

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	NDP
ALLUM, James, Hon.	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	NDP
BJORNSON, Peter	Gimli	NDP
BLADY, Sharon, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
BRIESE, Stuart	Agassiz	PC
CALDWELL, Drew, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
CHIEF, Kevin, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	NDP
CROTHERS, Deanne, Hon.	St. James	NDP
CULLEN, Cliff	Spruce Woods	PC
DEWAR, Greg, Hon.	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	Fort Rouge	NDP
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Richmond	NDP
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	NDP
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Swan River	NDP
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	Dawson Trail	NDP
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MELNICK, Christine	Riel	NDP
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	PC
NEVAKSHONOFF, Thomas, Hon.	Interlake	NDP
OSWALD, Theresa	Seine River	NDP
PALLISTER, Brian	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PETTERSEN, Clarence	Flin Flon	NDP
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REID, Daryl, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Kewatinook	NDP
RONDEAU, Jim	Assiniboia	NDP
ROWAT, Leanne	Riding Mountain	PC
SARAN, Mohinder, Hon.	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	St. Paul	PC
SELBY, Erin	Southdale	NDP
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin	NDP
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie, Hon.	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 4, 2015

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.

Please be seated.

Introduction of New Members

Mr. Speaker: I'm pleased to inform the Assembly that the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly has received from the Chief Electoral Officer a letter indicating the election of Amanda Lathlin as the member for the constituency of The Pas, and I hereby table the notice of the return of the member elected.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present to you the—Amanda Lathlin, the MLA for the constituency of The Pas. She has sworn her oath, signed the register and she now presents herself here today to claim her right to her seat in the House of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker: On behalf of all members of the—all honourable members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, I wish to welcome you to the Manitoba Legislative Assembly and to wish you well in your parliamentary career.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 16—The Terry Fox Legacy Act

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors (Ms. Crothers), that Bill 16, The Terry Fox Legacy Act; Loi commémorative de Terry Fox, now be read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Blady: Mr. Speaker, this legislation establishes the first Monday in August as Terry Fox day and the

second Sunday in September after Labour Day as Terry Fox run day.

As many of you know, Terry Fox was born in Winnipeg and went on to become a national symbol for perseverance in the face of overwhelming odds, hope and courage and an inspiration to those of us who have had a journey with cancer.

I would like to thank the Terry Fox Foundation, the Fox family both here in Winnipeg and in British Columbia for their support of this legislation, with a special shout-out to his brother Darrell and his uncle William.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

PETITIONS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing none, we'll move on to petitions.

Rights of Manitoba Children

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

The provincial government should uphold the rights of children set forth by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by Canada over 20 years ago to better protect and promote children and their rights and to ensure the voices of children are heard.

Instead, many children in Manitoba, especially those in the child-welfare system, reveal they sometimes feel they have no say in what happens to them

Under this provincial government, Manitoba's children and youth are falling behind on several indicators of well-being in areas that would prepare them for better outcomes in life.

This year, the provincial government's education system was ranked last of all Canadian provinces in science, math and reading.

Under this provincial government, Manitoba also has the second highest percentage of children

using food banks of all Canadian provinces and the highest child poverty rate.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the minister of child and youth opportunities to ensure that the rights of all Manitoba children are respected and that the opinions of children are taken into consideration when decisions that affect them are made.

To urge the provincial government and the minister of child and youth opportunities to correct the tragic systemic flaws that have failed Manitoba children in the recent past.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by N. Morham, V. Beaudry, T. Moore and many more concerned Manitobans.

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

Further petitions?

Provincial Trunk Highway 206 and Cedar Avenue in Oakbank—Pedestrian Safety

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Every day, hundreds of Manitoba children walk to school in Oakbank and must cross PTH No. 206 at the intersection with Cedar Avenue.

(2) There have been many dangerous incidents where drivers used the right shoulder to pass vehicles that have stopped at the traffic light waiting to turn left at this intersection.

(3) Law enforcement officials have identified this intersection as a hot spot of concern for the safety of schoolchildren, drivers and emergency responders.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the provincial government improve the safety at the pedestrian corridor at the intersection of PTH No. 206 and Cedar Avenue in Oakbank by considering such steps as highlighting pavement markings to better indicate the location of

the shoulders and crosswalk, as well as installing a lighted crosswalk structure.

This is signed by B. Dunlop, R. Cook, R. Turyle and many, many other fine Manitobans.

* (13:40)

Bipole III Land Expropriation—Collective Bargaining Request

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): I'd like to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

And these—this is the background for this petition:

On November 19th, 2014, the Premier authorized an order-in-council enabling Manitoba Hydro to take valuable and productive farmland for its controversial Bipole III transmission line project without due process of law.

On November 24th, 2014, the minister responsible for the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act signed a confirming order for the province of Manitoba declaring that no notice to landowners is required for the seizure of property.

The waiver of notice represents an attack on rural families and their property rights in a modern democratic society. There was not even an opportunity provided for debate in the Manitoba Legislature. In many cases, the private property seized had been part of a family farm for generations.

Manitoba Hydro has claimed it has only ever expropriated one landowner in its entire history of operation. The provincial government has now gone ahead and instituted expropriation procedures against more than 200 landowners impacted by Bipole III.

Since November 2013, Manitoba Bipole III land over-landowner committee, in association with the Canadian Association of Energy and Pipeline Landowner Associations, CAEPLA, have been trying to engage Manitoba Hydro to negotiate a fair business agreement.

For over 14 months, the provincial government and Manitoba Hydro have acted in bad faith in their dealings with Manitoba landowners or their duly authorized agents. Those actions have denied farmers their right to bargain collectively to protect their property and their businesses from Bipole III.

MBLC and CAEPLA has not formed an association to stop the Bipole III project and they are not antidevelopment. MBLC and CAEPLA have simply come together, as a group of people, as Manitobans, to stand up for the property rights—the right to collectively bargain for a fair business agreement that protects the future well-being of their businesses. MBLC and CAEPLA are duly authorized agents for Manitoba landowners who wish to exercise their freedom to associate and negotiate in good faith.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the provincial government immediately direct Manitoba Hydro to engage with MBLC and CAEPLA in order to negotiate a fair business agreement that addresses the many legitimate concerns of farm families affected by the Bipole III transmission line.

This petition is signed by R. Klassen, L. Klassen, R. Brash and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Minnesota-Manitoba Transmission Line Route— Information Request

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line is a 500-kilowatt alternating current transmission line set to be located in southeastern Manitoba that will cross into the US border south of Piney, Manitoba.

(2) The line has an in-service date of 2020 and will run approximately 150 kilometres with tower heights expected to reach between 40 and 60 metres and be located every four to five hundred metres.

(3) The preferred route designated for the line will see the hydro towers come in close proximity to the community of La Broquerie and many other communities in Manitoba's southeast rather than alternative route that was also considered.

(4) The alternative route would have seen the line run further east, avoid densely populated areas and eventually terminate at the same spot at the US border.

(5) The Progressive Conservative caucus has repeatedly asked for information about the routing of

the line and its proximity to densely populated areas and has yet to receive any response.

(6) Landowners all across Manitoba are concerned about the impact hydro line routing could have on their land values.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro to immediately provide a written explanation to all members of the Legislative Assembly regarding what criteria were used and the reasons for selecting the preferred route for the Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line, including whether or not this routing represented the least intrusive option to the residents of Taché, Springfield, Ste. Anne, Stuartburn, Piney and La Broquerie.

This petition was signed by H. Maurer, N. Maurer, T. Wiens and many more fine Manitobans.

Beausejour District Hospital— Weekend and Holiday Physician Availability

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) The Beausejour District Hospital is a 30-bed, acute-care facility that serves the communities of Beausejour and Brokenhead.

(2) The hospital and the primary-care centre have had no doctor available on weekends and holidays for many months, jeopardizing the health and livelihoods of those in the northeast region of the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority.

(3) During the 2011 election, the provincial government promised to provide every Manitoban with an—with access to a family doctor by 2015.

(4) This promise is far from being realized, and Manitobans are witnessing many emergency rooms limiting services or closing temporarily, with the majority of these reductions taking place in rural Manitoba.

(5) According to the Health Council of Canada, only 25 per cent of doctors in Manitoba reported that their patients had access to care on evenings and weekends.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Health to ensure that the Beausejour District Hospital and primary-care centre have a primary-care physician available on weekends and holidays to better provide area residents with this essential service.

This petition is signed by D. Evers, B. Birch, A. Rittwage and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Any further petitions? Seeing none, we'll move on to committee reports. Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us this afternoon Mr. Jian Luan, who is the guest of the honourable member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Speaker: That concludes the guests; we'll now move on to oral questions.

Fiscal Stabilization Fund Management of Fund

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): The last week, Mr. Speaker, the government decided to dive into the rainy day fund and do a rainy day raid of \$100 million plus, taking it away from the security of Manitobans for future use.

This week is Emergency Preparedness Week. Is your family prepared? The government is on side with the concept; at least they say so in tweets. They say, be prepared to respond to a disaster. Know the risks and reduce them. They say emergency situations create stress. Know who to contact when you need help.

Well, they know who not to contact, Mr. Speaker, and it's a government that would create additional stress for them by reducing their ability to feel confident in the face of potential emergencies in the future.

Now, with this \$100-million rainy day raid, I've got to ask the Premier: Was this raid done to reduce his stress or that of Manitobans?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that the member opposite has acknowledged that we had over \$800 million that we built up in

cash in a rainy day fund before the recession started, and we used it for exactly what it was intended for: to buffer the effects of the recession, to make sure that we could keep the cost of any additional borrowing low, to make sure that we could stimulate the economy and create jobs.

And, Mr. Speaker, uppermost in our mind in that infrastructure program that we announced, 5 and a half billion dollars, was flood protection for Manitobans, protection against natural disasters. And we've also put in the budget money for an additional centre which will be opened up later on this week for firefighting in Manitoba. We've made investments which will prevent Manitobans from experiencing dislocation and suffering and pain from natural disasters in our infrastructure program, in our investments in fighting forest fires, including new bombers that will pick up the water and distribute it in communities that are at risk.

* (13:50)

And every time we've done that, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has voted against that spending in the budget.

Mr. Pallister: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier speaks about preventing dislocation, suffering and pain, but he's causing it within his own caucus, and that is the problem here because the rainy day fund is there to protect Manitobans. It didn't exist nor does it in its remnants of its former size exist to protect the NDP from its problems.

Now, last week the NDP sucked another \$100 million out of that fund. It's now at its lowest level since 2004, over a decade now.

Now, the \$800 million the Premier speaks of didn't come from the NDP. It didn't, certainly, come from his members opposite; it came from Manitobans who work hard for their money and deserve to feel it's being used intelligently and with foresight. There's no foresight in this, and we recognize that these are rainy days for the NDP, but the fund is there for real emergencies for Manitobans, not political emergencies for the member opposite.

Now, would the Premier admit that this rainy day raid was designed to fund pre-election NDP vote buying? Would he admit that it's a desperate and dangerous tactic, and would he admit that it's placing Manitobans—during Emergency Preparedness Week—at greater risk of future emergencies?

Mr. Selinger: The only political party in this Legislature putting Manitobans at risk of natural disasters is the members opposite who refuse to support money to be invested in flood protection for Manitobans.

We put \$100 million aside in our last budget to help rebuild the communities around Lake St. Martin and Lake Manitoba. What did the members opposite do? They voted against it. They opposed that.

We put a 5-and-a-half-billion-dollar program together to build flood protection through the Assiniboine valley—some of which is already in place in the city of Brandon—build up and strengthen the dikes along the Assiniboine River, help with individual flood protection projects all through the Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin area, and we've spent literally millions of dollars to do that.

We built—we've committed to an additional channel outside of Lake Manitoba, a cost that could exceed \$500 million. Members opposite vote against every single one of those investments.

The Fiscal Stabilization Fund is there to get us through difficult times, to help rebuild our communities in Manitoba and to keep our debt low. That's what it's being used for; members opposite should know that.

Mr. Pallister: When it comes to the outlet needed at the north end of Lake Manitoba, the Premier and his friends are still having coffee parties five years after the fact. They haven't lifted a shovel of earth.

Now, the rainy day purpose was not—was not, I repeat—to solve an NDP crisis. It's designed to be there to protect Manitobans in the event of their crisis, a crisis not of their making, not to protect the government against a crisis of its own making.

This year, Manitobans were spared a flood, but the NDP's had a flood of bad polls, so they raided the rainy day fund to address their personal flood. Manitobans were spared a fire, but the NDP has had an internal fire of epic proportions, so they raided the rainy day fund to put out their own personal fire. No amount of self-promotion can disguise the selfish nature of this rainy day raid the government has perpetrated.

They are putting the management of their personal risks—and I want the Premier to admit this now—ahead of the risks to Manitobans.

Mr. Selinger: Let's compare the experiences. When the members opposite were in office, they took a

surplus, turned it into a deficit and created a rainy day fund. When their rainy day fund ran out, they sold off the telephone system, thereby taking the rates from among the lowest in Canada to among the highest in Canada, and that's what they used to then balance the budget.

What have we done? During the good times, when we had one of the stronger economies in the country, we put money aside for difficult times, over \$800 million, a record amount of money. We then drew on that money to help us through the recession and a stimulus program which has literally created tens of thousands of jobs in Manitoba. It's built universities, it's built schools, it's built roads, it's built flood protection, it's built the kind of assets that create jobs now and provide for greater prosperity in the future, Mr. Speaker.

And every single time we've done that, the members have opposed it. They voted against job creation now. They voted against flood protection for the future. They voted against roads which will increase the prosperity of Manitoba businesses. They voted against better housing for people that need it in Manitoba. They voted against health care, and they voted against education.

The member, if he's honourable, will stand—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable First Minister's time for this question has elapsed.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a new question.

Balanced Budget Future PST Increase

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, the Premier uses the word honourable but has difficulty keeping his word.

This is the broken-promise Premier, and last week he broke another promise. He promised that he'd balance the books, and the books are clearly not balanced despite \$500 million a year of broken-promise taxes that the Premier has imposed on Manitobans.

And Manitobans are tired of paying more and getting less, and yet when the Premier was asked if he would be raising taxes again, he said, quote, I would not rule it out.

So I have to ask him: If he gets the chance, does he plan to raise the PST again?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the average family in Manitoba right now, middle-income family in Manitoba right now, pays about \$4,200 less in taxes than when the Leader of the Opposition was in government. That's a combination of property tax credits going from \$250 to \$700 a year. That's a combination of reducing personal income taxes. That is a real benefit to Manitobans. They're actually paying less than they would have if the member opposite would have retained his policies, and they're getting more value for that money.

The assets in Manitoba have grown. We have over \$40 billion in replacement value in our assets. We have more schools, more daycares, more roads, more post-secondary institutions in Manitoba, more social housing in Manitoba, better trained Manitobans. They're getting—record numbers of young people are graduating from high school: 71 per cent when we came into office graduated from high school, now 87 per cent.

Manitobans are doing better. Manitobans are wealthier. Manitobans have more take-home pay, and if we return to the approach that the leader opposite wants to pursue, everything would go in the—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable First Minister's time with this question has elapsed.

Election Promise

Mr. Pallister: Well, the poor man is caught in a contradiction. If the sunny days are here, why is the rainy day fund being raided by this Premier here in this government? It's the premier of broken promises.

Again, the Premier hung on to his leadership with a razor-thin majority by promising to balance the books. Last week he broke even that promise. Half the delegates at his party's leadership convention voted for two other candidates who were forthright enough to come forward and say it wasn't happening. But the Premier stuck to his talking points, and now with this broken-promise budget even the half who supported him are asking themselves why.

Now, he makes excuses. He claims the promises he made were only targets. He says his promises weren't really broken because they weren't written in stone.

Mr. Speaker, so I have to ask the Premier: How many of his promises are written in stone?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, we said we would hire more than 200 additional doctors in Manitoba. We have exceeded that; we're up to about 220 doctors. We said we'd hire more nurses; we have done that. We said we would reduce class sizes to about an average of 20, and we've hired nearly 300 more teachers to have smaller class sizes in Manitoba.

Contrast that with the members opposite. They fired, laid off 700 teachers during their time in office. They fired over 1,000 nurses when they were in office. They ran in the '95 election and then cancelled the entire program to rebuild hospitals and personal-care homes in Manitoba. They said they wouldn't sell off the telephone system and promptly did that at a bargain-basement price.

Our promise to Manitobans is to keep them well looked after in the health-care system, to keep them educated, to keep growing the economy, to provide flood protection and the infrastructure they need to have a prosperous economy. We have done that.

The members opposite want to go in the opposite direction. They want to lay people off, shut the economy down and make Manitobans worse off.

Fiscal Stabilization Fund Management of Fund

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, we like sustainable management, and this isn't sustainable, Mr. Speaker. After 16 years the Premier says, now, after 16 years, the good times are here, let's roll with raiding the Fiscal Stabilization Fund to prop them up.

