

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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authority of
The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 27, 2013

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Speaker: Introduction of bills. No introduction of bills? We'll now move on with—

PETITIONS

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by T. Zacharias, P. Kehler, A. Gerbrandt and many other Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with our rules, when petitions are read they are deemed to have been received by the House.

St. Ambroise Beach Provincial Park

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

The St. Ambroise provincial park was hard hit by the 2011 flood, resulting in the park's ongoing closure, the loss of local access to Lake Manitoba, as well as untold harm to the ecosystem and wildlife in the region.

The park's closure is having a negative impact in many areas, including disruptions to the local tourism, hunting and fishing operations, diminished economic and employment opportunities and the potential loss of the local store and decrease in property values.

Local residents and visitors alike want St. Ambroise provincial park to be reopened as soon as possible.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the appropriate ministers of the provincial government consider repairing St. Ambroise provincial park and its access points to their pre-flood conditions so the park can be reopened for the 2013 season or earlier if possible.

This petition's signed by D. Grant, R. Hauber and R. Baldey and many, many more.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by C. Little, D. Antymis, R. Otto and many, many other fine Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition's signed by D. Deschambault, J. Lemoine, A. Simard and many, many other Manitobans.

Municipal Amalgamations—Reversal

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by L. Bradford, M. Smith, A. Biletski and many, many more fine Manitobans.

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by M. Regier, E. Regier, H. Mickel and many, many more fine Manitobans.

* (13:40)

Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by L. Dionne, C. Johnson, G. McKoluff and many other fine Manitobans.

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

Through Bill 20, the provincial government wants to increase the retail sales tax, known as the

PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this is signed by A. McMaster, J. Timmerman, B. Purdy and many others, Mr. Speaker.

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by D. Sonles, B. Hull, L. Foster and many, many other Manitobans.

Municipal Amalgamations—Reversal

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

The provincial government did not consult with or notify the affected municipalities of this decision

prior to the Throne Speech announcement on November 19th, 2011–2012, and has further imposed unrealistic deadlines.

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by D. Jones, D. Gudnason, E. Kovanu and many other fine Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase–Referendum

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This is submitted on behalf of T. Fotheringham, M. Procter, L. Nayler Griffin and many other fine Manitobans.

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by J. Graves, L. Neduzak, T. Witoski and many, many others.

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by M. Mateychuk, S. Dueck, D. Andrusyk and many fine Manitobans.

Municipal Amalgamations—Reversal

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

(2) The provincial government did not consult with nor notify the affected municipalities of this decision prior to the Throne Speech announcement on November 19th, 2012, and has further imposed unrealistic deadlines.

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Signed by D. Strilaeff, D. O'Neill, J. McCullough and many other Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Committee reports. The honourable Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, on committee reports.

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Yes, tabling. Could we have tabling?

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps, if I might suggest, the honourable minister might be waiting for the tabling of reports.

We will now move to tabling reports.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the 2011, 2012 annual reports of the Communities Economic Development Fund.

* (13:50)

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today from Ashern Central School 13 grade 9 students under the direction of Chelsey Lowry. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for the Interlake.

And also in the public gallery, draw the attention of the honourable members, where we have with us today Allan Barry of the Wildwood Park Heritage and Conservation Committee, who is a guest of the honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

NDP Convention Leadership Process

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Welcome back, everybody. I hope it was a refreshing weekend for the members opposite. I understand they had quite a love-in there and that's great.

And we understand now that, according to some of their key organizers, the campaign is officially under way. And their platform is ready to go: increased taxes, subsidies for lazy political parties and Manitobans don't get the right to vote on tax increases. So I wait for those signs to come out, Mr. Speaker.

I understand that change is hard and I understand that change is hard for any political party, but I have to also say that I'm in agreement with the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) on one thing, and that's a rarity, but the idea that members shouldn't be allowed to vote for their leader in a political organization does strike me as archaic.

I have to ask the Premier this question: Does his party still maintain that it's correct, in this day and age, to give 20 per cent of your delegates to elite

union bosses to vote for the leader of any political party?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I want to invite the leader to attend one of our conventions. Everybody from Manitoba comes to those conventions from all around the province, the north, the south, the east, the west. Urban and rural people show up at that convention. And we have debates, we have discussions, we have honest disagreements about things, we find a place where we can unify and come out together, and we have done that again this weekend.

