mr. Speaker, it's going up 50 per cent. So you talk about a 14 per cent increase in the PST. The amount that this individual is going to have to remit to the government is increasing this year by 50 per cent, because this government thinks that they know better how to spend that individual's money than the individual does. And what happens when you take an additional 50 per cent out of that organization, out of that business? Well, what's the effect? Can he—can an individual take that increase and put it on their customers? Not necessarily. There's a resistance to that, there's a reluctance to do so because you do drive customers away. And then you have, you know, competition that you have to worry about with your neighbours. So, you can't put all that tax increase on your customers so you have to swallow some of it. And what is—what happens when you swallow some of that tax increase as a business? Well, it reduces employment. You can't have as many people working. You have to do more of the work yourself. So, again, a reduction in employment, a contraction on the—in the economy. And this is a small case, Mr. Speaker, but, indeed, that type of an environment rolls out to the rest of Manitoba and we see that contraction on the environment—on the economy.

* (15:50)

So that impact is going to be huge for the people that work there. It's going to be huge for that business person. And what else does a business person do with revenues of that nature if they were able to keep it? Well, they might expand; they might expand in Manitoba or they might look to expand elsewhere and that could contribute more taxes to the economy. But, again, that's going to take that opportunity away from that person. They could pay down debt—I know something that this government is not familiar with. They're not really familiar with paying down debt and the impact that can have for your business on the—going down the road because you need to control the debt in order to be a viable entity, a viable business, a viable consumer. You can't go whole hog and just borrow what—money for whatever you want and expect to, you know, survive any particular downturns.

Because we are in a very low-interest area of the economy right now, this is, you know—certainly I've never seen interest rates this low. I don't know if you have, Mr. Speaker, but we all know, and the forecasts are there, that interest rates are going up. So, as much as this government may not be concerned about that, individuals, consumers and businesses are, because they know eventually they're going to have to pay a higher dollar for their debt. And they can't just go out and borrow with the expectation that it's going to be at this interest rate forever because that, we all know, is going to change. One thing that we can depend on is that the business cycle does indeed work. We just don't know when it's going to happen. We know it's going to go—come back eventually, down the road, and interest rates will go up; debt servicing costs will go up; it will have an impact on this government and that will be detrimental to Manitoba's services.

So I talked about the staff, and the other thing that businesses do is they support the local economy. The opportunities of spending in the economy, the people that they hire spend their money in the local economy and that benefits everyone, and you have consumption in the economy from that business in order to, you know, create goods to sell again. And—*[interjection]*

I hear some yipping across the floor for people that don't quite understand economics or a business, perhaps, Mr. Speaker. But businesses do invest, and they do spend in the economy and they do hire staff. And the other thing that really, really has an impact

in the local economy is donations. The number of requests for donations that we see come into our business every day of every month is astounding, and it has been just a huge amount of increase over the past, well, dozen years or so. I mean, it's been ramping up over time.

As the government cuts support to various organizations, they've had to go out and look at how they can increase fundraising. And then as the government increases taxes, well, those organizations, they have to pay those taxes, so, again, they need to increase their fundraising. It's a vicious circle, so they go to individuals and they go to businesses, and we see a huge increase in the request for donations. So much so that we had to strike a committee to deal with that because all those—they're all viable and they're all very good organizations, and we want to support as many organizations as we can, but we can't support them all.

And when the government takes taxes away from us, well, we're able to support fewer. And you have people that are dependent on your organization or an individual, for years you've been out there supporting them. They want that support to continue and increase, and sometimes you have to say, you know, we can't do it this year. The economy is—may not be good; we may not be able to support you at the same level, or we have another very interesting opportunity here with another donor that's looking for support, and they want a donation this year, so, we're going to do their donation this year so we won't do yours to the same amount.

All those are very, very difficult choices that businesses and individuals have to make, and this government is going to drive those decisions even more, Mr. Speaker, and going to make them more and more difficult because those are things that businesses believe in. They believe in supporting the local economy. They believe in making donations to support all the types of environments, the types of donors, the types of recipients that are in their particular area. They may have a particular group that they like to support, whether it be youth events or whether it be customer-related events or whatever, but they all have that direction.

And they want to make sure that those charitable organizations are viable, that they will continue to do the good work that they're able to with, you know, individual support and with corporate support.

But what happens is when this government takes away more and more of that revenue, our businesses aren't able to do that to the same extent, and then we see another detrimental effect on the economy because some of those organizations go wanting. They can't support the individuals that they are wont to support like, say, the United Way or other organizations, and we do and see a detrimental effect all the way along the way because the support's not there from the government any more. And they do depend on the local businesses for those types of supports.

And, well, sometimes you have to say no, and that's a very difficult no because they are all very good places to donate. They're all very viable charities and you want to make sure that they're taken care of, but we can't always do that, Mr. Speaker, because we've got to take care of our staff; we've got to pay down our debt. And, of course, first, right up off the hop, there's the government taking their share, and that's a huge increase to businesses this year.

So, all that, yes, does it trickle down? Absolutely, because you can't hire as many staff. What happens when you have to lay off staff? The economy suffers, it's—yes, you want to see a trickle-down effect? This is the trickle-down effect of this PST increase, and yes, indeed, it is there, the detrimental effect on the economy, as I spoke earlier, the drag on the economy that we will see in Manitoba for years to come.

And, you know, we have the comparative of what happens in other environments because we have a lower PST just over the border to the south of us in North Dakota; we have a lower—much lower PST just over the border in Saskatchewan. And in Winnipeg here, you might not see the effect immediately on that type of environment, people travelling to North Dakota; people travelling to Saskatchewan to make purchases that have a lower PST. But certainly from Brandon West and Brandon South and Winnipeg South, and Winkler and Morden, all those areas, they will have a huge effect on border traffic, cross-border shopping.

People will look for that opportunity and, you know, they'll look for places where they can save money because that is the goal of an individual, is they want to look after themselves first and their families first. And this government is going to drive them outside of our borders to make sure that they can do that, because they've—you know, fewer dollars

for disposable income at this point, and we're going to—people are going to go looking to North Dakota; they're going to go looking to Minnesota; they're going to go looking to Saskatchewan and elsewhere and find that, indeed, they can save money by purchasing things in those economies. And maybe they will be large pieces of equipment for businesses, and they may be, you know, smaller consumption items for families, but, indeed, that will have an impact on businesses in Manitoba.