Expect—every Manitoban knows what's coming and every Manitoban knows what to expect over the coming 10 or 12 months from this government and from this Premier, and it'll be a flood all right. It'll be a flood of ribbon cuttings. It'll be a flood of vote—desperate vote buying, all funded by the money that Manitobans contributed, not to protect the NDP but to protect against real floods, and that's a risky strategy and it's not sustainable. It's designed for short-term gain for the NDP at the long-term pain expense of Manitobans.

* (14:00)

Now, he's caught in a contradiction. He says it's sunny, but he—and he even spends a million dollars to advertise how sunny it is, Mr. Speaker—but then he raids the rainy day fund because it's raining too. Now, where is the common sense in that? Where is

the foresight in that? Where is the sustainable management in that?

What is his plan for next year now that he's got it to its lowest level since 2004? Does he plan to raid it again, or is he going to commit today to restore the rainy day fund next year? Which is it?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the economic forecast for Canada, the economic forecast for Manitoba, the economic forecast for the global 'economy' has softened in the last four months. The member may not have noticed that. Major organizations such as the IMF, such as the OECD, have said, do not put an undue emphasis on austerity. Make sure you continue to grow your economies. Make sure you continue to provide employment opportunities for young people.

We are doing that, Mr. Speaker. We are going to create more jobs in Manitoba. Last year we had the strongest job creation record in the country. Close to 20,000 new jobs were created in Manitoba, the best in the country at a time when the global economy continues to be soft and is not coming back as rapidly as people had anticipated. We saw a very significant increase in wages in Manitoba, about 2,000-plus dollars a year. We saw one of the strongest economies in Canada last year at a time when the overall economies were softening.

When you can be—have one of the stronger economies, when you can create jobs, when you can increase wages for Manitobans and grow the population by over 16,000 people while making sure we invest in health care and education, you're going in the right direction. If you follow the formula—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable First Minister's time on this question has elapsed.

Manitoba Economy Government Record

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, the Premier talks about forecasts, but the record of that government is clear: ninth in job creation over 10 years in this country, nothing to crow about. The message is loud and clear. The NDP government has failed spectacularly to manage the Manitoba economy, and as a result Manitobans pay more.

So, Mr. Speaker, in this budget revenues are up \$334 million over last year, and in that context the Premier still says he wouldn't rule out tax increases, and in that context the response of the government is

to raid the rainy day fund, a fund that was supposed to be reserved for responding to disasters.

Mr. Speaker, will the Finance Minister own up to his government's failed record on the economy, deficits, debt, raiding the Fiscal Stabilization Account, and just admit that the real disaster is his government?

Hon. Greg Dewar (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, again I want to remind the House and the members opposite they took a surplus, they turned it into a deficit, and when they ran out of money there in terms of the fiscalization fund, they sold the telephone system to their friends at rock-bottom prices. They put that into the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. They spent that. That is their record. We paid down over \$500 million in debt out of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, as the Premier has said.

We have a tremendous record when it comes to the economy here in the province: second lowest unemployment rate in Canada, Mr. Speaker. It's the second lowest unemployment rate in Canada, leading the economy—leading economy in Canada in 2015-2016, 20,000 new jobs created. And not only that, these people are paid more.

We'll take our record over theirs any time.

Declining Oil Prices

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, let me help out the Finance Minister. What is his record? The deficit this year is 20 per cent higher than the deficit projection from last year.

And that's even though only weeks ago, during the leadership debate and that leadership challenge, the Premier was sticking to his guns on the importance of reducing the deficit. When asked about his failure to meet the promised targets on deficits, the Premier told *The Globe and Mail* that Manitoba was no different than other provinces that had to deal with the fallout from lower oil prices. He said, have you noticed the oil prices in the last few months? Dramatic changes all across the country in what the forecast for the economy is.

Mr. Speaker, my question's clear: Does the Finance Minister agree with the Premier that the declining oil prices pose a challenge to Manitoba's economy?

Mr. Dewar: The Premier, of course, was referring, the declining oil prices, the impact it has on the Canadian economy, Mr. Speaker.

I remind the member all he has to do is look at the Alberta budget, which is—has a deficit between five and eight billion dollars. But there could be change coming to Alberta. There could be real change coming to Alberta tomorrow.

I remind the member about what happened in Newfoundland and Labrador. I met the Finance Minister when I was at the meeting in Ottawa. His deficit, Mr. Speaker, was going from \$300 million to \$900 million. Regrettably, his deficit there is \$1.1 billion in Newfoundland. They also have to raise the—their HST by two percentage points in Newfoundland and Labrador.

That is the impact that that oil is having on the Canadian economy.

Government Record

Mr. Friesen: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's quite amazing that the Finance Minister wants to make comments about other provinces' deficit situations but he has no comment for his own deficit situation.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) was clear. On April the 25th, he said the sky was falling; oil prices would hurt the Manitoba economy. However, in a Free Press article, the Conference Board of Canada reported that Manitoba could see a 0.5 per cent added to real GDP from the 40 per cent reduction in oil prices. Not only that, but the budget this year says low oil prices provide a large benefit to the economy through cost savings. This is a blatant contradiction. It's a blatant contradiction by those who are supposed to be creating a climate of stability.

I guess the question could be, did the Finance Minister or the Premier read the budget? But maybe the better question is: Won't the Finance Minister just admit that there is no acceptable explanation for the record of waste and mismanagement that is harming Manitoba families and hurting front-line services?

Mr. Dewar: I reject what the member has stated, Mr. Speaker. The Premier was talking about the—how the oil price would have on the economy of Canada.

And I do agree with the member. He talks about the rosy economy here in Manitoba. I will concur with him, Mr. Speaker, on that.

I also, Mr. Speaker, our—you know, there's two visions here when it comes to growing the economy. Ours is to invest in infrastructure, invest in front-line care. I just want to acknowledge today that our

government's investing \$65 million with the City of Winnipeg to improve city roads.

They have a different approach. They have an approach to take us back to the 1990s: 1,000 nurses fired, 700 teachers fired. We reject that.

Flood Compensation Claims Settlement Timeline

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Mr. Speaker, 1,100 flood-affected Manitobans remain waiting for promised compensation, in some instances four years later.

The MLA for Interlake talked about having to personally, quote, endure three months of agony, end quote, during the NDP's internal rebellion. These 1,100 Manitobans have had to endure years of NDP broken promises.

Why hasn't the Premier provided a firm deadline and end these Manitobans' pain and suffering?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister responsible for Emergency Measures): In case members opposite don't know, I am actually responsible for emergency measures, and I'm glad to be back, Mr. Speaker, to answer a very important question.

I want to stress, Mr. Speaker, the degree to which Manitoba has faced significant challenges over the last number of years—2009, 2011 and 2014 in terms of major floods—the degree to which we put in place unprecedented programs to assist flood victims, nine separate provincial stand-alone programs, degree to we—which we made historic investments in infrastructure. And we're now building and doing the detailed design work for an outlet from Lake Manitoba and an outlet from Lake St. Martin and, of course, we built an emergency outlet. So we're very committed to flood victims, to flooded communities.

The real question, Mr. Speaker, is when are the members opposite going to get on board.

Protection Expenditures (Budget 2015)

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the unprecedented incompetence of this NDP government when it comes to these 1,100 Manitobans did not even warrant a single mention in that paper-thin document they're passing off as a budget. Despite raising taxes by half a billion dollars a year, flood protection expenditures are actually decreasing for the next four consecutive years.

Why are these flood 'pictims' paying more but getting less protection?

Mr. Ashton: I realize that members opposite have absolutely no experience with building major projects. When they were in government, Mr. Speaker, in the '90s, Leader of the Opposition actually was minister responsible for emergency measures.

* (14:10)

Mr. Speaker, I know it's a rhetorical question, but I ask this question a lot. I ask, what did they build? Even Conservatives can't answer that question. The real answer is nothing.

We know how to build major projects. That's why we're doing the detailed engineering work. We're committed. We even put in place the revenue source, and what did members opposite do? They voted against it.

So they can talk all they want about flood victims; they don't care about flood victims.

ER Service Wait Times Funding (Budget 2015)

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, this NDP government has taken a lot of money from Manitobans, money which should've fixed the many problems in our health-care system. Instead, Manitobans have paid more and gotten less, much less. In fact, Winnipeg now has the worst ER wait times in all of Canada.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to tell Manitobans why there was nothing in this budget to address the ER crisis and the horrible waiting times for patients who are waiting in the ERs to see a doctor.

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Health): I'd like to thank the member for the question.

Actually, I'd like to reassure the—Manitobans that there was a lot in the budget that looked after them, a lot of things, right from QuickCare clinics coming in to make sure that folks don't need to go to the ER, Family Doctor for All, the investment in doctors.

And something today that I was very pleased to join colleagues from my neighbourhood, like the member—the Minister for Healthy Living and Seniors as well as members of the Grace Hospital Foundation and members of the community, there's a new MRI—we turned the sod today for an MRI at the

Grace Hospital. That's what we're doing for Manitobans.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, in February the WRHA admitted failure to fix the ER problems. They said that patients in ERs are waiting too long to be treated and discharged. They're waiting too long for a bed if they need one. They admitted that ambulance off-load times are too long and that none of the ER targets that were set would be met.

Where was this Minister of Health at this time? Hiding out, Mr. Speaker, not available for comment on the most pressing issue in health care.

So I'd like to ask this Minister of Health to tell Manitobans why she ran away and hid from her broken promises and her failures to Manitoba ER patients.

Ms. Blady: Mr. Speaker, apparently I'm running away and hiding if I'm not responding to member opposite's Twitter feed, but you know what? I have bigger things to be doing, you know, things like negotiating contracts with Doctors Manitoba to make sure that our citizens have doctors. We're working with doctors, and that contract is about collaboration. It's about working together with them, and not just the doctors but also the nurses.

So I'm sorry that I wasn't paying attention to her Twitter feed, but I was making sure that our valued health-care professionals were respected and properly remunerated.

Grace Hospital ER Wait Times

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I don't know why she's so nervous about my Twitter feed. That's *[inaudible]*

Mr. Speaker, the NDP promised a new ER for the Grace Hospital by 2015. Well, it's 2015 and the new ER is nowhere to be seen, just like this Minister of Health was.

This NDP government has allowed ER wait times at the Grace Hospital to become the worst ER waits in all of Canada. At least with a new ER, Mr. Speaker, patients at least would have a nicer waiting room to wait in before they can get into that ER.

Mr. Speaker, will this Minister of Health admit that her broken promises are desperately failing Manitoba patients?

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Health): And again this speaks to my colleague's earlier comment

about they really don't understand building, because as far as the Grace Hospital goes, we need to get that MRI up. The construction's starting on that.

And stay tuned for the rest of it, because, again, the only time the Grace Hospital emerg was ever closed was when the members opposite had it operating on banking hours. They closed it at night.

So we're—so all I can tell them, emergency room, stay tuned, coming soon.

Children in Care Missing Persons Numbers

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, last week I asked this government why 6,500 people went missing in Winnipeg under their watch last year. Now we have a report from the Winnipeg Police Service on missing persons for the first quarter of 2015, and we see we have 1,754 missing persons, on track for over 7,000 this year.

We also know that CFS accounts for 84 per cent of these missing people. When children are missing, they are at risk.

Why is this NDP government putting so many CFS children at risk?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): Mr. Speaker, a child that is a runaway, that is a crisis, we need to assure that we are working to support that child, that family and, more importantly, that community.

We have one of the best known initiatives called StreetReach. It is renowned across North America, the work that we do in partnership with the Winnipeg Police Service. They are knocking on doors. They are going on to the street. They are finding the children and they are returning them home.

We need to ensure that we are providing the necessary supports to families, and that includes addressing the issues of poverty, make sure that they have good quality housing, ensuring that there is education and jobs that are available to them. By doing that we're going to support families which will be able to support healthy children.

Mr. Wishart: Well, Mr. Speaker, StreetReach is simply overwhelmed.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba already leads the country in missing children on a per capita basis. Last year our numbers showed a 22 per cent increase, and the first-quarter numbers of 20 further reinforce that. Is this the best this government can do?

I ask again: Why does the NDP government's mismanagement continue to put CFS children at risk?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to reiterate for the member across the way that one missing child is too many.

That's why this government has taken the actions we have. We've tripled the funding to Family Services. We've hired more child protection workers and social workers. We're ensuring that we're providing better support to foster parents. But also, what's also very, very important is our initiatives around prevention, the work that we do with Healthy Child Manitoba, the work that is happening in education.

And, yes, there are children that have ran away. But when they run away, we are working with all the community partners to bring them home safely.

Mr. Wishart: If one is too many, what is 7,000?

Last year, we were six times more likely than any other province to have teenage girls at risk from sexual exploitation missing, six times. This year, in the first quarter we are in line to beat that with 70 per cent of the missing people being girls.

How bad does it have to get before this minister takes this seriously? Does it take another tragic incident before this minister will take real action?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Speaker, I can assure all members of this House that we take the well-being of all Manitoba children as a priority. We work with our community networks. We work with our agencies and our authorities to address the needs of families as well as the children.

What we've done in Manitoba is we've developed Tracia's Trust, which is a sexually exploited youth strategy. With our community partners across the province, we are addressing the underlying issues of poverty and the necessary support that is required to—for families and for their children.

We are out in the front lines every day supporting families and children, and that's by reducing poverty, ensuring that we're hiring the support workers that are needed and ensuring that when there is a family in crisis, that we are there, able and willing to help.

Children in Care Hotel Accommodation (Budget 2015)

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the extremely tragic circumstances of three children who were living in hotels under the care of today's NDP government have been brought to light during the 'plast' year. This has left Manitobans with many questions for today's NDP.

Let me begin with this: Why was there no evidence of a plan to address this situation in the budget speech? Indeed, why wasn't there even a mention of this grave concern in the budget speech?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the minister announced that there would be hiring of over 200 additional workers to provide care to children, that there would be an expansion of emergency facilities to provide for children that were no longer able to stay in their home. The minister announced that there would be additional support for foster families. Over 70 spots would be created.

All those were announced well before the budget. She didn't wait for the budget before making those announcements and starting to take real action on doing those things, Mr. Speaker. Subsequently, she said she would be shutting down hotels as—even as a place of last resort and making sure that we provide support to families.

* (14:20)

And most importantly, Mr. Speaker, you will see in the budget that there is additional money for prevention, and that is mentioned in the budget. To work with Aboriginal and indigenous organizations that work with families to help them prevent from getting in crisis, to help them function more effectively with proper supports in the community, that was in the budget, Mr. Speaker.

So the crisis response as well before the budget, the prevention and—strategy was put in the budget, and we'll see if the member opposite votes for the budget.

Youth Correctional Facilities Children Awaiting Foster Placement

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the Children's Advocate report warned in 2004 that this government must get its house in order with respect to emergency shelter for children in CFS care. The tragic death of Tina Fontaine and the recent violence against another 15-year-old girl may

have been avoided if today's NDP had heeded that report.

Today this government is once again not listening to the Children's Advocate and is now housing children in their care in jail, sometimes for weeks at a time.

Why is today's NDP government using this incomprehensible practice, a practice Grand Chief Derek Nepinak says is one of the worst atrocities we can imagine?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my previous answer, the use of hotels will no longer be allowed. We have hired over 200 additional people to work with families. Even prior to that, we put in a program for prevention to train people to work with families in their home communities to help those families stay strong. This is a government that has an early childhood development program that does prevention work with families, including in some of the highest need neighbourhoods in Winnipeg in projects like project bold.

In the budget, the member may have noticed that we put additional money in for Rent Assist to provide more money for families to be able to get stable housing, whether it's in the private sector. We also put more money in the budget to build more social housing, Mr. Speaker. We put additional resources in the budget to assist people to get employment and to be able to get rent assistance when they go into training or employment, and we put more money in the budget for the ultimate prevention program, education, so people could go to school and their families could be supported when they go to school and be able to succeed in school and be able after school to have an after-school program. And, in addition, 900 additional spaces for child care in the budget, which is another form of prevention.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, we've heard that before.

Cara Morgan [*phonetic*], executive director of Onashowewin, has reported that there are children in the care of today's NDP government being put in jail for throwing an empty water bottle and that there's a child in care with no charges pending who stayed in jail for weeks.

Manitobans cannot comprehend the machinations of today's NDP government, a government whose appetite for debt has no limits, whose

infighting knows no bounds and whose care of children is an atrocity.

Mr. Speaker, with CFS reports lined up in front of the minister's door and left to collect dust, I ask: Why is today's NDP government ignoring the cries of our most vulnerable citizens?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, this is the government that has dramatically expanded by more than double the number of daycare spots in Manitoba so families can have support while they go to work. This is the government that has 15 straight years of increasing education funding so the kids can have smaller class sizes and better schools. This is the government, for the first time in history, that is building brand new daycares all throughout Manitoba and every new school has a daycare put in it. This is the first government that brought in an early childhood development program with dramatic increases in funding all throughout the province of Manitoba and a Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet.