We have a program to build Manitoba, and the delegates were there to support it, and that's what we'll do: build a stronger Manitoba.

Vote Tax Government Intention

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but, you know, a meeting where everybody's Kumbaya-ing on raising taxes without-breaking promises to Manitobans, totally in agreement that Manitobans shouldn't have the right to vote on taxing, totally in agreement that there should be a vote tax paid to themselves—you know, I don't need to go. And it's 500 bucks for me anyway and 40 for everybody else, so I think it's not really that open a meeting.

The reality is that the Premier's positions have been smoked out on a few things, but one of them hasn't been clear and that is this issue of the vote tax. I mean, he can break his promise on not raising taxes within a matter of days and that's an easy decision to make, but it's a tough decision as to whether or not they're going to take the vote tax over there.

So just a question for the Premier, I guess: If you want to differentiate, then understand this. This party gave the money back to the people it belongs to. What's—my question is: Why is the NDP keeping it? It's not theirs.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the members did no such thing about giving the money back; they never received it in the first place.

And how many members voted in their leadership race? Who were the candidates in the leadership race for the Conservative Party of Manitoba? Where was the convention? Where was the activity? Where was the grassroots participation in the leadership race? It was a closed-door event. A couple of puffs of smoke went up and all of a sudden

we had a new leader show up in Manitoba. It's ridiculous. We had a real convention with people from all over Manitoba participating, debating the future of the province.

Their plan? Shut down Hydro. Their plan? Lay off nurses and teachers. Their plan? To run deficits 'til 2017 and '18. They can reverse the promises they made to Manitoba with indiscriminate, across-the-board cuts. They don't mind breaking promises, Mr. Speaker. It's not credible at all.

Mr. Pallister: Roy Romanow and I understand that sometimes one person wins a race for a reason, and it's without CUPE's help, in fact.

I asked them about the vote tax, Mr. Speaker. He didn't answer. It's not his money—it's not his money. His deputy says, give us some credit, we might give a few crumbs back to the people of Manitoba. I hope they don't find my wallet, because I know that when it comes back the money will be gone. The fact of the matter is, don't try to get credit for giving money back that isn't yours in the first place. And that's the party that thinks the money is theirs. It is not their money.

Now, the Winnipeg Free Press says, in their editorial last Saturday, this disingenuous, vacuous gesture ignores the fact that any amount it accepts digs Manitoba further into debt.

So I have to ask the Premier: If it was wrong to take it when you were running a surplus, why is it right to take the vote tax when you're running a half-a-billion-dollar deficit?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, here's the guy that gave back money he never received in the first place. Now he thinks nobody else should do it. Unbelievable. It's a remarkable story.

We're the second government in Canada that banned corporate and union donations in Manitoba. We think democracy should be accessible to people that aren't millionaires. We think the average Manitoban should be able to participate in the political process and no special interest groups should be able to dominate it.

We've seen how democracy has evolved in the United States. It's a business for millionaires funded by billionaires, Mr. Speaker. The politicians are millionaires; the billionaires are funding it. That's the model the Leader of the Opposition supports. He has never—there's never been a resolution out of one of their conventions to ban corporate and union

donations. The leader has never said he's opposed to corporate and union donations, and he took a million dollars of public finance—

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

Tax Increase Future Increases

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): He says he's opposed to corporate donations, but he want unions to control one in five of the delegates who select the leader of his party. It doesn't make sense, Mr. Speaker.

The Free Press goes on to say, and I quote: "An administration with integrity would have scrapped the odious vote-tax law, entirely." We agree, Mr. Speaker, and the reality is that the Premier has not taken a clear position on this issue despite the fact we and Manitobans are asking him to.

So the fact of the matter is that he should not be taking money out of the hands of Manitoba working people without their permission to run his lazy political party. His party should be working for it, and they should commit to working for it in the future.

Now, he's also been unclear on the issue of taxation, Mr. Speaker. He has refused to commit—despite the fact he's jacked up taxes at a record rate, he has refused to commit to not doing it again.