So, if your business contracts in Manitoba but the government still wants to, you know, increase the returns, the taxes by 50 per cent, how are you going to be able to pay that? What are you going to have to do? You're going to have to borrow money in order to pay government? Well, sometimes that has to happen, too, you know. People have had to borrow money to pay their taxes, and the government doesn't like to wait to get taxes paid.

But, you know, if there is a—if you—if the government owes a business money—gee, you know, I've seen it happen the other way where we've had to wait two or three years to get paid back from the government when we have overpaid them for PST or we've overpaid them for corporate taxes of any of that type thing. And we have to prove that we've overpaid, because certainly the government wouldn't just suddenly discover that we've overpaid them. So we have to prove—and, as a matter of fact, some businesses—I do have one in Brandon that overpaid on some of their taxes, and when they discovered this through an audit—and the government can come back seven years, Mr. Speaker—but they discovered this through an audit a year and a bit after the fact, and by the time they got all their books in order and they made the application back to the government, it was two years since they paid their taxes. And the government said, oh, gee, you know what? Two years is the date that you can—you're over the expiry date. You can't apply for a tax refund that you've overpaid past two years.

We can come and get your money for seven years, but after two years, no, no, no; it's government money. You can't apply for taxes back, you—well, it's probably already spent—long since spent. We know that several times over but on—and who knows what, because it's not the highways, it's not in health care. We seen the detrimental effects on that.

* (16:00)

But, you know, so this business is out the money. They've overpaid. They tried to be a good

corporate citizen, and when they looked to get some money back from the government, the government said, well, no, you know, two years have gone by, so—it's not in the legislation, Mr. Speaker. It's not in the regulations that you read online. There are none of those deadlines there for that business to look at. It is a practice of the Department of Finance, and that is what the practice is, that they were told. So no warning to the business. Can't read it anywhere that it's two years, but that business knows now that, you know, you can't wait two years to get this back because they've lost that money. The government's taken it. They're not giving it back.

And that's why, you know, Manitoban businesses and Manitobans really believe in creating opportunity, and that is the type of things that we really want to see in Manitoba. We want—don't want to see the bait and switch that this government talks about where they said, well, we have this budget out here and it's a—let's see, what was the first one?—it's a flood budget. Yes, it's a flood budget, must be a flood budget. I don't see a lot of flooding happening. And I notice we don't have the flood reports in the House every morning to create fear in Manitobans anymore, so floods—it's not a flood, no, must of made a mistake; it's not a flood budget. That's not the case.

Well, what else can it be? Must be the economy—must be the economy. It's got to be the economy. Well, let's see—but then they brag about how well the economy is doing in Manitoba. And, in fact, we do see reports out of the United States that they're starting to awaken from their long sleep here and the numbers are starting to look very good from the United States, and that economy is going to wake up and it is doing so now, Mr. Speaker. So, gee, maybe it's not the economy.

So I know—I know, it must be—it's got to be infrastructure. We're going to spend on infrastructure. And then you look at the budget, and, well, where's the infrastructure dollars? They're not there. They—and when they announce infrastructure, it's things they've already announced and funded. So where's the infrastructure money? And then there's some, oh, two or three hundred million dollars that went missing from the infrastructure sector last year.

So they're not spending money on infrastructure. They're not spending money on the flood. It's not the economy. Well, we're going to have to look for another excuse.

But Manitobans are all about opportunity, Mr. Speaker. And I want to give this government an

opportunity to change their mind. I want to give them an opportunity to talk to Manitobans because I'm concerned that they have not been talking to Manitobans. They didn't come to the PST rally. They didn't talk to them there. A couple of them peered out of windows. One of them walked by, and we had staff hiding behind the columns taking pictures of who was there. So they didn't come to that rally to talk to them. I'm concerned that they're not getting out in their constituencies enough, talking to them. So I want to give the government time to go out and speak to Manitobans.

So that is why, Mr. Speaker, that I will be introducing a hoist motion so that we can delay talking about and dealing with this particular bill, and give the government time to go listen to Manitobans, because that, I believe, is really what Manitobans want to happen. They can go out and listen to Manitobans. They can find out from Manitobans how detrimental this PST increase is going to be to Manitobans, and how detrimental it would be to businesses, and how detrimental it will be to individuals and families. We've talked about the effect on families, and that is a critical part of what the effect will be here. How damaging it will be to Manitoba families, and where those Manitoba families are going to have to go to make that money to pay the government to keep them afloat. But, even that, they're going to have another deficit.

So that's what this motion will do. And I did have to look up a little bit of information about hoist motions—it's certainly nothing that I've done before—and wanted to make sure that we had all the right types of things in place.

And I noticed in my research that there was a hoist motion at the federal level and—a couple of years ago—indeed, it was introduced by the New Democratic Party, isn't that interesting? So perhaps they could, you know, get some information from their cousins in Ottawa or their brothers, or whatever, to—some advice because they will get some advice on how this motion works, and some advice on why it is necessary. Obviously, the NDP felt it necessary to do in Ottawa. So I hope that the government, the NDP government here, will feel it necessary to support this hoist—hoist motion with us and to, you know, to vote for it, and, indeed, get out there to talk to Manitobans and give Manitobans back the protection that they do believe that they had, and the protection that they do deserve. So the legislation can have some thought given to it, you know.

Indeed, the Minister of Finance did set—and say, in some of his speaking notes here, that Manitobans, you know, they need protection from the government, and, yes, Manitobans do need protection from this government. So if he can't give it to them, that we'll give them an opportunity to do it again, and, indeed, protect Manitobans.

Because I really believe, Mr. Speaker, that Manitoba has some of the greatest opportunities of all provinces in the country and it has been—those opportunities have been ignored and compromised by this NDP government. So we want to give them the opportunity to make sure those opportunities are still there and they're celebrated and they're exploited and that people can go out there and create the Manitoba that we all envision, as opposed to this Manitoba that we seem to have here, where the government won't listen to its citizens, where the government takes away citizens' rights. And those are the types of things, I think, in Manitoba and in Canada, that we deserve. Those are the types of things that Manitobans deserves to get from this government. It is very disappointing to see those rights taken away and we want to give them the opportunity, with this hoist motion, to restore those rights to Manitobans and, indeed, give them the opportunity to vote on the PST increase.