In every budget we bring in a poverty reduction strategy, including Rent Assist, social housing, a higher minimum wage, more training so people could get the opportunity to enter the labour market and earn a living for themselves without losing their Rent Assist benefits, without losing their National Child Benefit.

All of those things never existed before, Mr. Speaker, and every time we do something like that and make progress, the member from River Heights, what has he done? He talks big now and he votes against it in the budget.

Mental Health Supports Children and Youth

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Speaker, today is the first day of Mental Health Week, and we know that mental health is the next frontier in health care, and our government has continued to invest in health care and the benefit of all Manitobans.

Mental health of children, in particular, is such an important element in their success, giving them the best chances in school and beyond.

Can the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities please tell the House about an important mental health announcement that she made earlier today?

Hon. Melanie Wight (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): I absolutely can. I am pretty excited about it, and I, along with my colleague the

honourable Minister of Healthy Living and Seniors (Ms. Crothers), were at Hydro Place today for the Canadian Mental Health Association's event Get Loud. So I think we can all agree it was a good place for me to be, somewhere where we get loud. So hopefully we can see both sides of us working on that because we're getting loud to help awareness for mental illness in our province and in our country. The stigma attached to that is one of the things, the main things, that keep people from seeking help.

So during this event we were able to announce the government's further investment of \$2 million into a continuum of supports that range from mental health promotion and prevention to interventions and treatment for children and youth. It's a multi-year strategy that will start this year by identifying and supporting critical services and workforce needs and launching a program that will equip home visitor staff to provide mental health supports to at-risk parents and families, and we're very proud of this beginning.

Thank you so much.

Funding for Education Test Score Results

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, under this NDP government we are now spending close to \$1 billion in interest charges, and at the same time, Manitoba students are ranking worst in Canada in reading, math and science.

The former minister of Education, the member from St. Vital, said in 2011, and I quote: Manitoba did not do well. This is unacceptable. I'm very concerned about this. End quote.

Will today's Minister of Education admit that his NDP's government's wasteful spending is hurting essential front-line services, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): You know, our government is focused on jobs and the economy, creating good opportunities for young people into the future. At the core of that agenda is education and educational quality.

That's why we have led the country almost every year since we've been elected in government in funding for education. That's why we've made small class sizes from kindergarten to grade 3 among our top priorities so that students and teachers have that one-on-one time to make sure that students get the attention they deserve. Mr. Speaker, that's why we're

revising curriculums. That's why we're building new science labs. That's why we're building new gyms. That's why we're building new shops to make sure that children have the opportunity and the skills they need going forward.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite likes to say that he's an educator and a parent, and I know that he is, and to his credit I think that's a wonderful thing. The odd thing about it is that when the member stands up I believe he's just as terrified of the Opposition Leader's cut to education—

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

Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mr. Speaker: It is now time for members' statements.

Youville Centre

Ms. Nancy Allan (St. Vital): Today I'd like to recognize an organization that is very near and dear to my heart, the same organization that celebrated a very important milestone last year. In 2014, Youville Centre celebrated its 30th anniversary. This organization has now been—this organization has been providing much-needed health care and wellness, education, counselling and support for over three decades. Youville Centre has two locations here in Winnipeg, and I am proud to say that one of them is located in St. Vital.

If you have a health question you might want to take advantage of their Ask a Nurse program. Young people can attend the Young Adult Program or the Teen Clinic for a safe environment in which to ask their questions. Mothers and fathers can take advantage of the parenting support that they offer, with prenatal classes, Baby & Me programming and breastfeeding clinics. At the St. Boniface location, the centre focuses on diabetes self-management, education and support. They are just some of the many programs offered that make life better for all community members.

Relying on both government and donor support as well as volunteer and student involvement, Youville Centre is truly a community-oriented organization. They seek community ideas and involvement and they make great use of those resources. For proof of this, simply ask their

volunteers. Some of them have made use of the services and are now volunteers.

* (14:30)

Their mission statement reads that they have taken it upon themselves to enhance the health of the individuals, families and communities that they serve, all while collaborating with community members and other agencies to build on community strengths and answer unmet needs. They are successful.

Today we are joined by the executive director, Patrick Griffith; program manager, Nettie Strople; and community development coordinator, Sophia Ali.

I'd ask the House to commend these individuals for the amazing work that they do at Youville Centre. Thank you.

Jian Luan

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, I have a young man with me today who is job shadowing a couple days in the life of a member of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

Mr. Jian Luan is a grade 12 student at Vincent Massey High School in Brandon. He would like to become a police officer and recently spent a month job shadowing individuals in the Brandon city police force.

Mr. Luan immigrated from Yantai, Shandong Province, China, with his mother, Caiqing Li, in 2009 to join his father, Felix Luan, who was working and continues to work at Maple Leaf Foods. His mother also works at Maple Leaf.

Mr. Luan and his family have been a part of the Chinese Pavilion at the Lieutenant Governor's Winter Festival in Brandon and are a part of our vibrant Chinese community.

Mr. Luan will graduate from Vincent Massey this June and has been accepted to the University of Regina where he plans to enter into police studies.

I'd like to ask the members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to help we—me welcome Mr. Luan and wish him well in his future plans.

Assiniboia Community Appreciation Night

Mr. Jim Rondeau (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, it's always been my honour to represent Assiniboia, a community rich with generous volunteers. Here in

Assiniboia, we have a tradition of celebrating their passion—dedication at the annual Assiniboia Community Appreciation Night.

On April 28th, we continued this long-standing tradition for the 15th year in a row. This year, I was with almost 100 volunteers, with my co-hosts, where we celebrated in style at the Canad Inns, Polo Park.

Many of these volunteers have spent countless hours contributing their time to organizations such as the Heritage Victoria Community Centre, Assiniboia West recreation centre, Lions Estates, alongside schools, hospitals and many other organizations. These volunteers are the backbone of many of these groups and organizations. Their hard work helps our community to truly thrive.

It's a very important to thank everyone involved for all of their passions and the hard work. A big thank you to the community members and businesses for continuing to sponsor the evening and making it a very special event. They have gone above and beyond the extraordinary volunteers. Most of all, I'd like to thank the volunteers themselves. Because of your hard work and commitment, you've improved the lives of many thousands of Manitobans.

Canadian curler Sherry Anderson once said that volunteers don't get paid, not because they're worthless, but because they're priceless. And, Mr. Speaker, I agree.

I'd like to ask that we include all the volunteers' names and organizations they serve placed in the Hansard. So I ask if I have permission to do that.

And I'd like to thank all these groups, the organizations, the businesses and the communities because they make Assiniboia truly a wonderful place to represent. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member for Assiniboia have leave to include the names that he's mentioned in his member statement? *[Agreed]*

1st Crestview Scout Group: Will Huggard, Dawn Wojtowica; 1st Kirkfield Scout Group: Derek Walsh, Dean Parsons, Alex Gregovski, Emily Parsons; 55+ Fit and Flex: Wilma Braun, Al Serebinski, Margaret Yuill; ALS Society of Manitoba: Gail Reid; Army Navy and Air Force Veterans No. 283: Wilmer Antonio, Sylvia Antonio; Assiniboia West Recreation Association: Jolene McKay, Tracy Man, Shauna Sutherland, Patti Shmon; Assiniboine Memorial Curling Club: Bruce Burton, Loyd Olson; Buchanan School: Tracy Broughton, Lil Atamanchuk;

CAVUNP: Doc Jardine, Linda Jardine; Collège Sturgeon Heights Collegiate: Tanner Gooding, Katya MacKling; Community Volunteer: Dallas Molloy, Lloyd Finlay; Crestview School: Coleene Major, Amy McGregor, Shelley Shepherd; Elderobics: Lois Desrosiers, Marion Widlake; Gold Wings—Winnipeg Airport: Pat Fraser, Dave Jyotsna; Golden West Centennial Lodge: Marilyn Anderson, Cindy Skelly; Heritage Lodge: Cecile Wagner, Olga Bennefoy, Maureen Gerbasi; Heritage Victoria Community Centre: Sharon Larouche, Tara Davidson, Candace Yaholkoski, Mindy Bourrie; John Taylor Collegiate: Mike Hussey, Keri Morris; Kirkfield Westwood Community Centre: Terry Wolowiec; Kiwanis—Assiniboia: Carroll Dalke, Harvey Dalke; Lions Estates: Sheila Dumore, Rhonda McEwen; Manitoba Women's Junior Hockey League: Kirk Koppers, Sonia Koppers, Val Officer, Linda Benson; Menshelds: Doug Mackie, Dave Friesen, Loris Barsanti, Kaz Sawicz, Won Jae Song; Ness Middle School: Cindy Frennd; Over 55 & Retired Club—ANAF #283; Prairie Dog Central: Gordon Kushner; Rotary Club of Assiniboia: Fran Coulter, Barry Rowley; Salvation Army Heritage Park Temple: Paul Nelson; St. James Assiniboia 55+ Centre: Fay Boyes, Eiko Fatayama; Linda Grant, Glenda MacDonald, Sylvia Danyleko; St. James Rods Football Club: Kendra Haubrich, Kyle Boernsen, Samantha Boernsen, Gia Walker; Voyageur School: Carmen Kube, Mike Kube; Winnipeg Military Family Resource: Shannon Bisson, Laura Webster, Karen Hansen, Nathalie Dufour.

Manitoba Curling Hall of Fame Induction Dinner

Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris): Mr. Speaker, last night I had the honour of attending the 28th annual Manitoba Curling Hall of Fame Induction Dinner.

The Hall of Fame was created in 1987 and has three objectives: to enshrine outstanding curlers, builders and teams; to identify and focus on the distinction of Hall of Fame members; and to maintain a permanent location for the Hall of Fame.

Four individuals were honoured last night, three in the builder category and one in the curler category, as well as one team. My attendance was driven by the fact that two of the residents of the Morris constituency were inducted. For those not keeping score, that's 40 per cent.

Lorne Hamblin was conducted in the builder category. A well-known curler, administrator, coach and volunteer, he has made 14 appearances at the

provincial level. What is not—what he's most known for is his volunteering, including the world junior liaison at Portage, initiating a local junior curling program in Morris, the establishment of the curling credit program at the high school level, founding the DeKalb Superspiel and Super League and vice-chairing business and promotion for the Tim Hortons Brier.

Little known is that Lorne is responsible for a curling rule change in 1995, a story he shared last night. In 1994, his rink had just won in the afternoon, were playing another tournament later that day. Their celebrations led to Lorne's inability to clearly see down the ice sheet, so he used his cellphone to 'scall'—call his skip for directions. In 1995, the use of electronic devices were banned.

Dennis Thiessen was also honoured last night. Dennis has medalled at five national champions as the World Wheelchair Curling Championship, highlighted in the 2014 Paralympic win in Sochi.

He shared a story of his immense pride winning gold, being on the same podium Jennifer Jones' team had been on just weeks prior and watching the Canadian flag be raised as the anthem played.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to congratulate Arnold Asham and Tom Clasper, inducted in the builder category, as well as the rink of Jennifer Jones. Thank you.

Tau Gamma Phi Fraternity Brothers

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): Mr. Speaker, this past Saturday, barely two days ago, hundreds of millions of people from all over the world stopped what they were doing to watch a boxing match. It has been called the fight of the century: American Floyd Mayweather and—versus Filipino Manny Pacquiao, the two of the best in the boxing world.

It might not come as a surprise to the House that I was cheering for Mr. Pacquiao. This man has overcome extreme adversity throughout his life, and he is a fantastic role model for young people.

For us in Tyndall Park, the event transcended sport; it was an opportunity for the community to come together. The Tau Gamma Phi Manitoba Triskelions, the Filipino fraternity that is a pillar in our community, organized a fundraising event around it. These fraternity brothers shovel snow for the Philippine Canadian Centre in the winter, help sandbag when flooding threatens parts of our province. They also help co-ordinate a Filipino

Folklorama pavilion every year. Today, brother members of Tau Gamma fraternity have joined us in the gallery.

We are also lucky to have volunteers in Tyndall Park, Weston and Brooklands who are dedicated to building the sport of boxing. Mr. Dwight Chessie—and he's not here—has been offering free boxing classes at the Weston Community Centre for the past three years. Offering two-hour lessons every Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, this man is committed to giving youth a chance to have fun, learn about boxing and gain self-confidence with new skills.

Thank you, Mr. Chessie, and thank you to all the members of the Tau Gamma Phi fraternity. You all make our community a fantastic place to live in.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that their names be read into the record.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave to include the names in the record of today's Hansard of these proceedings? *[Agreed]*

The names will be included in the Hansard then. Thank the honourable member for Tyndall Park.

Bro Oscar De Paula, Bro J.B. Casares, Bro Jomar Guaring, Bro Andrew Beloro, Bro Tony Garcia, Bro Raymond Viray, Bro Dennis Peralta, Bro Lito Taruc, Bro Charlon Lagaya, Bro Jay Lagac, Bro Arvin Cenas, Bro Randy Santiago

Mr. Speaker: I believe that concludes members' statements for today.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BUDGET DEBATE

(Third Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: We'll now move on to orders of the day, government business, and to resume the adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar), and the amendment thereto. And the debate was open at that time, but I believe it is the government's turn.

Hon. Erna Braun (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be standing here today to speak in support of our 2015 budget, a budget that the Minister of Finance expressed so well as one that lets Manitoba families know that we are on their side.

* (14:40)

Let me begin with my compliments to our Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) for shaping a budget that makes bold choices which will lead us into a future where we are building, investing, training—all the elements that are fundamental to steady economic growth.

We are offering Manitobans a very clear vision for a positive and forward-thinking future, a balanced approach that will create jobs, build our economy while assuring Manitobans that the services we hold dear—health care, education, community infrastructure—are maintained.

What the members opposite offer is a singular, narrow and myopic view: balance the budget with total disregard for the health and well-being of our citizens.

Our budget recognizes that austerity measures don't work, and only with continued investment in creating good jobs, providing educational and work opportunities for young people will our economy grow and flourish.

And history has proved that these choices are the best. We are hearing from the Conference Board of Canada, from financial institutions like BMO Capital Markets, that our economic growth is leading the country. We are seeing greater job creation than any other province, and our average weekly wages have increased by 4.3 per cent.

Our choices are making a difference. The plan is working and according to the Conference Board of Canada, Manitoba will lead the country in economic growth over the next two years combined.

This is a great message for Manitoba families. It speaks to every parent's wish that their children receive the training and education that leads to a good job here in our province. It assures families that our province will remain one of the most affordable places to live and it highlights our commitment to protect jobs and front-line services that families count on.

Mr. Speaker, as the MLA for Rossmere, I see Budget 2015 as having great resonance in my constituency. Rossmere is a very diverse community demographically. We've got seniors, we have baby boomers, young families and young people who are venturing out in their own.

Our older communities that are established neighbourhoods have many seniors still choosing to stay in their homes that they moved into during the

'60s and '70s. I always find myself pleasantly surprised when I door-knock to find friends of my parents or the parents of my high school friends still calling North Kildonan their home.

The best had to be when I encountered my former teachers from River East Collegiate, my favourite English teacher and my high school guidance counsellor, Mr. Harris. They live—they still live around the corner from my parents' house. I know that the seniors' tax credit will support them to continue to have their—pardon me—to continue to live in their homes.

As well, Rossmere has many apartment complexes that provide affordable housing for seniors, and I can tell you the Rent Assist will be of great assistance to them as they continue to live in our neighbourhood, but for the seniors in my community, our commitment to ensuring we maintain the care services they need is paramount. Their quality of life is at stake. We are making sure that access to universal health care remains intact by continuing to invest in our health-care system.

One of the important connectors in our community is the Concordia Hospital. It's a vital component of our health-care system in the northeast corner, and I've heard from constituents how pleased they are with the treatment that they have received at that care facility. And from personal experience with my mother this past year, to hearing from an American doctor whose father was being treated at Concordia, we are well served and deserve to have that good care continue into the future.

The care that my mom received this past year—she experience two heart attacks, as well as numerous bouts of pneumonia—was excellent. From the nurses to the cardiologists, she received good care and excellent treatment. The best endorsement, however, came from a former Manitoba doctor who, interestingly enough, found himself having to practise family medicine in the United States. His parents still reside in Winnipeg and he returned home to be with his father who was 'retrea'—pardon me—receiving treatment at Concordia Hospital. He indicated to me that he was very impressed with the care his father received, and he felt, in his opinion, that it was better than what he would have received in the US.

And this is what we want for our parents and grandparents. This is what our families deserve—timely and excellent health care—and this is why we continue to invest in our health-care system and

refuse to make the cuts that damage our system and put our families in peril.

And I haven't even touched on the remarkable hip and knee institute that is part of the Concordia campus. There is nothing like watching someone who has been in great pain for many years finding that they can finally waltz again with their husband after a hip replacement. The technology and research in which we have invested is making huge difference to the quality of life of older Manitobans.