So I want to ask him a simple question today: Will he commit to not raising major tax rates before the next provincial election?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, just—the member for Fort Whyte, the Leader of the Opposition, received \$16,107.53 of public subsidy in the last election. That's his commitment to public support for the electoral process.

Mr. Speaker, every Manitoban—and I know the Leader of the Opposition's been away for a while, but things did change while he was away—every Manitoban pays less personal income tax as they did when he was last in office. A single low-income earner pays \$326 less, -24 per cent. The minimum wage has gone up; a single parent earning minimum wage in Manitoba right now has more take-home pay than any other person in Canada in equivalent circumstances—any other person in Canada. A two-income family of four at \$60,000 is paying \$2,410 less than they did in 1999, a 28 per cent decrease, and I have more examples.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Election Call Government Intent

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): If I didn't know better, I'd think the leader opposite has a little rebate envy going on. The fact of the matter is every western society gives a rebate for election expenses. And election expenses are considered to be, in every western jurisdiction, in every Canadian province, in every state of the United States, a legitimate rebate. Operational costs, however, are not considered to be a legitimate rebate.

And so here's the issue. This high moral ground the Premier espouses to hold, where was it when the NDP were outraising the PC Party for a decade? He took bigger rebates for almost a decade than the PC Party did. No vote tax. Now the PC Party raises more money than the NDP because we get more small donations from Manitobans who want to support us than the NDP does, and now he wants a vote tax.

It seems like the whole party's ready for an election, Mr. Speaker. They've got their platform all staked out. I ask them: When's he going to call one?

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

* (14:00)

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): The member received \$16,107.53. The member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer) received \$14,785.30. I'm just looking for the juicy ones. The member for Morris, \$11,560.32. The member for St. Paul (Mr. Schuler), \$15,996.67. Mr. Speaker, it was remarkable, and those—that doesn't count the ones that didn't get elected. Over a million dollars of public support.

We banned corporate and union donations. We think democracy requires a broad base of support so everybody can participate. We can keep it accessible to the average person. The members opposite want to do it behind closed doors with the private financing of millionaires. We disagree with that.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, the final supplementary.

Mr. Pallister: Election rebates, what is it about this that the Premier doesn't understand, Mr. Speaker? Election rebates—we got more because we raised more money in the last election than the NDP did. What are they afraid of? They didn't need a vote tax for a decade when they were raising more than the

PCs, but now they need a vote tax. It's a subsidy for a tired-out, lazy political party.

But their platform's clear. It's been staked out: more taxes, less democracy, bigger NDP subsidies, smaller after-tax incomes for working Manitobans and higher spending with lower results. And that 37-person group over there is a danger to the future of Manitoba, but they act like they're ready for an election. They got a campaign manager who says they're on a high. They got a million-dollar unearned tax subsidy. They got a counterfeit mandate too, Mr. Speaker.

So I think that we need the Premier to answer this question: If he's so optimistic that he's on the right track with his agenda, why doesn't he call an election?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, that's great. That's absolutely great. In the—when he was campaigning to be the leader against all those phantoms out there, he said he supported fixed election dates and he wanted that in law. He was very concerned that we might be changing the law. Now he wants to break the law. That is the biggest flip-flop we've seen in the last few weeks in the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) received \$13,721.21. The member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), \$14,349.02. The member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), \$17,449.34. The Leader of the Opposition doesn't spend—understand the rules. The reason they got the rebates is because they spent more.

Infrastructure Spending Government Projects

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, what the Premier doesn't want to tell anybody is that he's going to have to go out and borrow the money for their vote tax, because they don't have any money.

Mr. Speaker, in Estimates we learned that although the NDP budgeted \$1.7 billion for infrastructure last year, they only spent \$1.4 billion; \$320 million was taken out of the infrastructure budget and spent elsewhere. We've asked the Minister of Finance to tell us where that \$320 million was spent. He refused to tell us in Estimates where it was spent.