Because I've said in here before, if this government truly believed that this tax increase was necessary, if they really believed that in their hearts and souls they should be able to go to Manitobans and convince Manitobans of that, and if you can do that, then you should have no fear of a referendum. You should believe as well that you're going to win that referendum. So, let's have at it, Mr. Speaker. Let's have this government go out, convince Manitobans that they need this P increase—PST increase, and then convince Manitobans, indeed, that they should vote in the referendum for that increase.

So, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded from the member from Steinbach,

THAT the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "THAT" and substituting the following:

Bill 20—and I better get the title right here, Mr. Speaker—The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act, be now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer), seconded by the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen),

THAT the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "THAT", in quotations, and substituting the following:

Bill 20, The Manitoba Building and Renewal Funding and Fiscal Management Act (Various Acts Amended), be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.

The amendment is in order.

So, prior to recognizing the next member to speak, I want to advise the House that I've received a letter from the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Pallister) indicating that the member for Steinbach has been provided unlimited speaking time on bill—second reading of Bill 20.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, order.

The honourable member for Steinbach has been—had the delegated unlimited speaking time for second reading of Bill 20, including all amendments arising from second reading of Bill 20. So that's for information for the House.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): It's always a pleasant surprise to learn that, Mr. Speaker, just before I speak, that the leader has granted me such an honour.

I want to thank the member for Brandon West for bringing forward this hoist motion, as it's commonly referred to in parliamentary language, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't happen often. It does happen in the context of our Legislature, but it's not a common sort of thing.

I think the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers)—he's been here some years. Maybe he's seen it a few times, but it doesn't happen—once perhaps, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't happen terribly often.

* (16:10)

But it's important because this is a unique debate, Mr. Speaker, and sometimes unique times, call for unique measures, and so this is a unique measure obviously, that the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer) has brought forward. I appreciate him doing research on the hoist motion. Everybody wants to be House leader, and it's good that he's

doing that research and looking into the different reasons why hoist motions have been brought forward in the different Parliaments either in Ottawa or here in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, and the reason behind the hoist motion—the member for Brandon West could have chosen three months or six months under the rules, and he decided to go with six months which I think is wise. He probably could have gone for longer. I know, ultimately, his hope would be that the government would withdraw Bill 20 altogether and there wouldn't be so much of a hoist motion as there would be a motion to do away with the bill to prevent, in fact, having the PST increase. But this is sort of the next best thing.

We debated a—our—a reasoned amendment a week or two ago. I would classify this a reasonable amendment, Mr. Speaker, because it's quite reasonable to ask the government to take some additional time—to take some additional time in terms of—to listening—

An Honourable Member: To cool down.

Mr. Goertzen: The member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) might call it a cooling off period, Mr. Speaker, and I think that this government, in fact, does need to have a cooling off period. It needs more time to reconsider what it is done and why it has done it.

For example, Mr. Speaker, I would say that the additional six months that's being proposed by the member for Brandon West—it can be used in many different ways and I propose over the next remainder of today and maybe for a couple more days to give some ideas in terms of how the six months could be used by the government in terms of considering Bill 20.

And, first of all, I think it's important to make it the first thing—is the government could use the additional six months' time to consult with Manitobans. Now, you might be thinking, well, wasn't there in fact a prebudget consultation meeting? And that's a good question, and when you look back at the prebudget consultation meetings that happened here in Manitoba there was a glaring omission. There was a glaring omission, Mr. Speaker, because the prebudget consultation meetings didn't talk about a potential PST increase. They didn't talk about an increase of the PST from 7 to 8 per cent. I've seen the various slides that were presented at the prebudget consultation meetings,

slides that didn't indicate at all that somehow the government was suffering or doing—in fact, I think they said that things were stable and were doing fairly well—

An Honourable Member: Stable, strong economic growth.

Mr. Goertzen: The member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) indicates that the Finance Minister tried to tell people it was strong economic growth. There was no rationale or reason for people to believe, Mr. Speaker, that a PST would be coming.

It's as though they had two sets of prebudget consultation meetings, Mr. Speaker, you know, the one set of prebudget consultation meetings that they gave to Manitobans and invited them in a fairly secretive way to come to these prebudget consultation meetings, and then they had another set of prebudget consultation meetings that they held at Cabinet and the Cabinet prebudget consultation meetings had a whole different set of books. They talk, in fact, about how they were suggesting that there are difficult economic times.

Now, in fact, of course, I think, Mr. Speaker, that all the members of the NDP Cabinet—the spendP Cabinet—would have recognized that it really it isn't tough economic times that is the challenge for the government. The challenge for the government is that they aren't willing to actually get their own fiscal house in order. They aren't willing to look internally for savings.

That wasn't discussed at a prebudget consultation meeting, Mr. Speaker. I don't think they talked about the 58th MLA, Bonnie Korzeniowski, at the prebudget consultation meetings. Would they have gone to Manitobans and said, well, we came up with some sort of a plan—negotiation or not—with the former member for St. James? We would appoint her to a position that she held when she was elected at the same wage and essentially at the same benefits if she decided not to run. I think that most Manitobans would have looked at that in those prebudget consultation meetings and said, well, that doesn't make a lot of sense. Why wouldn't you appoint somebody who is already a member of the caucus rather than, in fact, going and having somebody who had retired?

So, during the next six months, if the members opposite agree to this hoist motion—and I would certainly encourage them to vote for it, or at the very least speak to it. Now, we've been disappointed that

the members opposite haven't spoken to Bill 20 except for the introductory comments from the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers). We know that members opposite often want to speak about different issues, but they haven't been speaking to the main motion on Bill 20, Mr. Speaker, but there are certainly other things that they could be talking about on this hoist motion. Because, I think, that if they use the next six months to sort of go back into the field, as it were, with a new prebudget consultation meeting, they would learn many things, and I would encourage the Minister of Finance to do a few things.

First, and out—to broaden out the base, to ensure that he's going to many different communities to get that consultation during the six months when this hoist motion passes, Mr. Speaker, and then to give them the full facts, to ensure that those Manitobans who'll come out—and I'd venture this guess: I don't know—I know that many of these prebudget consultation meetings held by the member for Dauphin weren't that well attended, and I would say that part of that is how people are invited. You know, it's sort of in the dark of night, the night before, that they invite a few councillors and a few friends to come out to these meetings because they don't want to have too many people out there who might raise real issues.

I would make this guess, Mr. Speaker, and I'm willing to be found wrong if the minister wants to take me up on it: if, in fact, they vote for the hoist motion, and put this off for six months, and they held the prebudget consultation meetings, new prebudget consultation meetings, between now and six months hence, I would say to the member for Dauphin, they would be the most well-attended prebudget consultation meetings that this province has ever had.