And we continue to invest in innovative community health centres. East and North Kildonan is one of the first ACCESS centres—pardon me, has one of the first ACCESS centres in the province, and I hear frequently from constituents how terrific and all-inclusive ACCESS River East is. Whether you're seeking advice from a dietitian on how to manage your diabetes or you're seeking counselling, the ACCESS centre provides a variety of health-care services in one location. We see the value of such innovative thinking and now have many locations serving our citizens.

Home Care is another service that is essential for helping seniors of Rossmere and all parts of Manitoba. It helps them maintain a degree of independence in their homes. Our commitment continues to ensure that home care remains universal and accessible, without fees.

As I visit the many seniors' complexes in my constituency, is it—so evident that Home Care brings a quality of life and independence to our seniors. It also provides a safety component for our seniors and peace of mind for the children who may not be able to be an everyday support for their parents. I feel confident that my mother is looked after with her medication by the health-care aide that attends to her every morning.

I knew that a senior friend had his meals prepared and served every day, as well as his bathing needs met each week. And none of these front-line services would be—should be sacrificed in the interest of returning to a balanced budget. Would you deny these services to your parent or your grandparent?

As well as our older neighbourhoods with many seniors, in the past three years new sub-developments have sprung up where I see young families settling with their growing children. This diversity of demographics in our community demonstrate the range of needs in Rossmere, and the balance that our strike—and the—pardon me—and the

balance that our budget strikes for all Manitobans. For young families, education is at top of mind.

Since coming into government in 1999, we have continued to fund education at the rate of economic growth. We are seeing that other provinces make cuts to education in an attempt to balance their budgets. Parents want their kids to have opportunities and success in their future; a good start at school paves the way for that.

I recall in the '90s, as a member of the Manitoba Teachers' Society, our many attempts to dialogue with the PC government about the impact that class size has on student learning and achievement. Their response? It was to pass legislation which prevented teachers from bargaining class size. Our response? Cap class size at 20 for kindergarten to grade 3 and, recognizing that smaller class sizes would require more classrooms, we are building additions and renovating schools to make the—make sure that the physical environment matches the learning environment. River East Transcona School Division is seeing the effects of our commitment, and I'm very pleased to see the two classrooms that are being built at John de Graff School are coming quite—on quite nicely, and the students will be there come this fall.

Our investments also extend to high school, and over the past number of years we've created opportunities for our youth for apprenticeships and skill training. We continue to enhance co-op education and apprenticeships tax credits. With our budget we are creating more opportunities for young Manitobans to gain work experience and to find out about job opportunities in the economy, and over the past couple of years we've seen great enhancements in those areas at Kildonan East, Miles Mac, River East Collegiate.

Not too long ago, I was chatting with a constituent who was proudly talking about her five sons who've gone through the River East Transcona School Division. The four oldest are all working, three in the skill trades, thanks to our apprenticeship programs, and one in computer science and working for what she considers to be an absolutely fabulous IT company based here in Winnipeg. The youngest is now finishing his apprenticeship in carpentry, and these young men have found that Manitoba offers opportunity and they are setting their roots down here in our province.

We recognize that good jobs are an important indicator of a strong economy and our investments in our young people through a variety of educational

opportunities are proving that. We are seeing increases in enrolments in both our colleges and universities and our apprenticeship programs.

Not too long ago, a number of us had the opportunity to tour Price Industries, a company which is world renowned as a testing facility, a made-in-Manitoba jewel. Manufacturers from around the globe sell products—send products to Price for testing.

* (14:50)

It was terrific to hear that all the engineers working at Price are Manitoba grads, and our budget recognizes that the demand for engineers here in Manitoba continues to grow, something I also hear from the association of professional engineers of Manitoba. So, to meet these needs, we are adding a number of seats to the Engineering faculty at the University of Manitoba.

As a teacher in a past life, I am very proud of the commitment our government has made to education. We recognize that our economy is generating thousands of jobs and a skilled workforce will keep our economic engine moving forward.

Before I close my comments, I do need to acknowledge the importance of our investments in infrastructure. Most folks agree that south Winnipeg is a fast-growing community, but I have to say the northeast corner of Winnipeg has also been growing, although more quietly than other parts of the city. As a gateway to the beach district and also to the entrance—and the entrance to Winnipeg from our bedroom communities, Lagimodiere, Highway 59, is a very busy corridor. The building of the new interchange at Highway 59 and the north Perimeter will be a positive asset to the entire northeast corner.

With the east side of Lagimodiere adding more and more sub-developments, traffic flow along Highway 59 will improve greatly. Not only will traffic move more quickly which in turn will reduce the carbon emissions from cars that are sitting at red lights along Regent to Birds Hill, so we are also doing our environmental part.

Once again, I wish to say I'm very pleased to be speaking in support of our budget. It offers a solid plan, one which will continue to grow our economy, create good jobs for families and ensure that our front-line services are protected.

But I also offer a reminder, all Manitobans should have grave concerns over the promises made

by members opposite. To slash the budget across the board as the Leader of the Opposition is promising is irresponsible, to suggest an American-style health-care system, reckless and rash. What these statements should say to all Manitobans is that they are a party that doesn't care for all citizens, but caters to those for whom the additional cost of health care isn't an issue and tuition fees for private schools is not a financial difficulty, because the cuts they envision will not impact those with means, but will wound the majority of hard-working Manitobans who rely on the myriad of resources and supports that are essential to their everyday lives.

Our balance has a balanced approach to fiscal responsibility where we have taken meaningful steps to grow our economy while shrinking our deficit year over year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Just before I get into saying a few words about the budget, I just wanted to welcome a few people back, welcome our table officers, our pages back to the Legislature, and thank them for all the work that they do to make our lives easier here in the Chamber and in the Manitoba Legislature.

I also, Mr. Speaker, want to thank you for being here and welcome you back and, indeed, all of our colleagues who are here today and wish the best to those who have decided to move on after this term in office, and I wish them all well.

Mr. Speaker, it's indeed an honour and a privilege for me to be here today and, indeed, for all of us to be here and have this opportunity to speak in a free and democratic society, have an opportunity to stand up for the rights of the citizens of Manitoba within our individual communities, and to stand up and debate issues like this budget that has been brought in by the new Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar). And I think it's very important to have these debates, and we're so lucky and privileged to be given this honour bestowed upon us here today to have the opportunity to say a few words about this budget and to respect one another with our differing views as they will come about throughout this debate. And I do respect the fact that others have different views from various areas, and that's their right and their privilege within a free and democratic society.

Manitobans, Mr. Speaker, we've been travelling all across this great province of ours: northern

Manitoba, southern, eastern, western, all over the city of Winnipeg. We've had an opportunity to meet with hundreds of groups and organizations to listen to what their concerns are with respect to what's going on in the province of Manitoba, and we have had some great discussions with Manitobans and we've heard loud and clear some various themes that have come out of these discussions with these Manitobans. And, very clearly, Manitobans are tired of the NDP broken promises, and I want to just get into some of the reasons why they are tired of these NDP broken promises is because there's a litany of them.

Now, unfortunately, due to time constraints, I won't be awarded the opportunity to get into all of those broken promises today, but I did, Mr. Speaker, just for the sake of the House and for Manitobans, just remind them and remind members opposite of what we're hearing from other Manitobans about those broken promises.

I do recall, and other members here in the Manitoba Legislature may recall, that there was a promise made in the 1999 election campaign—and I know members opposite like to go back to the 1990s, and maybe I'll remind them of a promise that was made within that election, Mr. Speaker, in 1999, by members, many of the members who are here today.

They promised—this NDP government promised to end hallway medicine in six months with \$15 million, Mr. Speaker. Well, if we fast-forward 16 years, unfortunately hallway medicine is still alive and well in Manitoba hospitals. And it's unfortunate that this NDP government, after—even after 16 years has yet to commit and to—that promise.

Mr. Speaker, aside from that, not only is there hallway medicine, but hallway medicine went to highway medicine where people were being transported between hospitals because they couldn't get the care within their communities. So then hallway medicine became highway medicine which has now become parking lot medicine, because people are lined up in ambulances waiting to get into emergency rooms to seek the care that they need, want and deserve. So that was a broken promise that was made by this NDP government back in 1999.

And I'll remind them as well that they made another promise back then. They actually promised to fix health care in Manitoba. Yes, they did make that promise, Mr. Speaker. And 16 years later, we know that it's more broken than ever in this province.

And I'll have the opportunity in a few minutes to get into some of those areas of health care that this NDP government is failing Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, I will remind members opposite that back in '99, when they took office, the budget for health care was about \$2 billion, and it's now—it's about \$5.6 billion. It's almost tripled, yet waiting lists continue to rise, emergency room care in Manitoba is dead last in Canada, and these are just some of the things that Manitobans are seeing.

So we're seeing a government that—we're seeing where Manitobans are having to pay more and get less for those—the—for what they're paying in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. And Manitobans are tired of those broken promises and they're tired of this pay-more, get-less NDP government.

But, Mr. Speaker, I do want to fast-forward to 2011. And, again, there was a whole litany of broken promises between 1999 and 2011. But I do want to talk about one of what is potentially was—goes down as the most egregious promise that was made by this NDP government in the 2011 election, and that was, of course, that they would not raise taxes.

And I'll remind members opposite time and time again, because Manitobans care about this issue. They are concerned about a government that says one thing during an election, so desperate just to get elected in that election, and then they turn around at the first available opportunity and they broaden and expand the PST. Mr. Speaker, they raise those taxes. And Manitobans are tired of that.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) himself at the time stood up and said that the very notion of raising taxes was ridiculous. He said it was nonsense. He said that it was something that would never happen under his watch. In his first available opportunity—of course, during that election, they went door to door during that election, and all of the ridings—all 57 ridings across this great province of ours—they knocked on the doors, they asked people for their support and they said and promised at that time that they would not raise taxes.

Well, we know that that is not the case, that they turned around and not only did they expand the PST, but the following year they actually raised the PST. And because there was laws in place that were—that have been in place for a number of years, Mr. Speaker, that precluded them from raising those taxes without calling a referendum, they saw fit—because the laws didn't fit into their political agenda

at the time, they saw fit to just simply change those laws to suit their own political agenda at the expense of taxpayers in Manitoba. And that is extremely unfortunate. *[interjection]* I thank my colleagues.

* (15:00)

Another election promise that was made in 2011 was promised by this Premier (Mr. Selinger) and members opposite; again, they went door to door and they promised Manitobans that they would balance a budget by 2014, and I just want to go over some of the quotes and the timeline of this promise. Back in 2011, the NDP platform said, and I quote, when the global recession hit we implemented a five-year budget plan to bring the provincial budget to balance by 2014 without cutting front-line services. We have stuck to that plan and we will continue to stick to it. Mr. Speaker, clearly that was a broken promise.

In the budget speech of 2012, it said, and I quote, we are on track to return to balance by 2014, end quote. On March 6, 2014, the minister of Finance declared that, and I quote, we are on track to return to balance in 2016. So they already broke their promise, and now they change their track and said 2016 is our new target. Targets seem to be wherever they throw the dart, and then they paint the bull's eye around that target wherever it lands.

On December 12th, 2014, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) stated that—and quote—it is a goal of our government to return to surplus in 2016-17, and again, Mr. Speaker, that was—they changed it from a target to then a goal, and the Premier said we are focused on meeting that target. That's the objective. We will look at that. And we know, of course, that the Finance Minister, the current Finance Minister in this budget said, we've decided, and I quote: "We've decided that rather than meet that arbitrary target, we'll continue to invest in infrastructure and services that Manitobans desire." And, of course, that arbitrary target is a target—is the fiscal plan, the fiscal five-year plan, the original fiscal five-year plan from back in 2011, the annual five-year fiscal economic strategy of this government. Manitobans are tired of these—the spend-more—or pay-more, get-less government, and they deserve better.

Of course, we know that in infrastructure, the PST money that the NDP claims has gone to infrastructure, we know that, in fact, for the several years prior to the NDP PST hike, they actually—they showed very clearly that infrastructure was not a priority before then. And we know that they

continuously spent billions of dollars less on capital and infrastructure assets just prior to coming up to that, and then they expect Manitobans—with a PST hike, when they say it's going towards infrastructure when we know clearly it's not a priority of this government—they expect Manitobans to believe them. Well, I would suggest that Manitobans don't believe them, Mr. Speaker, and it's unfortunate that this NDP government continues to break their promises to Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, in the spring—another broken promise related to infrastructure is in the spring of 2012 the NDP committed to spending \$2 on road infrastructure for every \$1 raised through the gas tax. And this was just, again, another broken promise and, again, Manitobans are tired of these broken promises.

In 2013-14, the NDP spent almost \$650,000 advertising its PST increase under the steady—so-called steady growth, good jobs campaign, but it's simply just a partisan waste of taxpayers' money and it's a waste that—of money that is threatening essential front-line services in our province.

So those are just a few of some of the areas where this NDP government has said that they would do one thing, they turn around and do another. It's unfortunate all the broken promises of this NDP government.

One of the other areas that we heard loud and clear from Manitobans through our consultation process was that Manitobans are tired of paying more and getting less for the hard-earned taxpayer dollars that they spent. And, Mr. Speaker, we know that Manitobans deserve better value for the money they are spending, and Manitobans believe that they should be getting better value for the money that they're spending in our province.

And we need only highlight just a few areas, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the areas of health care, education, family services, jobs and the economy, justice—these are all areas where the NDP—there are a litany of examples of where the NDP has been forcing Manitobans to pay more and get less for those services.

So I just want to touch on the area of education and just remind members opposite about some of the things—the results that we're getting in our province, which is unfortunate, under this NDP government. Since 2007, Manitoba has had the lowest post-secondary graduation rate in Canada, and

Manitoba has the second highest high school dropout rate in Canada. The results of the 2013 Pan-Canadian Assessment Program, the PCAP, which measures the performance of grade 8 students in math, science and reading, ranked Manitoba last among Canadian provinces in science, reading and math. And, Mr. Speaker, the 2012 Program for International Student Assessment, the PISA scores released this past year, placed Manitoba second lowest in reading and science scores in Canada. Manitoba's PISA scores for math have declined more than any other province in recent years and are now below the national average.

Mr. Speaker, these are just but a few areas where the NDP is clearly failing our students. As a matter of fact, it's well known and has been documented that, in Manitoba, we pay the highest per capita in Canada for education in this province, and when we are dead last in areas of reading, writing and math, it means clearly that Manitobans are paying more and getting less for the kinds of services that they need, want and deserve for the very future of our students here in Manitoba, and that is extremely unfortunate.

I want to touch on some areas of health care where this NDP government is forcing Manitobans to pay more and we're getting less for it. Mr. Speaker, the Conference Board of Canada gives Manitoba health-care system a failing grade. Even the WRHA has admitted that they have failed. They said we've failed on ER fixes, and so they, the WRHA, is admitting it and it's time that Manitobans—or that this NDP government listen to Manitobans and understand that this is a crisis that we're here—in here in Manitoba as a result of their pay-more, get-less fiscal policies.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans also have the worst access to after-hours primary physician care in Canada, and according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, CIHI, Manitoba has one of the lowest doctor retention rates in Canada. Since the NDP took power, more than 2,300 doctors have left Manitoba to practise in other jurisdictions.

The Premier (Mr. Selinger) broke his promise to ensure that every Manitoban would have access to a family doctor by 2015, Mr. Speaker. And that was something that they promised in the last election in a desperate attempt to get elected, and of course we know that they failed on that promise, as well, to Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, 20 rural ERs are currently closed or operating under reduced services, again failing

people in our rural communities and treating them like second-class citizens.

Regarding our wait times, Mr. Speaker, MRI: the NDP promised it would be at eight weeks; the wait times are at 21 weeks—another broken promise. CT scans: the NDP promised two weeks, waiting times are now four weeks. Ultrasound examinations: the NDP promised they'd be at two weeks and the waiting times are at seven weeks. The median wait for hip replacement in Winnipeg is currently 19 weeks, and for knee replacement it is 20 weeks—way beyond what this government planned they'd be at. And, according to the Waiting Your Turn report, Manitoba is at the bottom of the barrel when it comes to wait times to receive treatment after being prescribed it by a specialist physician.

So, Mr. Speaker, with the NDP, Manitobans are paying more and getting less. Despite record-high tax increases, our health-care services have gotten worse under this NDP government.

* (15:10)

So, Mr. Speaker, the next area that I want to just cover off briefly—and again, there are a whole litany of broken promises and areas of examples where the—where Manitobans are paying more and getting less for the services—for the tax dollars that they pay in our province. But I just want to cover off some areas in Child and Family Services because what is happening with our child-welfare system, it's in crisis and it's absolutely abhorrent the way this government is allowing our children in Manitoba to be treated.

Mr. Speaker, the number of children in care continues to rise in Manitoba at an alarming rate with an estimated 11,000 kids currently in care. That is extremely unfortunate, and clearly we're going in the wrong direction.