So I'm going to ask the Minister of Finance again: Out of the \$320 million that he—

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

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, it was very clear the—my friend across the way, the critic for Finance, came into Estimates with a storyline in her head that she wanted to try to prove somehow. And when the facts of the matter were put on the table in front of her, I understand she was frustrated that that didn't fit into her narrative.

But I'm less concerned with her narrative and I'm more concerned with making sure that every dollar that goes—that we raise in revenue on this PST increase goes directly into infrastructure. We've done that through Bill 20. It's accountable. It's open. It's transparent. It's based on the priorities of the Manitoba families.

Mr. Speaker, it's not the same vision of members—

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

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, in a recent Angus Reid poll, 81 per cent of Manitobans don't believe that the NDP are going to use the PST hike for infrastructure. After learning in Estimates that the NDP took \$320 million of their last infrastructure budget and used it elsewhere, we also have that concern.

So I'd like to ask this Minister of Finance: Where did the \$320 million go? What were the pet projects they funded last year?

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll put up our record investments in infrastructure against their meagre amounts when they were in government any day of the week.

Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear that the PST increase that is contained in the 2013 budget, that money will go directly into infrastructure in this province. That money'll go into schools, it'll go into hospitals, it'll go into roads, it'll go into bridges, the very infrastructure that Manitoba's families depend upon, the very infrastructure that our economy needs to move forward in a strong way.

We're not the party in this House, Mr. Speaker, that's going to shrink away from our duties to grow the economy and—

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

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, so the PST hike, which is going to bring in \$277 million, is supposed to go for infrastructure guarantee for building Manitoba.

So if building Manitoba was so important to the NDP, why did they siphon \$320 million away from the infrastructure budget last year and use it for their pet projects? And now they want Manitobans to cough up a PST hike.

And we want to ask the minister again: Where did the \$320 million from last year's infrastructure budget go? Because it didn't go for infrastructure.

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, again and again, and in this case, again, the member for Charleswood is incorrect.

Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear that the PST increase will be guaranteed in law to go towards infrastructure in this province. This—the Finance Minister will stand and present every year a detailed accounting of where that money is gone. We'll show that to members opposite; we'll show that to the 1.2 million Manitobans that live in this province.

We've said that we would do that through law and that's what we will do, Mr. Speaker. We—opposed to the meagre kinds of funds that were put forward by members opposite when they had a chance in this province—

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

Waabanong Anishinaabe Interpretive Learning Centre Project Update

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): This past Thursday during question period, I had asked the Culture, Heritage and Tourism Minister for the status on the announcement from 2010 on the Waabanong Anishinaabe interpretive centre scheduled to open the fall of 2011.

She stood up and said, and I quote, Mr. Speaker, "There's some problem with—when all the bids were done, a construction company or a company was chosen, but something happened with that company, and there's now some civil litigations."

Can the minister expand on what she had said, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Flor Marcelino (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism): I thank my colleague for the question.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in life things doesn't always go right. For this particular situation, there was a setback. The setback is the contractor had to—the question is, there's some—I couldn't possibly elaborate more. If this would be in civil litigation, I think it's better answered in courts.

But what I could tell, Mr. Speaker, this project will proceed. This is a very important project, and I ask that the—

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

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, two-and-a-half-million-dollar announcement by this Premier (Mr. Selinger) in the fall of 2010; no centre. We don't know where the money is, and we have the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism now confirming that the Waabanong Anishinaabe interpretive centre is not on the same list as the non-existent Keeyask Centre, where the money is gone and nothing to show for it.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism: When is Hollow Water getting their interpretive centre?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): You know, Mr. Speaker, the department of industry—Infrastructure and Transportation is the department that is dealing with the contracts. In fact, my colleague the Minister of Culture was absolutely correct.

* (14:10)

I want to indicate, Mr. Speaker, that, indeed, this is a commitment of this government. In fact, we have worked extensively on the east side, and I want to commend our Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Robinson), who has taken a lead in working with the First Nations communities.

And, you know, I say to the member opposite, unlike that member who voted against the budget, Mr. Speaker, that's put in place the finances, we're proceeding with this project. There has been a setback because of the contracts, but it remains the commitment of this government and, unlike members opposite, we're going to deliver for the east side.