And he would truly get input and feedback, feedback that he didn't get in the first round of prebudget consultation meetings because he didn't really want many people out, and the people that were out didn't get the full facts, Mr. Speaker. They weren't given all the different information that they needed. They weren't told about a PST increase. They weren't told about any sort of tax increases.

So this is something that the member could do over the next six months, and I would certainly be willing to sit down with him, Mr. Speaker. We could come up with a bit of a game plan in terms where the meetings would be held. We can come up with a little bit of a schedule.

The House would—could continue to run. We could continue to run the House for the next six months, but we could ensure that over that time, Mr. Speaker, we could have prebudget consultation meetings in many different communities and, of course, throughout the city of Winnipeg. And I bet that many, many people would come out. And, you know, it's important to do that because the government hasn't been looking for any kind of feedback.

We know only a few weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, that there was a rally here at the steps of the Legislature. Each of these NDP MLAs, during the 2011 election, went door to door, and they told people that they weren't going to raise their taxes. And so when they betrayed that trust, when they broke that promise, Manitobans came to the steps of the Legislature. They came in numbers of over 500 and they wanted to talk to those same MLAs who had gone to their door during the election.

And so they—metaphorically, Mr. Speaker—came to the House, here, to their door. They came to the front door of the Minister of Finance, and I don't know if the Minister of Finance was able to see any of the rally. There was somebody peeking out his window, I think. I don't know who it was. It was kind of a mystic figure. There were some pictures that were had, but it was like those grainy sasquatch photos you see sometimes. We couldn't make out exactly who it was. But it may have been the Minister of Finance, peeking outside of the window at the people who were amassed down below and concerned.

And they wanted him to come out, Mr. Speaker. They wanted him to come and to address the crowd—if not him, then, of course, the Premier (Mr. Selinger), who was invited to come and to speak and, you know, it was like an empty chair or something. It was—the person wasn't there. The—I think the announcers, the hosts of the rally, called his name three times, hoping the Premier would come from the crowd and speak to the people who'd come to the rally but, in fact, he wasn't there.

But maybe the Minister of Finance heard from his—behind the curtains, maybe he heard some of the comments, and the comments were really about Manitobans wanting to be heard. And they didn't feel that they were heard during the prebudget consultation meetings because they weren't given the facts. And so now, we have an additional six months, if the members agree to support this hoist motion,

Mr. Speaker, an additional six months for reflection, an additional six months for members to go out to the different communities, consult with not only our constituents, but their constituents as well.

You know, I've read some very interesting editorials in the Dauphin newspaper in the last number of weeks, in the Dauphin Herald, Mr. Speaker. It's confirmed by the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers), a fine newspaper, I'm sure and they've been raising concerns within the minister's own newspaper about the government's fiscal policies.

* (16:20)

So I wonder, Mr. Speaker, if we held a new prebudget consultation meeting over the next six months when this voice motion passes, in the constituency of the member for Dauphin, I'll gladly go with him. Other members of our caucus will come as well, and we'll—we can even rent—we can rent a bit of a hall; we might need a bigger hall than he'd expect, and we'll invite people from Dauphin and from the area to come and to talk to the Minister of Finance about this PST increase. And I'm guessing that the message that he would get would be completely different than the message that he got earlier this year when they held the PST—or held the prebudget consultation meetings without talking about the PST increase. So that's a friendly offer that I make to the member for Dauphin, and I'd be happy if he would come with me and we could do that.

Now, six months is a longer period of time than it takes to get to Dauphin, of course, Mr. Speaker, so we could go other places. We could go to—of course, I might still be talking in six months, but you know, we have the evenings, and so when the House adjourns we could head off to Gimli—I'd be happy to go to Gimli. We had a great meeting with my colleagues in Gimli a few weeks ago. They were happy to see MLAs actually visit the community. They hadn't seen an MLA for a while, so it was good to see MLAs come to the community of Gimli. They were very welcoming, took us around to the different areas and showed us a lot of different things, and they raised a lot of concerns. But I—my guess is that if we held a prebudget consultation meeting, a new one—actually we'd probably call it a post-budget consultation meeting, I suppose—but if we hold the new post-budget consultation meeting in Gimli, that it would be quite different. It would be quite different than what the members had heard in their prebudget consultation meetings, because

Manitobans want to be heard. They want to have a say about the PST and they understand now that it's unlikely—we hope the government will change its mind, but they understand now it's unlikely the government's going to give them a say through the legally mandated referendum.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

So this would be an opportunity. That's why the hoist motion by the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer) makes so much sense. It's—in fact, it should be considered a friendly amendment, Mr. Speaker; a friendly amendment, because it gives the opportunity for the government to do what they should have done on their own accord, to hear Manitobans. And then—you know, the member for—the Government House Leader (Ms. Howard) says that we should vote on this. And I want to assure her we are going to vote—we are going to vote on this motion. And I'm surprised now that the member all of a sudden has this great passion for voting, because she's doing everything she can to prevent a referendum. She's doing everything she can to prevent Manitobans from actually being able to vote, and yet she desperately wants to vote in this House on an amendment.

Now, I—we are not going to strip away the rights of members to vote, we're going to allow them to vote on this amendment. It may not be today, it may not be tomorrow, it might not even be next week, Mr. Speaker, but at some point the government will have an opportunity to vote on this hoist motion. All we're asking them—all we're asking them to do is to respect Manitobans in the same way and to follow the law and to give them that right. And so the additional six months will certainly give the government time for reflection. So I'd be happy to go with the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson), and we could have this post-budget meeting in Gimli, and I know that he would get many different comments that he might not be expecting.

Now, the member for mandatory voting—I mean, the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), who's very concerned about mandatory voting, I would hope that he would go into his caucus or the convention this week—I understand there's some sort of a confab happening in Brandon this weekend, Mr. Speaker, and I certainly wish them well; I wish them all safe travels. Maybe we could have a budget meeting in Brandon this weekend. We could ask people what they think about the PST, because, you know, there's nothing actually—there's nothing

actually on the NDP convention agenda about the PST. It's as though the same person who drafted up those ads—those ads that are running on the budget, are the same ones who drafted up the NDP agenda, because both of them don't mention the PST. You turn on the TV, you hear the radio—don't mention the PST at all. You go to the NDP convention, well, they don't want to talk about a PST increase. And isn't that interesting, because all around Manitoba—all around Manitoba what people are talking about is the PST increase. But you go—the only place you could probably find in Manitoba this weekend where people won't mention in any fashion the increase of the PST increase is in Brandon at the NDP convention. You know, it's like it's some sort of alternative universe where people don't have any sort of notion of what's happening in the real world—not going to mention the PST increase at all on the floor of the convention. And I don't think they're going to mention anything about the referendum, Mr. Speaker, about doing away with the referendum at the NDP convention.