Manitoba has witnessed the highest increase in food bank usage in Canada. In between 2008 and 2013 it increased by almost 50 per cent, Mr. Speaker. This is over double the national average of about—of 23 per cent. And according to Statistics Canada, 1.1—no, 1.9 per cent of kids under the age of 14 are in foster—in the foster system in Manitoba, the highest proportion in Canada.

One of the most egregious ones, as well, is in 2012 Manitoba had the highest child poverty rate in all provinces in Canada, and it continues to hold that title, Mr. Speaker. And in 2014 Manitoba had the second highest rate of children using food banks in any province in Canada; 44.3 per cent of all users in

Manitoba were children, whereas the Canadian average was about 37 per cent. And that is nothing to be proud of for this NDP government.

Of course, in the area of jobs and the economy, this NDP government claims one thing, but we know we're ninth in job growth in Canada, Mr. Speaker, under this NDP government. And Manitobans continue—Manitoba businesses continue to pay more and get less in the way of services. They're riddled with red tape, laced further with taxes and tax increases, and they're getting less services for what they're paying for here in our province.

And that doesn't—and we know that Manitoba—the Manitoba Business Leaders Index recently found that—which is the amount of confidence business leaders have in our government—is the lowest in Canada at 13 per cent, which is an all-time low for our province as well, Mr. Speaker, and so these are just some of the areas.

We know that the NDP seems to think that an advertising campaign is going to somehow grow our economy, Mr. Speaker, but we know that the 600-some-odd-thousand dollars or million dollars that they spent on that advertising campaign does nothing towards growing our economy and creating jobs here in Manitoba.

We on this side of the House know who the real people are who build our province and who grow our economy, and those are people—those are small- to mid-size business owners who work very hard for our province and who work very hard to create those jobs for Manitobans who need one and deserve those jobs. It's not an NDP government.

So I think that's the most unfortunate part of all of this is that the NDP government feels they know best how to spend taxpayers' money and, of course, we believe that Manitobans know best, Mr. Speaker. And we believe that Manitoba businesses are the true builders of our economy and we have a tremendous amount of respect for them, unlike members opposite.

Mr. Speaker, we know that in the areas of justice that Manitoba—Winnipeg is consistently ranked the murder capital of Canada for five consecutive years, that Manitoba's led the nation in sexual assaults or has been second every year since 2000. We know that Manitoba's also led the nation in gang-related murder since 2001, and since 2004 Manitoba's had the highest number of youth in remand custody and the highest number of youth offences. And we know

that the city of Winnipeg is the second in Canada in violent crime. So that, again, is another example in the area of justice where we're failing our children, where we're failing in the areas of providing services to Manitobans who pay more for taxes but they're getting less for those services.

The last area that we heard of from Manitobans quite clearly, Mr. Speaker, is that the NDP waste is threatening front-line services, and we know that the core government budget has increased from \$6 billion in 1999 when this government first came to power to almost \$13 billion in this budget, more than double if you look at the core government budget. So that's almost—that's more than double, and I don't believe that Manitobans—and I don't think Manitobans believe that they're getting more than double the level of service from this NDP government for having spent double the amount that they did when this NDP government first came to office. In fact, I would surmise that they think that this government is going in the wrong direction, that Manitobans are paying more and getting less.

And, of course, just to mention one of the things with NDP—that NDP waste is threatening front-line services, the debt servicing costs, Mr. Speaker. The debt servicing costs are approaching \$900 million in this province and growing, and that's money that could be better spent in other areas. In fact, it is the equivalent of the fourth largest government department. If there was a government department in this province, it would be the equivalent of the fourth largest government department. That is money that would be much better invested in other areas to help grow our economy and to provide the services to Manitobans who need, want and deserve those services.

Mr. Speaker, coming to the end of my time here to be able to say a few more words, so I do want to just say that there are some important things that we have introduced and that are under the leadership of the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Pallister), and some of the positions that we have taken that we feel will better make Manitoba a better place to live, because, again, we believe that Manitoba has true, huge potential. It is a wonderful province that we live in, and we just believe that, unfortunately, under this NDP government, they've had an opportunity and they had another opportunity when they introduced this budget to provide hope for the future of Manitoba, but, unfortunately, we believe that they have squandered it.

And I'm not going to get into all of the positions that we have taken and some of the things that we have announced, Mr. Speaker, but I will announce a few of them. We have announced that we will proceed with a value-for-money audit immediately upon becoming government, that we'll reduce the wasteful spending practices that the current government has employed in sole-source contracting and use greater market competition to increase value for money. We'll reduce levels of wasteful spending on advertising and communications. We'll eliminate the subsidy paid to political parties in the way of the vote tax that we know the NDP has taken. We'll keep the NDP promise of 2012 by reducing spending by 1 per cent, and we'll commit, in our first term, to reduce the PST from 8 to 7 per cent. And we will respect the referendum requirement of the balanced budget law and honour Manitobans' right to vote on any major tax increase proposal.

But, most importantly, Mr. Speaker, we will keep our promises to Manitobans. We will ensure that Manitobans get the best value possible for the tax dollars that they pay and we will eliminate the waste and duplication that is threatening the front-line services that Manitobans need, want and deserve.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I'd like to begin as always by thanking the great people of Concordia for their ongoing support of me and the work that I do here. It's been a real pleasure over the last few months to get back out on the doorstep and talk with folks and directly seek out their advice and direction as their representative in the Legislature, and it's always refreshing to get their perspective on the work that we do in this place.

* (15:20)

I've often said in this House that I think that the people of Concordia, the constituency, represents a fairly balanced snapshot of Manitobans, and, you know, I represent people of all different socio-economic levels and all different education levels and backgrounds, and I think it's really given me a better sense of how to be a more well-rounded representative of their interests here in this Legislature.

They've continued to put their faith in me, and it's with that in mind that I strive every day to represent them the best that I can both here in this Legislature and in the community. It's truly an

honour to come to work here every day and, of course, I recommit myself every time I stand to speak in this House to continue to work on their behalf and especially in the coming session.

I also wanted to take in—my opportunity here, Mr. Speaker, to thank yourself and your staff and the clerks and the table officers and all the folks behind the scenes that help us do what we do and help this place run. I have the honour of serving on many different committees and in different capacities, extracurricular roles, you could call them, here in the Legislature. I'm currently the vice-chair of the Public Accounts Committee, representative for the government caucus in the Legislative internship committee, LAMC, the chair of caucus. All of these roles, it can be a bit of a juggle, and so I certainly appreciate the work that the clerks do in keeping me on task and supporting me in those roles and so I just wanted to take an opportunity to thank them.

I also wanted to acknowledge our new members of our government Cabinet, which I haven't had an opportunity to do: the member for the Interlake and the member for The Maples (Mr. Saran). And, of course, we've had a few changes as well, but those two members in particular are new to Cabinet and I wanted to take an opportunity to just say how incredibly happy I am for them, and I think they are some of the strongest constituency folks in this Chamber and so it couldn't happen to better people to give them this opportunity to continue to serve the people of Manitoba.

The member for the Interlake, in particular, was my seatmate when I first came to this place, and so for those of you that know the member well, you'll understand what a lens that was to look through in terms of getting my first lessons in this place; it was certainly an experience. But as I said, his commitment to the people of the Interlake and just the lesson that I learned most from him is to put the—your constituents first and to be relentless in doing that, and I certainly believe that he has accomplished that and I wish him all the best.

The member for The Maples is just an incredible person as well that I'd like to acknowledge. He has had an amazing life journey coming from India, coming to Canada, being some—one of the first of, kind of, the modern wave of immigrants from the Punjab region in India to Manitoba. And to hear his experience coming to this province, you know, largely without the support that a lot of folks have now, you know, he came to this province, really

struck out on his own and just took that incredible journey. He's also a very humble man, as we all know, and, you know, I've been told that's not a very good quality for a politician. You know, I would argue that his success maybe proves that old adage wrong. But it's certainly a very great quality for a human being, and his family and the member himself were so gracious and accommodating to me when I had a chance to visit them in their village in India and to be really treated like family, and it's—he's just an incredible person, and so I couldn't be happier for his opportunity in this House as well.

I'd also like to take an opportunity to welcome our newest member of our caucus, Amanda Lathlin—oh, I'm sorry, the member for The Pas (Ms. Lathlin), sorry, Mr. Speaker—who's brand new in this Chamber. I'm just so elated for her success, and I know she's just going to do a phenomenal job here in this House. And I do feel a bit of a kinship with the member in the sense that we were both elected in a by-election alone. And for those members who have had that experience, it can be a bit of a unique experience in that you're, you know, it's a bit lonely and you don't have a class of other members to come in and learn with, and you're, you know, it can be a bit of a lonely experience.

You know, that being said, I think she'll find that not only within our caucus where, you know, we have great folks that are here to support her and give her that, whatever support she needs going forward. I honestly believe that all members of this House will extend that support to her because we're here to serve the people of Manitoba, and that does bind us. In that sense, we are all one team, and I think we're all here to support her in her work representing her constituents.

She's also been elected now one year to a general election, which I also had the experience of being elected shortly before a general election. And so it does feel like sometimes that the election campaign doesn't end, because you're running your by-election, you're getting yourself elected and then you're right into that crucial last year and—before an election—and, of course, when it's busiest. So, anyway, I just—I think she's going to do phenomenal and I just wanted to extend my welcome to her in this House.

Overall I believe, Mr. Speaker, that we have a very strong team of government MLAs, and I'm confident in our ability to represent the priorities of Manitobans in this House. Budget 2015 builds on the momentum that we've created in this province, and

as our Finance Minister said in his speech, budgets are more than just numbers and statistics. They're about people, they're about choices, and our government will always choose to put people first. We protect the jobs and front-line services that Manitoba families count on from the threat of reckless cuts, and that's why this budget says to Manitoba families very clearly: we are on your side.

Now, has that plan worked so far? Well, we don't have to guess whether government investment can have a positive effect on the economic health in the Manitoba context. Despite both global and Canadian economic ups and downs, our economy has remained relatively stable and, in fact, is on track to continue to heat up. We can see the positive results in communities across our province and we know for a fact that our plan is working.

Now, I hear this anecdotally all the time in my constituency, and I'm sure all members have stories that are similar. Just recently, Mr. Speaker, I had a chance to speak to a soon-to-be high school graduate who has secured an internship position in the fast-growing biomed field here in this province, which is taking off and offering great possibilities.

I recently spoke to a tradesperson, Mr. Speaker, who had absolutely no downtime this winter, was happy in the sense that he had received all the work and was working as hard as he possibly could but was just now getting ready for his busy time in the summer and getting ready to be even busier than he had been over the winter.

The small-business person in my community, Mr. Speaker, who has now relocated twice already because they ran out of space for their expanding business and they're now looking to build a new facility just to house the new equipment that they're purchasing and the new employees that they're planning to hire.

Everywhere in—we look in Manitoba, people are working, they're training themselves for the careers of the future and they're moving themselves forward.

But it's not just this anecdotal evidence, Mr. Speaker, that we come before the House to talk about. We have outside validators—it's not just even ourselves talking about ourselves—outside validators which have looked at the Manitoba model and see the benefits: of course, the Conference Board of Canada, who forecasted economic growth will lead the country in 2015 and 2016; BMO Capital Markets has called Manitoba a rising star in job creation.

Investments in these critical infrastructure projects are paying off. We've added, since last year, 20,000 good quality jobs in this province. Our rate of economic—or, sorry, our rate of employment growth is almost four times the national average.

Projects in my neck of the woods, such as the interchange at Highway 59 and the Perimeter, show how strategic investments in our infrastructure can both address long-term infrastructure needs and create job opportunities for the people of Manitoba.

I'm proud to be part of a government that has prioritized this long-awaited part of the northeast transportation system and, I might add, has prioritized adding active transportation for the first time as part of a provincial infrastructure project from the ground up and from the planning stages up. And it's absolutely phenomenal what it will do with connecting our active transportation and our transportation system in general in northeast Winnipeg.

*(15:30)

And three out of four jobs, we can't forget, Mr. Speaker, in Manitoba are in the private sector. So it clearly demonstrates that businesses see the potential here in the province as well and that they have the confidence to build their future right here in Manitoba.

Young people also want to see the growth in our province and they are choosing to build their lives here. A strong economy and a healthy job market gives young people the hope and optimism they need to reach their full potential.

That was certainly my experience, Mr. Speaker. When I was a young man, I struck out on my own right out of high school, and I was able to do that because I had a good-paying job. I was lucky enough at that time to get on as an unskilled labourer with a company doing some pipefitting work, and when I was offered a job in a local transmission shop, which would've made an absolute phenomenal career, I knew I had to make a choice: I could continue down that path and I would've had a great career and would've been to—able to support myself and my family, but I'd always wanted to try something, I'd always wanted to go to university and just see if I could make it.

Because I was confident in those good careers that were there, that were there if I failed if I wasn't able to do it, I was able to take that leap to push myself to try something that was outside of my

boundaries, and I believe it's that kind of optimism in the opportunities of—here in Manitoba that we want for all young people. So not every young person is going to go to university, is going to learn a trade or is even going to necessarily stay in Manitoba initially, but they can go spread their wings. They can try different things, and they know that here in Manitoba there are opportunities and there is a future, if they so choose, to be here and to work together for the ongoing economy. But having the lowest unemployment rate in the country gives young people confidence to experiment; it gives them the opportunity to try different things and it allows them to find out how they can contribute to our changing economy and support themselves.

A good economy translates to better quality of life for all Manitobans and this translates not only for just young people but for all Manitobans, no matter what stage they're at in their lives. Manitobans are hard-working people by nature, I believe, and I certainly know that to be the true—true of the people that I represent in Concordia. So I know that if we give them the opportunity they will make the most of it, Mr. Speaker.

Budget 2015 also continues our emphasis on moving education into the 21st century and responding to our changing economy. Now, I've spent a lot of time in the last year in the high schools of my community. I think it's actually one of the—my favourite things about being an MLA is the access that it gives me to our schools and being able to meet our communities' future leaders. I'm so inspired by their connection to important issues. When I hear the things that kids are doing nowadays, blows me away and I just can't get enough of hearing the incredible stories they have.

Kids today are better informed about the world around them and more engaged in the issues from around the world than ever before in history. They have a closer connection to those issues through social media and more information and a better personal understanding of how it affects people. The key to their success is having the skills now and the opportunity to effect change on those issues that they're so connected to. With those skills they have unlimited potential and we can provide them with those skills.

Just this spring, I met with a high school student who is well on her way to becoming a community leader. She was an incredible student. She had a range of interests and talents. She sings and

performs. She is, of course, academically very astute, but she was a bit shy. She was given a leadership role in a social studies project that they were doing at the school, and she started to learn the fundamentals of how political engagement can make a difference. The skills that she's now learning in that class, Mr. Speaker, will give her the ability that she needs to be a leader in our community in the future.

We also know that most of—or some of the most in-demand and good-paying jobs in the future will be in the skilled trades. The skills that students are learning not only give them career opportunities, but also teach them valuable life skills that can be applied in a variety of different ways.

I often talk about the amazing culinary and pastry arts program at Kildonan-East Collegiate where students can experiment with different cooking techniques, practise their skills by serving food to the school and to the community. We're currently investing in their program by building new space and, if they choose to continue in that career, they can connect easily with Red Seal certification program which exists at Red River College or simply use those skills on nutrition and healthy eating throughout their lives. This was a priority, Mr. Speaker, when I was first elected, to expand this program and support this program, and I'm proud that our government has seen the value in a program like culinary arts and how it can change young people's lives.

Mr. Speaker, our government also invests in the state-of-the-art autobody program and shops program at the high school. And once again, skills translate well into the workforce. But they can also begin to receive certification before they even leave high school. So it gives them that leg up and an extra step that they now have in that career choice.

Budget 2015 introduces a new youth jobs strategy that will help focus on the most successful programming and target new funding to those programs that yield the best results. The youth jobs strategy will also include a fund to support more paid work and on-the-job training opportunities.

We're also continuing our support of post-secondary education in the province. While most other provinces have been cutting funding for colleges and universities, we're increasing operating grants by 2.5 per cent for universities and 2 per cent for colleges.

I've spoken many times about my experience, Mr. Speaker, going to university under an NDP government, and when I started my academic career, I benefited from the initial tuition freeze and rebate that was put in place in 1999, which is incredible. I then got to witness first-hand the increased investment that our government put into the university and college campuses to improve capital and develop new and innovative programming: over \$1 billion since 1999. And, at the end of my academic career, I was able to actually benefit from the tuition tax rebate, which encourages students to stay here in Manitoba and contribute to our economy. Because of these successful initiatives, college enrolment has increased by 51 per cent and university enrolment by 45 per cent, and I was able to access university education because of these programs.

We've come a long way, but where we're going next with post-secondary education is even more exciting. Starting in August, Manitoba student loans will be interest free for the first time and will allow more people to access post-secondary education than ever before. Continuing to invest and keep tuition affordable will enable our students to be better prepared for the economy of tomorrow.