Mr. Ewasko: It looks like there's some life preservers going on at the other side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, \$6.3 million to the non-existent Keeyask Centre. Supposedly \$2.5 million for the Waabanong Anishinaabe interpretive centre.

Is this Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism (Ms. Marcelino) going to stand up today and say again that things have gone awry with her government?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I—the member opposite might want a briefing in terms of how things work in government.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation delivers. Yes, we—by the way, we're also the department that is working with post-secondary education on expanding our community colleges throughout the province. We work with Justice in terms of improving our corrections facilities. So I realize that member opposite probably isn't aware of actually how it does work in terms of delivering this.

I want to stress again, Mr. Speaker, that this is part of our commitment to the east side of Winnipeg, and I want to point out that members opposite not only don't support it financially, they have failed to support any of the initiatives to protect the unique character of the boreal forest on the east side.

And we're 'propeck'—going to—Mr. Speaker, protect the ecology. We're also working with the First Nations in that area. We're committed to one of the jewels—

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

The Pari-Mutuel Levy Act Amendments

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Mr. Speaker, the plot thickens over at the Manitoba Jockey Club and the Assiniboia Downs file. Last week the non-answers from the Minister of Finance, it's clear the NDP are going to move to change The Pari-Mutuel Levy Act and the legislation that this Minister of Finance broke by withholding the funds. It also appears they're going to be renegeing on their deal signed between the Jockey Club and the lotteries commission.

Mr. Speaker, given that the NDP government is now facing a \$350-million civil suit launched by the Jockey Club, will the government plans change?

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Will they change The Pari-Mutuel Levy Act and will they be

renegeing on the contract that exists between the Jockey Club and the lotteries corporation?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, we're going to do exactly what Judge Dewar said we had the authority to do. We're going to do exactly what we said we would do in the budget, which Judge Dewar said we could do, and that is we are going to introduce changes to The Pari-Mutuel Levy Act and we're going to use—introduce changes to the VLT site-holder's agreement, which is exactly what Judge Dewar said we could do. There's no injunction against moving forward on that; that's incorrect. There's nothing in the judgment that says we can't move ahead and do that. The member, I think, understands that. Those who believe that are lying. We can go ahead and make those changes. That's what we said we would do—

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

Manitoba Jockey Club Statement of Claim

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Well, Mr. Speaker, it's—unfortunately, the minister didn't read the entire judgment brought down by Judge Dewar. It was clear the judge said the minister acted above the law, and that's pretty clear when he held back the money. He was instructed to turn that money back to the Jockey Club.

If he would have read the entire judgment, he would have also saw the lawsuit coming, because I'm going to tell you what the judge said on page 24: This decision does not foreclose MJC from making those claims in contract or in tort through the issuance of a statement of claim in the normal way, a.k.a. lawsuit. The minister should have saw it coming.

Did the minister fail to read this part of the judgment, and why did he not read this judgment?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the member for Spruce Woods is exactly wrong. The judge said very clearly at page 10, section 25, the Legislature—[interjection] Members opposite aren't very interested in the truth. The judge said very clearly the Legislature can pass any law it wants so long as it has jurisdiction and a law does not contravene the Charter. Very clear. The judge also said, I see no reason why a minister who decides to place a bill before the Legislature for it to consider cannot do so. Page 10, section 25.

Mr. Speaker, the judge was very clear—

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

**PST Increase
Legality**

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Well, Mr. Speaker, we've got a Minister of Finance ignoring the laws of the Province.

What the judge said on page 24, at the end of the judgment, it says that, I grant an order compelling the minister to forthwith approve the plan of distribution; basically, send the money back to where it's supposed to go, Mr. Speaker. The minister is guilty of withholding funds under the existing legislation.

Now, secondly, the minister is pushing forward on his PST agenda through Bill 20 even though it's illegal under the existing balanced budget legislation.

I ask the minister in question: What laws is the minister prepared to break to get his financial house back in order?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Nobody's breaking any laws, Mr. Speaker.

Maybe the member from Spruce Woods and his colleagues across the way weren't listening when the judge said the Legislature can pass any law it wants to as long as that law is—has its—is within its jurisdiction and is not in contravention of the Charter. He saw no reason why a minister who decides to put a bill before the Legislature for it to consider cannot do so.