And yet, ironically, the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) is going to stand up, I suppose, and support his riding association—I suspect he was involved with the drafting of the resolution—and demand mandatory voting. I don't know how he's going to enforce it—what kind of draconian measures they have to try to enforce mandatory voting. And next, I'm sure, they're going to want to have, you know, mandatory voting for their party.

But at the end of the day, that's where the NDP sort of go on these democratic issues. But they're not even going to talk about the referendum at their convention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, even though the member for Elmwood will passionately, as he often does, talk about mandatory voting. And I don't know how they can't see the disconnect. On the one hand, they want to stand up and say, well, we're the great defenders. We're the great defenders of voting, Mr. Speaker. But on the other hand, they won't actually stand up for Manitobans and give them the very voice that they want. So this six-month hoist motion gives them the opportunity. It gives them a chance. It gives them time to do what they should've done to begin with—to consult Manitobans. And that's why I'm glad that the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer) brought it forward.

We could travel into Seine River, Mr. Speaker, into the great community of Seine River in south of Winnipeg, and we could talk to those Manitobans and say to them: What do you think of the PST

increase? We had some good examples brought forward, not just today but in the days past as well, about families who are having to make tough choices—about families who are going to have to choose between a sports program or being able to do something else, who might have to do away with a family vacation. And I wonder if the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald), when she's out talking to these families, who maybe don't do as well as she does financially—and we don't begrudge anybody doing well financially, but the reality is that some people struggle along and at different periods of their life, they go through challenges.

And this PST increase is going to impact them and it's going to force them to make decisions. It's going to force them to choose between things that they shouldn't have to choose between, because ultimately the problem isn't theirs. Ultimately, the problem isn't necessarily at their kitchen table; it's at the Cabinet table. And so the change should happen at the Cabinet table, not where they're forcing the decision onto the kitchen table of the hard-working people of communities and constituencies like Seine River, St. Vital, and Southdale and other constituencies here in the city of Winnipeg.

And I would ask those MLAs to speak to their members, to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), and I hold no personal ill will to the Minister of Finance. I find him to be an affable fellow, and we have good conversations outside of this House. We see each other at the odd Bomber game, Mr. Speaker. At least, we did in the old stadium. I don't know if we're going to be sitting near each other in the new configuration of the new stadium. *[interjection]* Well, I think the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) has made sure that we're seated together or close together, so we'll cheer on the Bombers this summer.

But I—you know, it's not a personal issue, and I would hope that the members of that caucus would go to the Minister of Finance and say to him, well, we want a second chance at this. You know, there's never anything wrong with admitting that you've made a mistake, and so all we're asking in the NDP caucus to do is to look at this six-nix-six months as an opportunity—as an opportunity to admit that you've made a mistake, as an opportunity to hit the reset button.

And I don't think, you know, that Manitobans would hold it too much against the government if they did that. In fact, I think sometimes people are

often critical that politicians don't often enough say when they've made a mistake. So here's an opportunity for the Minister of Finance not to be shamed into something, but perhaps to take a proactive step in the next six months to reconsider and to come forward and say, I made a mistake.

There are different ways that this can be done without hurting individual families, Mr. Speaker, and I think that people might give them credit for that—that people might not boo him at the Bomber game like the Premier (Mr. Selinger) was booed at the Jets game only a few weeks ago—

* (16:30)

An Honourable Member: That was just his picture. He wasn't even there.

Mr. Goertzen: —and that was just his picture, you know. I mean, heaven forbid had he actually, you know, been there in person. So I would hope that the member would take this hoist motion in the spirit that the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer) has brought it forward; not in a negative way, not as something to be looked at with chagrin, but as a great opportunity. In fact, I suspect, knowing the member for Dauphin a little bit, that there are probably times when he goes back to his office after the legislative session, after 5 o'clock, and he sits down at his desk and he puts his head in his hands and he wonders, how can I get out of this. You know, how can I make this whole thing go away? And I'm not surprised, because I know that he'd be getting the emails, he'd be getting the phone calls like we're getting. And, of course, we often hear from his own constituents who are disappointed with his actions, Mr. Speaker, and it wouldn't be just Stan.

I know that other ministers and other MLAs—and, of course, some of the MLAs who aren't in Cabinet wouldn't feel as much personal responsibility to the decision, but they're all—you know, they're all elected members of this Legislature, they all have to make a decision. And so they all at different moments probably sit at their desk and proverbially put their head in their hands and ask themselves, how do we make this go away? So we've come along to do them a favour.

The member for Brandon West, you know, he's here to help by bringing forward this hoist motion. Now, it's really not our job, I don't think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to get the government out of trouble. And really we shouldn't have to be bailing out the government when they make mistakes, but that's the

kind of people we are; we're willing to help. So we bring along the hoist motion to give them the opportunity for the next six months to do what they should've done right from the beginning, to have that consultation.

We're giving the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) the very thing that he looks for late at night—a way out—how do I make this whole thing go away? Well, here's an opportunity. Go back to the people, let's have another—a round of the now post-budget consultation and say to Manitobans, all right, we put forward an idea that we didn't consult with you with to begin with. We surprised you by bringing forward a PST increase. We admit that we broke a promise, but now let's have another discussion. And I think what they'd find out during those six months, that Manitobans want that voice, they want that referendum.

Now, I recognize that not every Manitoban, before this debate was started on the PST, would've even known that legislatively they had a right for a referendum. Of course, not every Manitoban reads the statutes—the consolidated statutes of the Province of Manitoba, so they wouldn't have all understood exactly how the balanced budget and taxpayer accountability act works. But I venture to say that many more Manitobans now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, know about the taxpayer protection and accountability act. They knew about it a few months ago, and I've been very proud of Manitobans, about the fact that they have gravitated to the idea—not just they don't think that a PST tax increase is necessary—and they don't. They don't think an increase in the PST is necessary, but they've gravitated to the fact that the referendum is something that was granted to them, that was given to them in law. Even those who may not have even known beforehand that that's how the law read, see the unjust and the unfairness of having a government come along and change the rules after the fact, of coming along and saying, well, those were the rules before but now we're going to change the rules, because that's not how ordinary Manitobans live.