Affordability, of course, is a key to our success in this province as well, and we believe very much in raising all boats towards that goal. Our government has been working with Poverty Reduction Council on the goal of ending homelessness. We continue to believe that partnerships within communities, at the community level and those organizations who work at the grassroots level on the issue of poverty is our best approach.

We also increased the vital Rent Assist program by \$22 million this year. We're moving it to the level of 75 per cent of median market rent, which offers a major support to so many in our community. Although this winter wasn't as cold as it was last winter, I did take advantage of the many apartment blocks in Concordia this winter to do some of my canvassing and that's where I met so many people that can benefit from, or have benefited from, the Rent Assist program. Some of them were seniors, some of them were students, some of them were on social assistance and some of them were just working as many hours as they could and still sometimes struggling to pay the bills.

This benefit is portable. It gives them the support that they need. And it helps move them into training

and more jobs, which I think is so vital. Of course, we still need more affordable housing, Mr. Speaker, and our government is committed to building more. Our minimum wage will also increase to \$11 per hour this year, and it moves us closer to providing a living wage for all Manitobans.

By ensuring that all Manitobans have an opportunity to succeed, we will all together make our province a better place. In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, our government has a plan. Budget 2015 is a plan to deliver on priorities of Manitoba families: more jobs, better roads and stronger services.

Manitobans aren't interested in the deep and reckless cuts to front-line services and infrastructure that the PCs have proposed. They want good jobs. They want a growing province. Our plan, our budget, is putting families first. Our budget gives hope to young people. Our budget moves us into the 21st century, and I believe our budget is building a better Manitoba.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

* (15:40)

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): I'd like to take advantage of the opportunity when I'm speaking to this budget to welcome everyone back to the Legislature. It seems like it's been a long time since we've had a session so it's—I'm very pleased to get back here and welcome to you, Mr. Speaker, and, in particular, welcome to the new member representing The Pas. I hope she enjoys her stay here and has the opportunity to participate and be part of this process.

It is an honour to be part of the Manitoba Legislature and I'm particularly honoured to represent the fine constituency of Portage la Prairie, one that—my—it's—I'm still on my first term representing them, but we've certainly come a long way together including some years that had major crisis in them, including floods which taught me a great deal about human nature, I could tell you, those that work and those that complain and those that actually get out there and contribute in their community, and it's very—it's a real pleasure to work with those.

Now, I'm not going to go into a lot of rhetoric about the broken promises that this budget represents because the list is pretty lengthy and I'll leave that to my colleagues, many of which who've already touched on a number of issues.

But I did want to talk about, a little bit about some of the increases in taxes and fees that were attached to this particular budget. And it must be wonderful for it to be a Finance minister where you get to talk about the good things and simply ignore anything that you don't want to talk about, because this particular budget contained quite a number of fee and tax hikes and I wanted to touch on a few of them, in particular, that have a fairly broad implication.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Increased fees for subdivision applications—and, of course, every municipal level of government has these to deal with at one time or another, and as luck would have it, the number of them actually working their way through the process and—for both the city of Portage la Prairie and the municipality that surrounds it and, of course, they're quite concerned. How much more is it going to cost us and is this just government clawing back some of their tax fees? *[interjection]* Yes, less with more. We're getting less and we're paying more.

And also along with this there's a 2 per cent fee increase for the Manitoba Food Development Centre which is located in the city of Portage, and the concept there has been all along to try and encourage more entrepreneurs to get into the—either agricultural processing industry or the actual food production industry, processed foods, in particular. And, yes, I know that the intent is good, so the centre has struggled to attract enough attention. And certainly adding 2 per cent to the fees probably won't make it any busier. And so I hope it doesn't cause some lost opportunities.

There are a number of these types of centres across Canada, and I had compared fees for my own information before and found that we were already the most expensive in terms of fee for service, so another 2 per cent certainly won't make us more attractive. And for—certainly, when it comes to larger companies, they shop the fees across the country and they shop the services as well. So here we are again paying more and getting less.

Also new application fees for licences to—suspensions to get in front of the appeal board. Here we have a hidden cost to get justice in the province. I hardly think that that's very fair to those that are caught in this position.

And also increased application fees for residential tenancies, most of which appear to be

around rental increases. And, of course, rental increases are a part of the market adjusting through a period of time. But as everyone probably knows and understands, when there's an increased fee, it gets passed on to someone. So I suspect that the renters will end up paying one way or the other for this increase fee which the government, of course, will capture.

New fees for credit guarantors, so that's banks in one form or the other and, of course, if you found a bank that doesn't pass the fee on to the people they serve, please let me know what it is because I don't think there is such a thing in existence. They all pass their increased costs down the chain to those that actually use them.

But, in particular, one that I found very interesting, renewed fees for the veterinary diagnostic services. And I have a couple of friends that are veterinarians and I happened to be speaking to one of them recently, and I said, you know, this is going to cost you a little more money. He said, actually not because we've long ago quit using the Manitoba services because they are too expensive and too slow and too poor, and we simply send everything to Saskatchewan. Which goes a long way to explaining why the veterinary lab here is losing money, because they're simply not providing a really great service.

So he said he suspects that if the fees increase in any substantial way, they'll pretty soon price themselves entirely out of the marketplace and people will be going to Saskatoon. So that's very productive, perhaps that—something the government wasn't aware of. They probably just looked at the bottom line and saw that they were continuing to lose money and decided, well, we'd simply charge more there. We can pass that along. But what will happen, of course, there is choices that the veterinarians can make and they will simply move somewhere else with—to get the services. They're not required to use the—Manitoba.

And then, of course, we have the increased cottage lot fees, and I won't go into that too far because certainly my colleague from Morris is going to want to be talking about that. But every one of us has at least some constituents that are caught in this and some of the fees increases are simply ridiculous. It may be true that for a period of time they certainly got a very good deal because nobody was doing their paperwork, in terms of government supposed to be keeping track of the cost of services and they were

supposed to be providing the cottage owners with some indication of what they were paying for the services they got—they were getting and what the return was. That was never happening. Nothing ever seemed to come out. Every now and then they would get kind of a summary statement that really didn't indicate anything. It would just—a mishmash of numbers, didn't really break it down the way it was.

But you've created anomalies out there now where people in parks are paying on their cottages—paying for waste water treatment or paying for water services for the townsite that they have no access to. So what is the fairness in that situation? I know that even across the floor here there are some cottage owners who are probably scratching their head and wondering why are you paying more and getting less. You're getting no services whatsoever, and, in fact, I think we'll see that they'll be some people on both sides of the House here that are unhappy about this. Though, as—not—I do not have a cottage and do not spend time at the lake, I think that that'll be someone else that has to do the follow-up on that.

There are increased fees for independent study, especially for distance education. How is that providing better access? Would that have helped the member from Concordia had he been outside of the city of Winnipeg to get better access during his period of time? And increased registration fees for those with international education and also the perennial increase is tobacco taxes.

So, certainly, we've seen a lot of increased fees and taxes that have been passed along. I'd like to put a little balance in that, because, of course, certainly, that comes back to individual Manitobans. It isn't all good news, as the Finance Minister and the Premier (Mr. Selinger) would like to tell everyone, great budget. This is—sounds a little bit like what they said at the door when the 2011 campaign was going on: We promise no new taxes and we'll balance the books. But, again, we're looking at promises that were broken and people having to pay more and getting less in terms of services.

Now, I'd like to spend a little bit of time talking about Family Services, in particular. Mr. Acting Speaker, the 2015 budget seeks to allocate more than \$1.1 billion to the Department of Family Services, and it has grown since the NDP came into power, dramatically, as has the number of kids in care, in particular. And what are we getting? What are we getting for this? Are we getting lowered number of kids in care? No, we're getting increased numbers of

kids in care. That create—indicates more problems out there. And are we getting better results? Are we having less problems? Well, certainly, if you listen—if you pay attention to the media, you know how frequently people are ending up in a bad situation because they're tied into CFS, and it's absolutely abhorrent that kids are still in hotels even to this day. And I know the minister's indicated that by June 1st, she'll do something with the kids, whether she puts them in jail or where she puts them, but she's—they'll be out of the hotels. But that certainly leaves them at risk out there if we have not found appropriate places, and we don't seem to be making much progress on this.

And it is not the first time this promise has been made. The member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh) very clearly made this promise back in 2007 and, in fact, the premier of the day, the member for Concordia, also many times in public said we—you know, we'll get kids out of the hotels; they belong in family rooms, not hotel rooms.

And look what happened. It returned again and, in fact, there's been special committees too numerous to mention whose duty it was to try and get kids out of hotels. And the results have always been that we end up with kids back in a hotel.

*(15:50)

I think part of it is the lack of knowledge in the system because, certainly, with all of the agencies and authorities, we have found time and time again that there was actually space in different parts of the system, but nobody seemed to know it was there, and the minister's responsibility is to help co-ordinate this and it just doesn't seem to be happening. They had this problem a few years ago in Ontario and have come up with a better system of tracking them, and now seem to be doing very little of this; in fact, it's illegal in Ontario to actually have kids in hotels, and I believe that they actually stick to that law, something that I think this government would find a novel idea, to stick to a law.

So we're continuing to be worried about the increasing number of kids given the usual rate of increases, and there's really been no sign of it capping off. We probably, at the moment, probably have 11,000 kids in the care of CFS across this province, and games are being played all the time where sometimes the kids that are in extensions of care are counted, when it works, especially when you want to count—allocate funds to that, but when you go to the public to tell them, the press in particular,

how many kids are in care, well, we might leave those ones off because technically they're not youth anymore.

But you have kids like Phoenix Sinclair, who we all know was—lost her life because of the mismanagement of CFS system, other kids like Gage Guimond, Jaylene Sanderson-Redhead, Breana Belanger, Heaven Traverse, Venecia Shanelle Audy, Patsy Desmarais, Michael Helgason, Tracia Owen, baby Amelia and baby Matias de Antonio and, of course, Tina Fontaine. This is just a few of the kids that have lost their lives to the CFS system under this NDP government.

And, as you know, I have kept the House updated on what has happened to the de Antonio family after the loss of little Matias, and they are expecting their second child here very soon, are still at a loss whether it's safe for them to give birth to that child here in Manitoba or whether they again will be a victim of CFS action without any explanation, because they still have not been offered to this day one word of explanation as to what happened or one word as to what went wrong while that child was in the care. Can you imagine that happening in your family, and can you imagine being satisfied with that level of explanation? I think it's a 'travis' justice and something that has to be dealt with and reversed at some time. But it's very sad to have this type of thing happening in the system and, believe it or not, no sign that we've changed anything. We haven't changed anything to deal with this type of problem.

During this time of the—between 2009 and 2013, 76 children died in the care of CFS; many of them, of course, were results of suicide. No suicide prevention plan in place for many of those years, and when they finally did put one in place, you know, it has only had minimal impact in terms of reducing that number.

We know it's very important that children in the care of CFS have a cultural identity and that they put—be put in households that are culturally appropriate. And that still remains a struggle of the system, doesn't seem to be able to accomplish that and so children are often placed in—temporarily or even for a few years with families and then moved without—with no explanation after they have settled down, leaving both the foster parents that have been good parents to these kids and the kids themselves wondering who did what wrong and at a loss and often blaming themselves. You would find—you find

that many of the foster parents that are in that situation, they had a child removed from them, absolutely will have nothing more to do with the system. They basically back out of the system altogether because it is very traumatic to lose the child that you have spent a lot of time and effort on and shown love for and then have that child taken away, really, with no explanation whatsoever, and they get nothing in terms of that.

Then we have all of the recommendations from the Phoenix Sinclair report, and many foster parents and many staff in the CFS system are crying out to get some of these things implemented. Some of them have been years in waiting. If you go back, actually, to 2002 and you look at all of the recommendations both from Phoenix Sinclair and from the—any autopsy and inquests that were associated with them, there is over 1,000 recommendations, and of them, very, very few are fully implemented. Many of them are repetitive in nature simply because nothing's changed; the system continues to blunder on in its own direction, and more and more often I am hearing from workers in CFS, families that are associated with CFS, about all of the things that have gone wrong in the system, how kids have been mistreated, kids are left without supports, families are left with no supports. Even staff people are frustrated how poorly the system is working.

And I think, in all honesty, it is not unfair to say that CFS in this province is in a crisis, is in disarray and continues to head down that road in the future. And we do not see anything taking place that will change this. I think we should be very concerned and I think the minister is very aware that she has put in place circumstances—particularly we've been reading the last few days about the number of missing kids—she's leaving these kids vulnerable out there. And, in fact, in particular for the young girls that are vulnerable to sexual exploitation she has created an extreme at-risk circumstance for these kids, and I suspect that there are people out there that prey upon these kids that have come to know Manitoba as one of the easy places to go. And I think that's a horrible 'stakor'—state of circumstances and I think it reflects extremely badly on this government.

We've also increased the highest increase in food bank usage in Canada between 2008 and 2013 a whopping 48 per cent, over double the national average of 23.3. Now, many people that use food banks are often there because the first thing you do is try and keep the roof over your head, and that's where the increase in Rent Assist, which we were

very pleased to support, the increase in EIA housing allowance—and three years ago we took a position on that, a very clear position that this was a good thing for Manitobans and a good thing for Manitoba and a good thing for the individuals, and it's taken the NDP three years to actually get there.

No, they haven't accomplished yet, as my colleague points out; they just promised to do it. And, given their success with broken promises, perhaps we'll never see that. But Rent Assist has actually been a few people that get that, and that creates another interesting set of circumstances because some people got it and some people didn't, and even those that were in the EIA system where you would think there would be universal knowledge at least that you could apply for this, weren't being told.

So we see many of the poverty groups in the province now attaching a link on their website so that individuals that look at their website—and not everybody uses them, unfortunately—are now encouraged to actually go fill out the paperwork so that they can apply for something that someone probably should have told them about. And so I think the next step we're going to see when that—this actually becomes in place and available across the province is a period of time when we have to work very hard to educate people that may be eligible for this that there's actually something out there. It's another one of these programs where we want to make the announcement and we want to throw a little money at it, but we hope nobody actually uses it.

And there are other examples to that which includes things around the—some of the housing issues where we were looking for assistance to help with some of the housing and, in particular, if I remember correctly, if I can find the right page here, one that is of particular interest to you in terms of rooming houses because there are many in your constituency. And, of course, the number of rooming houses continues to drop and there has been actually a couple of programs in the past that were supposed to help people actually upgrade rooming houses so that—they're sort of a necessary part in the system, not something that many people actually want to spend a lot of time in, but they become kind of a transitional housing tool. But they're often very poor in terms of quality of housing and also on security they're often very poor.

And there were programs available, actually, through Manitoba Housing for the last five or

six years, and nothing has been done. There's only been actually nine applicants for these programs simply because the paperwork was so great that the owners of the rooming houses looked at the programs and said this is a waste of my time—yes, a waste of my time.

So it's another example of, yes, we got to make an announcement; yes, we've got a ribbon cutting, but we didn't actually change anything. So it's a very sad set of circumstances.

Here in Manitoba, 4.81 per cent of Manitobans are using food banks. This is an increase of 2.4 per cent since 2013, and that actually puts us at the highest in Canada. We have the highest percentage of people using food banks of any province in Canada. In fact, the only other province that is even close is Newfoundland-Labrador, and their numbers are actually working their way downward, actually, at a pretty good pace, and our numbers continue to rise. So it's a very sad set of circumstances that we see around the use of food banks. I think they are a symptom of the fact that we are not dealing with poverty issues in this province in any way. In fact, we're simply sweeping it on the rug.

*(16:00)

Our child poverty rates in Manitoba rose 6 per cent from 1999 to 2002, 23 per cent to 29 per cent respectively since that time. Child poverty here is nearly 10 per cent above the Canadian average. Three out of every 10 Manitoba children live in poverty, compared to two out of every 10 elsewhere in Canada. We cannot expect these children to succeed if we continue to leave them in such vulnerable position. And it is a very sad reflection on Manitoba that we have the highest numbers in all of Canada. Of those that are using food banks in Manitoba, 44.3 per cent of the users actually are children. In Canada elsewhere, that's only 35 per cent. So, certainly, the numbers are moving in the wrong direction.

In the little bit time I have left, I did want to touch on a few other issues as well. Certainly, in my constituency of Portage la Prairie, one of the issues that often comes up even on street corners and coffee shops is how are we managing water in this province. And we have been blessed with the 2011 flood; we had a pretty good flood again in 2014. And one would have thought—and in between, in 2012, we actually had several local issues in terms of flooding as well that caused quite a bit of losses in the community and also losses in the processing

community because that year the number of potatoes that were actually produced because of the flooding and mismanagement was actually down, and we have two major potato processors in the community, and so it certainly hurt at that particular point. But you would hope that in a year like this, which we had below average snowfall, below average rainfall, that we'd actually get the flooding right, and we didn't. We mismanaged this one as well.