We said exactly what we were going to do in a letter to the Jockey Club in January. We followed up by saying exactly what we were going to do in the budget, Mr. Speaker. Judge—the judge—Judge Dewar said exactly—

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

**PST Increase
Legality**

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): You know, Mr. Speaker, the minister is lucky we have immunity in this House or we'd be hiring a whole bunch of new judges.

Mr. Speaker, according to the NDP this weekend, increasing the PST is a good thing. Well, I expect by that logic that getting sued is a very good

thing. I expect by the same logic that having a minister break the law must be a great thing according to the NDP. But it's not a great thing for Manitobans, and they're rushing towards breaking the law again on Canada Day, of no other day.

I want to ask this government: Are they going to ensure that they don't break the law on Canada Day by increasing the PST if Bill 20 hasn't passed this House, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Acting Premier): I'm glad to have the chance to see my honourable friend across the way. I missed him this weekend, but I'm glad to be back in the House with him.

I will say, I think as we've said before and has been common practice in this government and previous governments, that when budgets come into effect and there are tax measures in those budgets those tax measures come into effect before the final act passes. That is the case.

Every time we've raised the tobacco tax and members opposite raised the tobacco tax, that tax comes into effect, often at midnight that night. When we reduced the tax on bicycle helmets, that reduction came—comes into effect before the legislation passes.

That is a common practice in budgetary policy across governments.

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

Mr. Goertzen: I'm sorry I couldn't make it on the weekend, Mr. Speaker. The circus was in Steinbach, and I could only attend one this weekend.

I—you know, I was glad to see that the old Vaughan Street prison was open for touring. Maybe that should have been a warning for the Minister of Finance and this government.

Only this government believes that increasing the PST without passing Bill 20 is a good idea or that it's a good thing, Mr. Speaker. All we're doing is we're asking the government to obey the law. That's it. We just want them to do what they expect all other Manitobans to do, whether they're following the speed limit or paying their taxes. Just obey the law.

Will this Premier (Mr. Selinger) give direction to the government that they're not going to increase the PST on July 1st on Canada Day unless Bill 20 is passed and the law has been changed, Mr. Speaker?

Ms. Howard: I hope the member opposite enjoyed his weekend with the elephants and the monkeys and the clowns and whatever he was doing. I was in a room with hundreds of Manitobans debating policy issues and listening to the things that were important to them, Mr. Speaker.

I will say again for the member opposite, it is common practice. When the Leader of the Opposition was part of a government that expanded the provincial sales tax to apply to things like school supplies and baby supplies, that expansion came into effect, my understanding, before the law passed that would have enabled that tax to come into effect. That is the way that governments function when it comes to budgets, Mr. Speaker. It's the way that governments function throughout parliamentary democracy—

* (14:20)

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

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, there was no referendum requirement at the time that the minister is talking about. She can't find and she can't table any case law that would indicate that where there's a referendum requirement that it wouldn't be breaking the law to do away with that referendum or to have the PST increase before the referendum came in place. She can't find that case law or she would have long tabled, and certainly we know that over in the confines of the NDP convention, a resolution that supports the PST—that's not case law. And we know that Manitobans don't support it; they believe that they have a democratic and a legally protected right for a referendum.

All we're asking this government to do is follow the law. Don't bring in the PST increase unless Bill 20 has passed, or you're breaking the law, Mr. Minister.

Ms. Howard: I know I haven't had the advantage of attending law school with the member opposite, but I will say that it is my clear understanding, and I was—I've been part of this government; I was active in politics when his party was in power. And under both parties, when the government comes in, brings in tax measures—whether those are tax increases or tax deductions—announces it in the budget speech, those tax measures come into effect often before the law is passed that enables those tax measures to come into effect.

That is what we are doing here, Mr. Speaker. It is well established throughout the country and most provinces that have—in all provinces that have tax measures in those budgets. The federal government does it; they bring in tax measures, they come in—

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

Manitoba Courts Gladue Principle

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, in 1999, the Supreme Court ruled that courts in Canada have to recognize the background and culture of Aboriginal people who appear in courts.