And so, this additional six months that the member for Brandon West is proposing would give a great deal of time for reflection—a great deal of time for reflection for the member for Finance—for the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers). He could speak within his own community, he could come to communities like ours, and to hear from Manitobans. And I think that he would hear that Manitobans want them to look internally first, to go to the Cabinet

table and not to the kitchen table of average, say, Manitobans to find those savings.

I think that he would hear that Manitobans are distrustful of this government. That they are disappointed that the government broke their promise not just last year, but this year as well, not to raise taxes. In fact, I know that the government members are already hearing that message. I know that as they go out to the different events within their community, if they venture out of their homes, that they are hearing that message from Manitobans. That Manitobans are saying to them, you promised us one thing and now you're doing something different.

So this six months that the member is proposing on the hoist motion, Mr. Speaker, would give the government that opportunity to hear from those Manitobans. I think, also, that the next six months, if the hoist motion is—when it is voted upon, and I've given my commitment to the member for—the Government House Leader (Ms. Howard)—that, in fact, it will be voted upon. But it would give them time for reflection and, you know, sometimes reflection is a powerful thing. Sometimes reflection is good for everybody, a chance to sort of get away from the heat of the moment, from whatever is going on and distracting you whether that's here in the Legislature or otherwise, and to have that opportunity to reflect about things that have happened, because reflection often gives you a very, very different perspective.

And so the six months that the members could gain by agreeing to this hoist motion would give an opportunity for the government to have a great time of reflection. And I would say for the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) that this is also something that's done with his best interests in mind, with the right motives, because he would have the opportunity to, maybe not walk away from the Legislature—the Legislature would probably still sit through those six months. But he would have the stress of this particular issue removed from him. He wouldn't have to worry specifically about it in the moment and it would give him an opportunity to reflect on what it is that he's done.

And what it is that he has done is to breach a trust, to breach a trust with Manitobans because each of the members opposite made a promise, and they made a promise to Manitobans in the last election. They said to Manitobans, door to door and through radio ads and television ads and in leaders' debates and in newspapers, Mr. Speaker, and in pamphlets

and in every other form that we communicate during an election, they said that they wouldn't be increasing taxes. And I think that over the next six months, with the passing of this hoist motion, would give the Minister of Finance and all the different Cabinet ministers and MLAs on the NDP side time to reflect, to reflect back on their promise. Perhaps the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), he could go through some of the old brochures that he had from the 2011 election. I'm sure he'd find things on his brochure that would show that he also made a promise, either directly or indirectly, that he wouldn't be raising taxes over the next term of the government.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan) could over the next six months go back and look at the ads that she ran in the last election, and I'm sure that she would find different examples of how they made a promise, a promise to Manitobans not to raise taxes during the term of their election. And it would be a powerful opportunity to sit back and reflect over the next six months about what the government has done, and also to reflect on the response of Manitobans.

You know, I was saying to a friend of mine a couple of days ago that it's interesting that the Legislature has become a bit of a beehive of activity, and it's going to be more so in the next several weeks as we have committees that are going to be coming forward. I haven't checked today, but as of yesterday there was 185 people who had registered to present to Bill 20.

An Honourable Member: Holy.

Mr. Goertzen: I know, it's shocking for many members. It's not often that we've had that many citizens come and register for a committee. I can only think of one or two times. So it's an unusual sort of thing. It's not a common occurrence and, of course, that's not surprising. It can be an intimidating thing for people to come to the Legislature. The building sort of has a grandeur nature to it, and to come before a committee of MLAs and, I mean, obviously, it's what we do for a living. We speak on issues. We talk to constituents. We have the opportunity to speak in public forums, but that isn't the common experience. It's not the common experience for individuals and often people feel very intimidated.

I know the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) had the experience of listening to two or three hundred presenters on a different bill several years ago. He seems to be the member for huge committee

hearings. I don't know if that's something that he's done or if it's something that's foisted upon him. The minister of controversy, it seems, Mr. Speaker, I don't know, they might not be building a statue for him any time soon. But, you know, ultimately, we're going to be having a lot of people coming to this Legislature to have committee presentations. And I know that the 185 people that are registered now, and I'm sure that that number will exceed 200 by the time we get to committee in several weeks, that those 200 people, or plus, would rather be doing something else than coming to a committee on a weekday night and sitting late into the night, possibly through the night, if this government does another undemocratic thing and rams the committee through the night. But I know they'd rather be doing something else. I mean, it'll be a warm summer night, I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, and we'll be in the committee room for many hours to hear Manitobans concerned about what this government is doing on Bill 20.

*(16:40)

So they're coming here because they have a purpose. They want the government to reflect. They want the government to have time for reflection. They want the government to change its mind, and this is what I think the hoist motion would do for the government. It would give them that opportunity. It would give them that chance to themselves have time for reflection. But Manitobans will give them that chance, even if they don't take it themselves by agreeing to this hoist motion because Manitobans will ensure that we have committee for several days. They'll speak from different experiences.

I'm sure the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers), and I'm hopeful and I want to encourage him to encourage his leader, the member for St. Boniface, the Premier (Mr. Selinger), to join him at these committee hearings. I don't think that the Premier should be afraid of the public. I don't think—despite the fact he got booed at the Jets game, I think he'll get a different reception if he comes to the committee and listens respectfully to the presentations by Manitobans, but listens with an open mind, not just open ears because there's a difference between hearing something and truly listening. And I'm hopeful that the Minister of Finance and the Premier will actually come there to listen to what Manitobans are saying because there will be Manitobans—and I can tell you this and I know this to be true. There'll be Manitobans who have personal stories of struggle, Mr. Speaker, personal stories of hardship. There will certainly be some Manitobans who simply feel

betrayed, who simply feel that the government made them a promise and expect them to live up to that promise. I'm sure we'll hear those stories, but there'll be Manitobans who have, I think, very personal stories about how it's a struggle for them to make ends meet.

And I hope that the Minister of Finance, who, again, I think is a decent person, I think he'll come and be there for those hearings, but I hope that he truly listens and then if he's not able to convince the Premier to come to the meetings, that he'll bring those stories back, that he'll bring back to his Cabinet table, to the different ministers in the government, those real stories, because ultimately this isn't a government that's listening, Mr. Speaker. And that is what is frustrating Manitobans.