Apparently, we can't look at Saskatchewan's numbers because it was very clear from the Saskatchewan numbers that the amount of flow on the upper Assiniboine was still extremely high, and yet we closed the gates at Shellmouth. And, instead of taking two and a half weeks to fill, as it might have if they continued with opening, it filled in five days. Now, you have to re-open the gates and increase the flows in the lower Assiniboine, and that has led to additional flooding of about 40,000 acres between Brandon and Shellmouth. Those will probably produce absolutely nothing this year, and that is, for those people, the fourth year in a row that they will be blessed with the type of management that left them with inability to actually produce anything on these acres.

But downstream, we're still suffering from that. Of course, we're trying to keep as much water out of Lake Manitoba as possible because it's only just a fraction below flood stage already, not able to get the water levels down over the last year because we didn't seem to figure out how to get the emergency channels working properly so that we couldn't get rid of the water. So we went into the winter at very nearly full flood stages and, of course, we have had—even in a dry year, we've had a little bit of runoff. And so now we're basically at full flood stage now, and any time the wind blows, the water comes to shore somewhere and floods out somebody else in whatever direction it's going to be. And this was the driest year in many, and yet we can't seem to manage the water.

More and more often, I hear from people, is there any type of water management that this government seems to be able to handle? And, certainly, it's hard to give them any other answer than, well, they just don't seem to be able to figure out what's going on. You know, it's not that difficult. Even back in 2011, there were many people warning government, even in the fall of 2010, that they needed to do something to get water out of the Lake Manitoba as quickly as possible, and they simply were ignored until things turned to absolute disaster

area. It's becoming increasingly obvious that the only time we get a decision from this government is in the face of a disaster, whether it's a flooding disaster, whether it's a CFS disaster or a disaster of other types of human proportions. It seems to be the only time that they actually make a decision. No preplanning, no looking ahead and seeing things coming, no looking at the data and making an informed decision that there might be a problem in the future. It just seems to be crisis-to-crisis management. And perhaps that's why things are going so badly inside their own caucus, because they're just going from pillar to post, from one crisis to the other, and they simply can't get their act together.

Now, getting back to the original discussion here around the budget, I am very pleased to support our leader's amendments on this, and I find the budget, though it touches—and I'll credit the NDP, they finally got it right on the EIA support, 75 per cent of the market median. Three years after we did, they got it right. And that's still only an announcement, as I have been reminded earlier, but perhaps they'll actually understand that—the implications of this increase. It certainly takes a lot of pressure off other sources and helps provide better housing for people, and better housing is certainly step 1 in dealing with the issue of poverty. If you're struggling in your housing situation it is very, very hard to hold down a job, to go out and get training done, to do anything in terms of improving your own situation.

So thank you very much. I hope—I wish you success with the rooming house situation, though I have yet to see any reports come out of the committee you are working on. I recognize that there is certainly an issue there and I do hope that at some point in the future good recommendations come forth, because everything we've had in that area up until now has been more announcement and less about doing.

Thank you.

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): I'm honoured to get up here today and to, like many of you of have in your opening 'resparks'—remarks about the budget, to say how pleased I am to be back in the House and to be here with my brothers and sisters in our caucus to continue to fight on behalf of all the people of Manitoba.

Ms. Jennifer Howard, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

I think it goes without saying that I am extraordinarily proud to support the budget. We remain, as we have been almost every year since we were first elected, the most progressive government in Canada that fights for working people each and every day and who ensures that we put people first at every single opportunity.

Mr. Speaker—or Madam Speaker, forgive me—I want to congratulate my friend, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar), for such an extraordinary budget. I think he has done the people of Manitoba a great service by making sure that we continue to grow this province, to build this province, to continue to ensure that every Manitoban has an opportunity, that every Manitoban counts and that no one gets left behind.

And Mr.—I want to say also that in doing that, in giving the budget speech, the Minister of Finance has done what so many others of us done, what I do each and every day in my portfolio—and I stand on the shoulders of those who came before us, who have worked to make sure that Manitobans are taken care of, who have worked to ensure equity and fairness in our economy and to continue to raise the floor for all Manitobans so that we do not have the inequities that we find in other places in Canada, that we do not have the inequities that we find globally around the world, to make sure that our growth is steady, make sure that development is planned and, ultimately, to try to make sure that we are—live in a sustainable economy that serves, as I said earlier, all of the people of Manitoba.

I certainly want to begin by thanking the people of Fort Garry-Riverview for their continued support and their continued encouragement to me in my duties as both an MLA and as a minister of the Crown. I think it's pretty clear that the budget reflects the priorities of my constituency and of the neighbourhoods in there. I—fortunate enough to represent a constituency of many progressive people who understand that it's not all about me, necessarily, but it's about us as a community, as neighbourhoods, a city, province and a country.

They understand the importance of investments in a sustainable economy that creates jobs; that builds infrastructure; that builds neighbourhoods and builds communities; a budget that protects the environment; that fights poverty; that prioritizes health, education and child care; that promotes opportunities for young people; provides securities

for seniors; and enhances the quality of life for Manitoba families.

* (16:10)

As I said, we're a government that governs for all the people of Manitoba, all the time. We're not just doing it for the few elites but to ensure that every Manitoban counts.

I—I've—there are so many elements of the budget that I want to talk about this afternoon and I'm not sure that I'm going to have sufficient time to do so, but at the heart of the—our plan is jobs because we know that at the heart of misery is joblessness. That's why we invest in Manitoba, that's why we invest in infrastructure, that's why we invest in the social infrastructure of our communities, not just the physical infrastructure of better roads and—but also the social infrastructure of stronger services, as I said, to make sure that every Manitoban is taken care of.

We know that following the great recession that occurred in this—globally, across the world, we made a choice. We said we were going to continue to invest in building our core infrastructure and to keep Manitobans working and at the same time provide those training opportunities so that young people have a future here in Manitoba. And it's no coincidence that our plan is working; it's no coincidence at all. Every reputable economic organization, every reputable economist, every reputable organization that looks at these kinds of things understands that we're doing exactly what's required to keep Manitoba secure and to keep Manitoba sustainable into the future. We also know that we have among the lowest unemployment rates in the country, and for that, as I said, is something that is the critical piece to a healthy community and a healthy society.

As I said earlier, joblessness is misery, and if we think about what joblessness is like in the Great Depression of the 1930s or the great recession of the first decade of the 21st century, we see what joblessness was like in southern Ontario when the manufacturing sector was wiped out, or in the Great Depression of the 1930s when farmers and workers were—lost their jobs because nobody cared about them. We've learned that in times when—of difficulty it's absolutely important to keep investing in our economy to ensure a sustainable future for every Manitoban, be they a young person, be they a family or be they the seniors who in the first place built this province.

As I said in many times in the House, our focus is on jobs in the economy, and at the heart of that—at the heart of that agenda is education and training for young people, because when we do that, when we have an informed and educated workforce, then we know that we can keep innovative—innovating and keep developing so that you don't just stop but you reach a point of sustainability that allows us to have a future for every Manitoban. We know that young people with good skills in a growing economy can find a good job, buy a home and build a better life right here in Manitoba.

Budgets are about choices and we couldn't have a starker contrast than the one we have on this side of the House, compared to our friends in opposition on the other side of the House. We've told Manitobans that we're going to continue to invest in the economy, and we've told Manitobans how we're going to do it. We've shared our plan with them through the Minister of Finance's (Mr. Dewar) extraordinarily good budget, and we've let them know exactly where we stand.

On the other hand, the Leader of the Opposition has no plan for Manitobans, save one: that's to cut \$500 million out of the budget, cut services, cut education, fire teachers, fire nurses. Where have we seen this before? We saw it in the 1990s, and I'm absolutely confident that were they ever, ever to get their wheels on the hands of government again, they would push this province back into the 20th century and, you know, you listen to the Leader of the Opposition's speech on Friday and you'd think he was living in the 1950s all over again. He hasn't progressed one iota forward. He's not prepared to invest in our economy. He's not prepared to invest in our future and, as a consequence, he's going to lead us down a path that I don't want any Manitoban, in particular my own family or my friends' families, my colleagues' families, to have to experience, because that will lead to joblessness and it will lead to misery and before you know it all the progress that we've made in our years in government will be for naught and instead Manitoba will be fighting an uphill battle all over again.

Now, I have to say that as Minister of Education I'm in an extraordinarily privileged and lucky position. I've said many times it's a great honour to be an MLA in this House, to sit in this House and to work on behalf of families and young people and seniors every single day. I feel extraordinarily privileged in that regard. And then I—on top of that, I have the great honour to be the Minister of Education

and Advanced Learning, and I look at our record in government over the years in education and I think, wow, what a tremendously progressive government we really, really are.

We've invested from—in the K-to-12 system, as we know, at the rate of economic growth every single year so that we can make a difference in the lives of our children. The result of that is that when we were first elected, graduation rates hovered around 71 per cent. Today, as a result of the investment we've made in the K-to-12 system, graduation rates now are at an all-time high of 87 per cent. That's the result of what happens when you invest.

Since 1999, our government has invested nearly \$1 billion in capital infrastructure and the result of that is that we've built 35 new schools across this province. That would never have happened where the other folks had the chance to be in government. In fact, it didn't happen in the 1990s. They pulled the plug on building schools, and students and parents were, as a result, left out in the cold.

In addition to that we've continued to renovate classes to bring them up to the—classrooms to bring them up to 21st-century standards. We've continued to build science classes that are in fact part of a 21st-century plan for education. It's not sufficient just to continue to have the old equipment that the Tories were happy with. That's wasn't good enough. You know, we've gone beyond the Bunsen burner, in case they wanted to know. They need 21st-century tools in the classrooms, and that's exactly what our government has provided.

In addition to that—and because, you know, I love sports—I have to say that when we invest in new gyms and we're investing in gyms across the province, we're making sure that our students have the opportunity for an active lifestyle so that they can be healthy and fit and they can live to a grand old age. But, at a minimum, what we know for sure is a healthy body helps to making a healthy mind, and so when we invest in gymnasiums we give our young people the chance to be whole and complete people.

In addition to that, and this is something that's been really tremendous during my time as Minister of Education and Advanced Learning, is the investments we've put into new shops—yes—so that our young people have the skills and the opportunity for training that they need in the trades so that they can go on and get a good job. In the first instance, by doing it in the secondary sector, it gives them an

opportunity to develop their interests, grow those skills in the first place. Then they can go on to a post-secondary education, whether it's our fine colleges or our superb universities, continue to grow those skills, enhance their training—in fact, contribute to innovation in both those areas—and at the end of that they'll be positioned to have a good job.

And we know, as I said earlier, it's all about jobs. And the opposition is all about joblessness. And so here's just a few examples of the great things we've done in jobs—there are many examples.

I know the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and my friend from Minto were at Tec Voc just last week for innovative announcements there, but we're expanding the autobody and culinary arts program at Kildonan-East. In fact, I've been to Kildonan-East so many times for announcements that I've gotten to know it better than almost any high school in the province. We're expanding and upgrading shop classrooms at Garden City Collegiate. We're expanding the broadcast and online media 'studio'—studio and plumbing program at Louis Riel Arts and Technology Centre.

So it's not just the skills trades, as important as they are; it's also innovative new technologies, allowing our young people who are experts in social media to use that expertise to continue to build and grow our economy.

* (16:20)

We're expanding the welding program at Sturgeon Heights Collegiate. Again, we're continuing—these are just some examples—but continuing to do the kinds of things, make the kind of investments, to provide opportunities for young people, and continue to grow our economy.

That's why I'm so proud of the Minister of Finance's (Mr. Dewar) budget. That's why I've been proud of every budget by every Finance minister here. We stand on each other's shoulders to build Manitoba, one that is prosperous, one that is sustainable, and one that we can certainly be proud of.

So what else have we done during our time? When we've—in Education, in the K-to-12 system—we've—one of the most important things we've done is the small-class-size initiative so that we can reduce the class size from kindergarten to grade 3, so that teachers and students have that important one-on-one time which will help develop the skills and abilities

of our young people that position them, then, to become critical thinkers going forward. And from there they can get those problem-solving abilities that position them to be in a place to make choices, academic choices, in the first instances, and then career choices in the second instance. Educated young people, strong foundational skills, problem-solving skills, critical-thinking skills, become the citizens that we want in this province.

Contrast that with the Tories in the 1990s when they were last in government. They cut funding to education. Oh, my gosh, they fired 700 teachers. It was an unbelievable display of arrogance that said we don't care about teachers, we don't care about young people. We're instead focused on the minutia of budgets without recognizing that a budget that's balanced needs to be balanced for our communities in our society. That's at the heart of our vision.

So we want to ensure that our kids can access high-quality education that prepares them for every opportunity. We've reduced class sizes, as I said, in the early years, and that's making a tremendous difference.

But more than that, my friend from St. Vital, when she was the minister of Education, brought human rights into our classrooms through a very strong antibullying legislation that protects all Manitoba students and makes sure that there are safe spaces for difference and that were inclusive. Isn't that what we want in our communities? Isn't that what we want in our schools? Isn't that what we want in our society? An inclusive vision for every Manitoban.

And I'm sorry, but, on the other side of the House, when it came time to provide safe spaces, when it came time to stand against bullying, when it came time to make sure that there was a secure place to be yourself in our schools, what did they do? They voted against it. Shame on them. And they're going to go out in the next election when the time comes, and we're going to remind Manitobans what exactly happened in the House during that session, when they made sure that they didn't stand for safe and secure places in our schools, to be inclusive and to ensure that everybody has a place in our community.

That's only on the K-to-12 side and I'm just getting going. My gosh, let's think about the post-secondary sector for just a second, because what we've done there is to build an incredible post-secondary education system right here in Manitoba. It's no surprise, it's no mistaking that, on the one

hand, we have been among the best-funding government to post-secondary sector, in Canada, No. 1 this year and, at the same time, we have among the lowest tuition rates in Canada. That's what balance is my friends, that's how it works. And as a result of that, we have strong universities, we have strong colleges and we have the opportunity for our young people to have educational choices that are both academic and skills training. They used to be segregated, didn't belong together—not anymore. It's no longer an either-or proposition; in fact, they go together. That's our vision of a post-secondary education. In fact, that's our vision of an education sector: no wrong doors, no dead ends, choices, options, the chances to become—chance to become yourself to learn and grow and develop and then make a contribution to their community and their society.

When I think about the post-secondary education sector in Manitoba—and I have a great relationship with the presidents of all our institutions and I've gotten to know faculty and staff who give their heart and soul every single day—I recognize not only do we have strong institutions, but we have a strong system—one that's prepared to work together, to collaborate together to ensure that there are no wrong doors, that there are no dead ends, that there are opportunities for our young people to make a choice. Isn't that what we want? I think it is. Low tuition, increased investment, no wrong doors, no dead ends, opportunities for young people.

And then you think about, well, what did the Tories do in the 1990s with post-secondary education? Oh, my gosh—runaway tuition, 132 per cent over their time—runaway tuition. And what was the net effect of that? It sent young people out of our post-secondary education system, not into it in the same way.

Well, enrolment has grown dramatically during our time in government. In fact, enrolment plunged during their time in government. And if they're ever given a chance again, we know—we know it's going to be the same result. Funding will be cut, tuition will go—will skyrocket, and students will have nowhere to go, and the result of that is that they'll have no choice and no opportunities in the future.

At the end of the day, when it comes to education and when it comes to the economy, when it comes to the future of Manitoba, the greatest threat to our education, the greatest threat to our economy, the greatest threat to the future of the—of Manitoba

sits on the other side of this House, and it's our obligation, my brothers and sisters, to work together to make sure that never, ever happens.

You know, I had a chance to listen to the Leader of the Opposition's speech on Friday and, well, it was something to behold. As I've said before, when I look at the Leader of the Opposition giving a speech, I've seen happier faces in a dentist's office than I've seen in the backbenches of the Tory caucus. I'm not sure if they have to listen to that kind of stuff all the time, but that was one heck of a performance if you have no expectations, if you want to plunge the economy into recession and if you want to rob our young people of any hope or any opportunity.

One of the phrases that he uses that's very important for us to remember what it means—because it's deceptive in what it means—is that running through his speech is this notion of common sense. Well, I know all about common sense. As many of you know, I came from Ontario. I moved here in the mid-1990s, and there was a different kind of common sense in Ontario. That was the Mike Harris common sense. It was frightening, and it plunged the Ontario economy into a state that sent many of us running to other parts of the country. I was glad I was lucky. I got to land in Manitoba. I was lucky and to make so many good friends while I was here to grow deep roots in this province in a very short period of time.

But what was the common-sense revolution all about for Mike Harris? You know what they told poor people? You should eat more mac and cheese. What do they call that? *[interjection]* Kraft Dinner. I'm not—you look it up. Poor people should eat more Kraft Dinner.

There was a colossal, huge war on unions is—in particular the teachers' union in Ontario. You know, my brother was a teacher at that time in Ontario; he taught English for 30 years, and he would say, well, why am I being persecuted each and every day by Mike Harris's so-called common-sense revolution when all I'm doing is trying to work with my students to make sure that they're well educated and they have a future. Well, he didn't deserve that kind of persecution. He didn't deserve Mike Harris's definition of common sense.