They don't feel they're being listened to. They hold the rally outside the steps of the Legislature just a few feet to walk out of minister's office and down the stairs, spend 20 minutes, half an hour, listening to the concerns of Manitobans, but they didn't do that. The members of the government refused to do even that.

Now I know that, you know, you don't have to agree with everybody's position. I know from being an MLA, that you don't always agree on every issue that comes up but we have a responsibility to at least listen, and the next six months I think, if this hoist motion is approved, would be that opportunity, and it's why I want the government to consider to support this because the frustration that Manitobans are feeling—the frustration that they feel is that the government isn't truly listening to them.

Not only that they disagree with the decision, and they do, I think, disagree with the decision, but they strongly disagree with how the decision has been implemented, by refusing to listen—to have their government members listen to them, Mr. Speaker. That has added to the frustration. It's really made people concerned that the government is out of touch.

So, again, this is an opportunity for the government. They vote for this hoist motion as an opportunity for them. It's an opportunity for them to reset the agenda, to hit the reset button, to take a second chance, to take a second look, to come back into Cabinet and say, well, we tried this. It didn't work very well, you know, and we reflected on it and we're going to come back out and we're going to come up with a different idea, a different approach.

And there are different approaches, Mr. Speaker. You know, when you talk to Manitobans and I know the members opposite don't believe this. I know when you listen to the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) and he'll talk about—what are you going to cut? What are you going to cut? What are you going to cut? And those are the kind of lines that he's trying to use.

But, when you actually talk to Manitobans and you ask them: Do you think that there's enough money within government that they could find a way to not have to raise the PST? Almost unanimously 90-some per cent of Manitobans would say, absolutely. If the government was dedicated—the government was committed to finding savings, they could do it.

So it might be—well, and, you know, the member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer), you know, and I saw the newsletter that he sent out. And I've never seen a newsletter, Mr. Speaker, that was such an apologetic newsletter. You know, that he tried point after point—some people say this and we shouldn't increase the PST; other people say we shouldn't increase it for this reason. And he tried to dispel every argument that I'm sure his constituents are actually raising.

Now I think that there's a saying—a Shakespearean saying that, you know, somebody doth protest too much, Mr. Speaker. Well, he did protest too much in that brochure. But he laid out very clearly in the brochure and the email that the member for Wolseley sent out—all of the concerns that Manitobans actually feel.

And I think one of the points—and he might want to table it for the House, Mr. Speaker—one of the points that he said in his brochure was a question that had come from constituents: Well, you couldn't you find the savings somewhere else? And that's a key concern that Manitobans have been raising with me and I'm sure with members of the government. Because overwhelmingly—overwhelmingly—they believe that they would, in fact, be able to find those savings in government.

You know, I hear that there's some—they think there's some magic formula. You know, it wouldn't take magic to do away with the vote tax, you know. It wouldn't—you wouldn't actually have to go to a magic store, Mr. Speaker, and buy some secret potion, you know, to do away with the vote tax. In fact, you know, it's actually called—it's a little magical something called a committee. You could go

to a committee and do away with the vote tax, but the government doesn't want to do that.

You could do away with the 58th MLA with the stroke of a pen, to use a phrase, Mr. Speaker. Wouldn't take very much, you know, wouldn't take very much—might take a little courage and maybe the government's short of that these days. Might take a little bit of courage to go and say, well, you know, we know that you served as a colleague of ours, but maybe we could find one competent MLA—backbench MLA—to fulfill that role on the other side.

So the member doesn't have to look for magic. I know he hasn't been here very long, but it doesn't take a lot of magic to find out how you can do the right thing, Mr. Speaker. But it does take something—it doesn't take magic, but it does take a little bit of courage—does take a little bit of courage. And I would encourage the new member to try to find a little bit of that. Look less for magic and look a little bit more for courage.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Now I digress, Mr. Speaker. The reflection that the members could have over the next six months—the reflection that the members could have over the next six months if they would support this hoist motion is something that would, ultimately, benefit them. It's, ultimately, something that is going to help them.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) is truly looking, he's truly looking for a way they'd get out of this. I think he's finding a way to—how can he, you know—it's hard for me to know exactly who pulled the trigger here on the PST increase. Whether the Premier (Mr. Selinger) demanded that it happened, or whether the Minister of Finance demanded that it happen, or maybe he was talking to some of bond-rating agencies in New York and they gave him a warning about what might happen if they weren't able to do some things financially. And they decided, well, this is what we're going to do because they're worried about a downgrade or other sort of things. It's difficult. That's speculation.

I don't know exactly what happened, but I know something happened. I know something happened. And I also know that the Minister of Finance is somehow looking for a way that he can make this all go away.

And I think now that he probably—I think they miscalculated. I think they misunderstood how

concerned Manitobans would be about this increase. How concerned they would be that the promise that was made to them in 2011 wasn't kept, Mr. Speaker. And I think they drastically—drastically underestimated how Manitobans would react to the elimination of the referendum. I truly think they believe that the referendum was something that needed to be adhered to.

* (16:50)

So that's something that the next six months would be helpful for the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers). He could—you know, I'd even give him a little bit of time if he wanted to go away from the House, you know. Normally we'll be sitting here for six months, Mr. Speaker, but if he needed a few days away to reflect, that we passed the hoist motion, so the bill was put off for six months, and he needed to get away with the family to think a bit about the kind of quagmire he's got himself into, I'm a generous man. I'd give him that time. I'd be happy to let him go away to think about this because reflection is important, to give him that time for reflection. So I'm hopeful that over the next six months, that the government will have that opportunity.

The other thing, if the government supports this hoist motion, Mr. Speaker, is that they're going to have an opportunity to speak to retailers. Now, that's a key thing, I think. I don't think that the government spent a lot of time talking to retailers and what impact this PST increase would have on them. And I know the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Pallister), the member for Fort Whyte, had an opportunity to speak to some small business people over the last number of months. He held a news conference with one of the members, and the businesses are telling us that this could be, for some of them, a critical blow for them, that this additional cost that's going to get borne by their customers might affect their customers' shopping patterns so much that it might impact them. That won't be the case for every business that it might be that critical blow, but, certainly, it's going to have an impact on many different businesses in many different ways.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that many of our Manitoban citizens go to the United States sometimes to do their shopping. Already, there's cross-border shopping. Many of them will go to Grand Forks. I see some of my constituents, at different times, in Grand Forks. I've seen them in different parts of the United States, and, of course, sometimes they're there simply for a holiday to get

away from the daily stresses of life. But often they are there to shop because the taxes are often less; on clothes; certainly, in Minnesota, where I don't think you pay tax on clothing, or in North Dakota, where you can claim back the tax, that it's going to have an impact. It's going to have an impact to increase cross-border shopping; the more people are going to look at it and go, well, you know, I might not have done it before, I might not have bothered to go down to Grand Forks or Fargo or to Minnesota or Minneapolis, but now it's worth it. Now I've decided that it's worth it.

And what impact does that have? That has a tremendous impact, Mr. Speaker, on those individual businesses. It has a tremendous impact on the employees. And members opposite should never forget that businesses employ people. They employ individuals who are in school. They employ individuals who are supporting families. They employ individuals who are in the later parts of their life.

So any increase in taxes, Mr. Speaker, that makes us less competitive with other jurisdictions, has an impact on those retailers. So, if this hoist motion is approved—and I know the government will have an opportunity to put some words on the record; I would encourage them to put words on the record. But, if the hoist motion is approved, it would give the government, the Minister of Finance, the MLA for Dauphin, it would give him an opportunity to visit many, many businesses in Manitoba.

He could start, of course, in the city of Winnipeg. He wouldn't have to go too far. He could visit some of the ma and pa stores, as we call them, smaller operations. He could visit medium-sized businesses, here, in the city of Winnipeg, and he could visit large retailers. And he could talk to them and actually consult with them. And I think one of the frustrations that businesses have, Mr. Speaker, is they don't feel that they've been consulted with. They don't feel that the Minister of Finance has talked to them.

Now, I know there has been lack of consultation from the Minister of Finance in other areas. For example, the whole fiasco involving the Manitoba Jockey Club, Mr. Speaker, that there wasn't real consultation there. We read some testimony in statements of claim about the kind of consultation, or what the minister calls consultation, the sort of language that he used when he went and tried to

bully the Jockey Club out of money that, ultimately, they are raising within their establishment.

But that's not really consultation, Mr. Speaker, and I don't know if that's the kind of consultation the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) had with businesses when it comes to the PST increase. I suspect it isn't, because, you know, after the budget, we heard from many people who came forward and said, well, you know, we were surprised. You know, the Canadian association of independent retailers, and we heard from the Taxpayers Federation. All of them seem flabbergasted that the government was going to be increasing the PST. They simply couldn't believe it. They didn't see it coming.

So this is an opportunity. The next six months is an opportunity for the Minister of Finance to actually go out and talk to the different businesses, to talk to the retailers, to ask them: How is this going to impact your business? How is it going to impact your employees? Is it going to impact your employees? Are you going to have to lay people off? Are you going to have to have people share shifts instead of having one person who is full time or a couple of people who are full time?

And I know from my years, Mr. Speaker, in working in the retail sector and working in the retail sector, that these things all have an impact. Well, the minister of—member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald) is wondering where I worked. I had the opportunity when I was in high school and university—those few years—to work at Penner Foods, a grocery store. I did. And wonderful place to work—of course, owned by a great man, Jim Penner, a former colleague. And I know working with Jim in the store that there are a lot of different things that had consequences when you had raised taxes individually on certain things that it had a consequence—it had a consequence in people's shopping patterns, and we often talked about that—about how different things would impact people's shopping patterns.

So this is information that the Minister of Finance could learn from. I'd be happy to go with him. We could visit various retailers. We could sit down and have coffee in their establishments and we could ask them, how is it that the PST increase is going to impact your business? How is it going to have an effect on you? And when we have those discussions, I think that the Minister of Finance would learn a lot.

First of all, he'd learn that he should consult. That before he brings in a budget, there needs to be

true consultation—not the prebudget consultation meetings that we saw where there's a couple of hand-picked NDP supporters and a couple of councillors quickly invited to a meeting of 15 people in a room and then presented with false information—not those kind of meetings, Mr. Speaker. We've had those already and they didn't work very well.

The kind of consultation meeting that I'm talking about is where we sit down with business people and you tell them exactly how this is going to go—exactly what the government's going to do.

And, of course, now they know that they want to bring in a PST increase. And then you ask them, what do you think's going to happen? How's it going to impact you? Maybe you bring in some employees and you ask them, would it change how you shop, not just in the store that you're working, but in other places. How would it impact your families? And when you have those discussions with people, you learn an awful lot.

You know, that's the great thing about this job that we have as MLAs, is you get to learn every day. And the greatest learning that we have, of course, isn't here in the Assembly. This isn't where the greatest foundation of knowledge is. The greatest places that we learn from, Mr. Speaker, are from members of the public. When you go out to Tim Hortons and you sit down with a few people in the—in a Tim Hortons you just pick a table and you start talking to people and you find out a bit about their lives. You find out about what their struggles are. You find out about how they're doing well in their life or how they're maybe aren't doing so well. And that's the kind of consultation I want the member to undertake with me.

Let's go to those businesses. Let's go to the coffee shops and let's talk to Manitobans and let's say to them, all right, you know, the government was proposing to have this PST increase. Can you just tell us—tell us how you feel about it? What's it going to do for you? Do you think it's a good idea or a bad idea?

I'm not proposing that we gerrymander these sort of discussions, Mr. Speaker. I think we lay it out there. Maybe you think it's a good idea. Maybe you think it's a bad idea. Minister can present his arguments; I can present—our Finance critic, our leader can present the arguments against it and how they—other savings could be found. And then we'd hear what people think. You know why—what would they be scared of?

And, you know, six months is an opportunity to do that, Mr. Speaker. So I would ask the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers)—I know he's going to be away this weekend and visiting with other like-minded folks in Brandon at their convention, and I don't think that he plans to raise the issue of the PST. I don't think he's planning to go onto the convention floor and talk about the impact of the PST increase.

But he has an opportunity, because he's going to be in Brandon, and the fine folks of Brandon—if he went down to the—went to the Tim Hortons out on the highway, if he went over even to Houston's—you know, I think he could drop by and he could ask a few of the fine folks there. He could ask a few of them—the tavern—he could ask a few of the fine folks.

He could ask them—well, I've only heard about these places. I've never actually been there. I only heard about them. But he could ask people there, well, what do you think of the PST increase, because he's going to get a different view than he's going to get on the convention floor. I can guarantee you that the response he's going to get at those places, whatever establishments—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. When this matter's again before the House, the honourable member for Steinbach will have unlimited time.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 22, 2013

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