* (16:30)

And so be very, very wary, Manitobans, when the Leader of the Opposition starts using that phrase, because he's got only one thing in mind. It's a

Hobbesian world of the—a Hobbesian vision of the world—short, nasty and brutish. Let's never let that happen. Let's make sure that never happens.

So I want to conclude just by saying that I am—well, I know my friend from Steinbach, he's applauding and wanting more, and I'd like to give him more. Of course, we've given him lots. We've opened schools in Steinbach. Of course, he won't come when we open those new schools, sadly. I don't know why he won't accept that very kind invitation. You know, my friend from Lac du Bonnet—he showed up. My friend from Morden-Winkler—he showed up. And yet my friend from Steinbach refuses to come. Ah, how sad. I guess he's not as generous as—individual as I would like him to be. But, you know, the invitation, the welcome mat is always out. When this government builds new schools, and we always do, he'll be the first to get an invitation. I hope he comes in the future.

But I have to say—I have to say—I want to give credit to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) for having a bold vision for our province, one that finds real balance in our communities, that makes sure that there is opportunities for our young people, that provides security for our families, that makes sure our seniors are taken care of, that puts a priority on jobs, that puts a priority on investing in education and health and child care, that makes sure that every Manitoban has a place here in this province where never—no one gets left behind, where everyone counts, that governs for all the people all the time.

I'm proud to be a New Democrat; I'm proud to be a member of this government. Let's keep building this province, now and into the future.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I'm honoured to put a few words on the record as we speak to the 2015 budget and to the motion that was put forward by my leader.

But, before I get on to my budget comments, I just want to say congratulations to the newly elected member for The Pas (Ms. Lathlin). I wish her well. It's another female voice added to the Manitoba Legislature, and we certainly welcome that, and I wish her all the very best as she learns the ropes in this Chamber and in the Legislature and—that represents her constituents.

I also do want to pay tribute to those that have announced, along with me, that they're not going to be seeking re-election in the next—in 2016. To the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson), the

member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau), and I believe the member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan) has made that announcement too. I want to wish them well as they sort of close one chapter in the book of life and open a new one. I know that everyone is still young enough and enthusiastic enough to want to pursue other opportunities, so I wish them well as they move forward.

And I also wish the candidates that are being nominated, especially on our side of the House, and I am so excited about the quality and the calibre of the candidates that are coming forward that want to represent our party in the next election, and, hopefully, be members of this Legislature after April of 2016. I encourage them and thank them and thank all members who put their names forward for any political party. It truly is a significant undertaking, one that not many understand out there except for those that volunteer and work for us on a regular basis from election campaign to election campaign. Sometimes people that only show up and work every four years when the election is called, but there are others that are there, you know, all the time, supporting us, working with us, giving us suggestions and ideas on how we can make our province just that much better.

And so I say thank you to the people, too, that make a commitment to us as elected representatives, and I'm one of those people that says that you're only as good as the people that surround you. And I have been truly blessed in my political career to have many, many really good volunteers that have been there by my side over the span of 30 years and eight elections and have always encouraged me—but not only encouraged me, have been there with me to support me, to go door to door with me, to give me the strategic advice that I have needed in order to continue to represent River East. And it's really not one of those constituencies that we call a shoo-in, you know, when you get the nomination, you're pretty well guaranteed to be elected. There's a lot of hard work, and it's always very close in River East. It's a close contest. We've had good-calibre candidates that have run for other political parties, and I do know that it's that hard work and commitment that all of us make as we put our names forward for political office that either makes or breaks us.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

And I also do know that it isn't necessarily of your doing, if you should lose an election. And many

of us believe that we are very strong representatives and advocates for our communities and our constituencies. And there are many very good MLAs that lose their seat as a result of their party falling out of disfavour with the electorate, and some become casualties of that process. And so it's not necessarily—and there aren't many people in society that have to justify their job, their existence in a job, every four years.

So, for all of us, we have that unique—those special circumstances. We have the opportunity to represent, but do know that sometimes it's maybe for a good time, not a long time. And I've had the opportunity for some good times and a long time here in this Legislature and seen many very credible people come and go as a result of the electoral process, but that's what democracy is all about. And I feel very privileged to have been here and to have worked with the very, very qualified and credible members on our side of the House through several different administrations to—whether it be in government or in opposition, to do the very best that we can do to advocate for what we believe in, for what our party believes in and for what many Manitobans believe.

So I just wanted to put those few comments on the record and to say we are into—I don't know; this is probably the—I don't know if it would be the 29th budget that I've had the opportunity to speak to. It might be 29. I think—it could be 28 or 29. I haven't really counted. I haven't really counted them. But I do know it's been that many years, and I haven't missed too many opportunities to speak on—*[interjection]* Yes, and we have—the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) points out to me that we have sometimes had two budgets in the same year, so it could be more than 29. I really don't know. But we're getting close.

And, of course, in some instances, I have spoken in favour of the budgets and voted for very good budgets, and in other instances I've had the opportunity to speak against the budgets and vote against budgets. And, you know, I hear members on the government side of the House very often say, oh, well, you know, we—this was in the budget and this was in the budget, and you voted against it. Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, what I have voted against is the deception that's been put forward by a government that says one thing and does another. They promise before an election that they're going to do certain things, and then after an election they bring in a budget that does something completely

opposite to what they said they were going to do. And, you know, I've prided myself on never going door to door and telling people something that I didn't believe I could deliver. And I know, in the last election campaign, my opposition went forward and said: We're not going to raise taxes; just elect us. We're going to look after you; we're going to protect you.

* (16:40)

Well, I think it was the NDP candidate in River East that said, to very vulnerable senior citizens also, just elect us and we're not—we're going to make sure your rents are kept affordable. We're going to make sure that your rents don't rise. Mr. Speaker, many of those seniors, very vulnerable seniors, that are on fixed incomes were deceived, were deceived by the candidate who went door to door and said that. And many of the candidates for the—on the government's side of the House went forward and said that, and you know what? Those seniors have seen double-digit increases in their rents for three or four years now. And that wasn't what they were told during the last election campaign.

An Honourable Member: So were they lied to?

Mrs. Mitchelson: They were also—yes. One of my colleagues asked whether those constituents were lied to, and I would say, unequivocally, yes, they were.

And, Mr. Speaker, we also saw a government and a Premier (Mr. Selinger) who stood in his place during a debate in the last election campaign, when he was asked if he was going to raise the PST, and he said: Absolutely not, that's nonsense, ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous. We're not going to do that.

Well, what happened, Mr. Speaker? We've seen what has happened. The PST was raised. The balanced budget legislation was changed so that there was no requirement, or there is no requirement, to hold a referendum, something that was in legislation and I was very proud of that we put in place as the government back in the '90s .

And so, Mr. Speaker, Manitobans have been betrayed, and they feel and they know that they can't believe a word that this government says. So, when we see a budget before us that talks about all the wonderful things it's going to do for Manitobans, we have lost faith in this government's ability to follow through on what they say they're going to do, and Manitobans have lost faith.

And it couldn't be more clear than the polling that was done, or has been done, over the last year that led to the major revolt that happened within the governing party, within the New Democratic Party. Mr. Speaker, the polls were showing that the NDP party in Manitoba was so low, the support for the party was so low, that they could be obliterated in the next election. And there were—annihilated, and, you know, there was—and I guess just cause for concern within the rank and file of the NDP party in Manitoba. And there were some that spoke out and said that this wasn't acceptable; they needed a change in leadership. And, well, we all know who those individuals were and, you know, as a result, an unprecedented leadership by the governing party in the province.

And I would venture to guess that there wasn't much governing that was going on in the last six months. And we know that by the budget that we saw come forward. There wasn't a lot of thought, a lot of energy, a lot of consultation with Manitobans. And, Mr. Speaker, Manitobans know and have said clearly that they're tired, they're tired of the broken promises, the broken promises to balance the budget, which has moved from 2014 to 2016 and now to 2018, and we don't know whether the budgets will ever be balanced in this province under the NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, they have no credibility when it comes to saying that they're not going to raise taxes. Manitobans know and understand that we've got a government that is dysfunctional, that doesn't have their house in order internally and it reflects and impacts on the kind of budget that they bring forward. And I know that the new Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) may have tried his best and he tries his best in the House to stand up and defend the indefensible, but Manitobans are tired. They're tired of paying more and getting less. They're tired of seeing the government dip into their pockets, pick their pockets for every last nickel that they can get, and then spending that money in many instances in a wasteful manner. We see the number of communicators that it takes to try to defend the actions of this government, and we see those communicators on a regular basis speaking on behalf of ministers.

Now I know that, when we were in government, our premier indicated to us that it was our responsibility to talk to the media. It was our responsibility to answer and defend. That was our—that was the mandate that was given to us.

Mr. Speaker, I can't remember the last time a minister on the NDP side of the House commented. It's always a spokesperson for the minister that is commenting on what the government is doing, and now they even send emails; they don't even have a live person. Sometimes it's by email; they send emails out to the media and to everyone trying to explain what the government is doing.

Well, Mr. Speaker, Manitobans don't buy that, and Manitobans don't buy the kind of waste and mismanagement that goes into those kinds of activities that's not going to the front-line services that Manitobans need and that Manitobans deserve. We see that kind of waste on a regular basis. We see a debt that is climbing and escalating at a rate that is uncontrollable. It's unsustainable, and it's going to be our children and our grandchildren that are going to have to pay for the mistakes that are being made today by this government.

And, you know, I have two beautiful little granddaughters that deserve the opportunity to be able to grow and thrive and get a job right here in the province of Manitoba. I want that for them. I want them to stay here—*[interjection]*—and I know that the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) thinks that maybe my granddaughters will vote for the New Democratic Party.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't speak for my granddaughters—and I usually encourage all to get involved in the democratic process—but I want him to know that they will—and they already have at a very early age in life—understand that what it is to have a dollar in their pocket, what it is to save a dollar, and I'll tell you a little story because I know and, well, I guess, maybe there's an option, maybe there's a bit of a lesson here for me in this story too, but I have two granddaughters in the same family and I might give them \$5 each and we'll go into a store or I'll say you have \$5 to spend on anything that you might want. So they'll look at everything and then one of them will say to me, Grandma, if I don't buy anything, will I still get the \$5? And I, of course, say, yes. And the other one then will say, well, I'm not going to buy anything either because I want the \$5. They want to take it home, they want to put it in their bank, they want to save it and they want to talk about the money that they've accumulated. So I believe that they're Conservative in their thinking already, and they're only six and eight years old.

Anyway, yes, and, you know, in the day and age when a lot of families do live on credit and are

overextended, we have to ensure that we're trying to manage responsibly, and we're trying to bring our children and our grandchildren up to know and to understand the value of a dollar, the value of saving that dollar and the value of living within your means. And, Mr. Speaker, we've always lived that way, and I'm hoping we can instill those values in our children and in our grandchildren as well.

* (16:50)

Mr. Speaker, I want to say unequivocally that I will be voting against this budget, and I'm voting against this budget for the right reasons. I'm voting against this budget because it does fail to recognize that you can't continue to make promises and break those promises to Manitobans. You can't continue to—as a government, to go out there and say one thing to Manitobans and do exactly the other. You can't continue to raise taxes to a point where they're unsustainable.

And, Mr. Speaker, there's no guarantee and we haven't heard a commitment from the Premier (Mr. Selinger) 'thet'—yet that he is—will not again raise the PST. But if—even if he did say that he wasn't going to raise the PST again, which he hasn't said, how can anyone believe him? How can anyone believe anything that is in this budget? How can they believe the deficit numbers when this government never lives up to the commitment that they've made year after year?

Mr. Speaker, this budget does fail to recognize that Manitobans in all areas are paying more and getting less. When we look at—and when I hear ministers stand up and defend their departments while saying, we're putting more money into this and more money into this and more money into this, well, why aren't we getting better results? Why aren't we getting better results in health care? Why aren't we getting better results in education? Why aren't we getting better results in our services to children? We have more children in care today than at any other time in the history of this province. We have more children that are falling through the cracks today than we've ever had in the history of this province. So, clearly, pouring more money into the system and getting worse results is not the answer.

Spending smarter is the answer, and this government doesn't appear to know, in any area where there's major expenditures, how to spend smarter, how to put the resources into the front lines, Mr. Speaker, not into the administrative cost, not into the spinners and the communicators they've hired to

try to make themselves look good. It's time that they looked in the mirror, that they practised what they preached, because every one of them has gone out and deceived the people of Manitoba. That's said and done anything to try to get a vote, to buy votes at all cost.

And I cannot support a government or a budget that does exactly that. Manitobans have been deceived. Manitobans are tired of this government. It's time for a change. And I may not be here after the next election, but there are many on our side and there'll be growing numbers on our side that will be here to try to ensure that Manitoba gets back on the right track. And I look forward to that date with anticipation, but I do want to indicate again that I will not be supporting this budget and it is for the right reasons. Thank you.

Hon. Melanie Wight (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to be back in session. It's good to see you and all of my colleagues again on both sides of the House. I'm so grateful to the people of Burrows for allowing me to represent them here, and I'm so grateful that I have the opportunity to work now in a department that is very close to my heart.

It was a real struggle to make this speech short enough—cannot possibly get in everything that I would like to say. Budget 2015, first of all, is one that I am so proud to be part of, and I want to speak to so many things that are in it, and I know I can't possibly get there. I'm always torn, because I want to take the opportunity, as well, to try to correct all the errors that I'm sure the opposition unintentionally puts on the record all of the time. I can't believe they could be possibly doing that on purpose. However, again, that would take my whole speech. So—and days and days more, and then some.

So it's always a struggle to know which way to go, Mr. Speaker, so the first thing I wanted to speak on actually is something that I think that both sides of the House would at least be able to say they do—they agree with, although only one side would ever bring it in, and that is, as chair of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, which is a committee, as you know, of 10 ministers, and our Finance Minister has 'verly' kindly recently joined us—is unique in the country. It's the only legislated committee of Cabinet that's dedicated to our kids, which, I think, indicates exactly the value that we put on them. And today I was proud to announce, along with the Minister of Healthy Living, Manitoba's first-ever,

whole-of-government multi-year strategy for child and youth mental health.

There is—we know, Mr. Speaker, that there is no family that has not been touched in some way by mental illness. Mental health matters to every Manitoban and the future of our province. We know it is for everyone, every place, every day, in our homes and families, in our child care, our schools, universities and colleges and in our workplaces. We will keep building awareness and understanding and reducing stigma.

A few of us were at the Iris Gala the other night, and the speaker there was noting how stigma is the No. 1 reason that people do not seek help when they experience a mental health concern. And he had a graph, Mr. Speaker, that showed the change in stigma since 1950. And, sadly, it hasn't gone down across North America; it's doubled.

Our government is dedicated to strengthening all the systems—not only health care, but all the systems that matter for mental health, from pre-birth to early childhood, to schools, to our communities. This multi-year plan, which is cross-departmental, is part of Manitoba's Rising to the Challenge, provincial mental health strategic plan for all age groups. And a major focus of this new provincial strategy is to strengthen the child and youth mental health workforce. So, over the coming year, we are going to work with all the systems, Mr. Speaker, that serve our children in order to do that.

And we do want to thank the folks that really inspired us on this, which included the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, the Manitoba School Boards Association, the Manitoba Teachers' Society and the Manitoba Association of School Business Officials for their help. Thank you. Thank you to them.

We know that one in five young people in Manitoba have a mom with a mood or anxiety disorder. We know that most adult mental health problems begin in childhood and adolescence, and I have personally worked with many young people experiencing the pain and the isolation and often, sadly, the bullying that can accompany mental illness. We know we can change lives by supporting parents, especially pregnant moms, and building resilience in young people from their earliest years.

So I know I can't speak to everything we will be doing, but I would like to speak to the fact that this budget includes new funding for our very

own made-in-Manitoba program called Towards Flourishing. It brings mental health promotion facilitators to strengthen our already amazing public health system in all the regional health authorities, particularly our successful province-wide Families First program in serving the mental health needs of moms and dads of newborns across our province. Towards Flourishing was developed right here at home by Healthy Child Manitoba, the U of M, and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, along with all the RHAs and other TF community partners. And I am so proud to be part of a government that did not choose to cut into services such as these but rather chose to enhance them. That is the difference, Mr. Speaker, between this side of the House and the opposition.

In February 2015, we were proud to announce Starting Early, Starting Strong, which is another multi-year early childhood development strategy. And these two strategies, Mr. Speaker, will work

closely together to have them create the greatest possible benefit to Manitobans.

Building on strong early childhood, our young people must continue to flourish during their school-age years, and that's why Manitoba's new child and youth mental health strategy includes new funding to increase the number of classrooms across the province, including in First Nations, for offering the PAX program in grade 1 and Roots of Empathy up to grade 8. *[interjection]* It is fabulous. Both programs have been incredibly popular and in great demand province-wide since we began—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities (Ms. Wight) will have 23 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 4, 2015

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