Manitoba under the NDP is backward with respect to the Gladue reports and courts. Indeed, in Saturday's Winnipeg Free Press, Justice Monnin says the NDP have created a situation where there is, and I quote, either a systemic disregard or a systemic impossibility to provide what is required for judges to comply with the dictates of the Supreme Court.

I ask the Minister of Justice: What is he going to do to begin showing respect for the Gladue process in Manitoba?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Indeed, since the Supreme Court ruled in the Gladue case, that is a possibility of sentencing in every case where it's an Aboriginal person who faces a custodial sentence. Those Gladue reports do occur in Manitoba; it's part of the presentencing process. That will continue.

What I can tell the member for River Heights is that in Manitoba we have many other means to deal with these issues. We have Aboriginal healing circles; we have Provincial Court judges who actually cede ground to elders committees who meet with Aboriginal people, where appropriate, to find solutions outside of our traditional justice system, to use a process that has been around for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, and yet, as Judge Fred Sandhu has said, I quote: The Gladue process outcomes in Manitoba are rendered generally weak and ineffective due to a lack of resourcing to put Gladue principles into action in a manner that inspires confidence, both by the court and the public.

Mr. Speaker, I've been at numerous meetings over the last decade where Gladue processes have been said to show better outcomes than the status quo, which has been so strongly supported by this

NDP government. MKO Grand Chief David Harper is also strongly supportive of Gladue courts.

I ask the Minister of Justice: When will the first Gladue court finally be operational in our province?

Mr. Swan: Mr. Speaker, every court in the province of Manitoba is a Gladue court. Every judge can receive a Gladue report which contains particular information about the individual's background if that is an Aboriginal person who's facing a sentence. That is the case every place the Provincial Court sits, every place the Queen's Bench sits.

I have had the chance, though, to meet with elders, to meet with court staff, to meet with people in communities such as Waywayseecappo First Nation, which has a very successful elders committee which supports the court, which provides offenders with different options to try and find traditional ways of dealing with these cases. I've sat with the elders at Peguis First Nation. I've travelled up to Fisher River First Nation to hear different communities and their alternatives and their ways of dealing with situations of this type.

So, certainly, Probation Services is going to continue to work—

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry to hear that the minister has such a different perspective than so many others.

Law Professor Debra Parkes says, with respect to the Gladue process in Manitoba, Gladue is not being implemented in any sort of systemic way. There just doesn't seem to be a culture of it being implemented and there hasn't been any real push to do it. Six other provinces and two territories already have proper Gladue courts functioning and are much further along than Manitoba.

I ask the Minister of Justice: When he will—will he provide the resources and the push to ensure Gladue is implemented properly as the Supreme Court ruled 14 years ago so that the jam—Manitoba Justice system can be more effective and can be up to date?

Mr. Swan: Well, I'm not sure that the member for River Heights fully understands what a Gladue report is.

The Gladue case tells us that it's necessary when it's an Aboriginal individual who's being sentenced that the presentence report should take into account a

number of principles which are set out in the Gladue case. That is why I said in my last answer, Mr. Speaker, every court in Manitoba is a Gladue court, every single court in this province.

We've added additional resources to Probation Services to make sure those presentence reports are completed in a timely and a complete way. And I will acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, that certainly there are times when the time of completion of presentence reports can be a problem, but that's because our probation officials take that process very seriously. They're aware of the Gladue cases. They're aware of our obligations. And we'll continue to add resources—

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

Gay-Straight Alliances Resource Guide

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): Mr. Speaker, I take pride in the fact that many times when I've been asked to pose a question to one of our ministers that it has to come—that it comes from the perspective of being a mother. And like so many other moms in my neighbourhood, I'm concerned that we always have places, not just in our own neighbourhood but throughout the province, where our children can learn in safe and inclusive learning environments. And I'm proud of the fact that for over a decade we have been at the forefront in Canada for taking action to prevent bullying in our schools.

Today the Minister of Education made an announcement that demonstrates our ongoing commitment to this and how we continue to work with schools to create these kind of environments by providing new tools to assist all schools in creating safe, caring and inclusive learning environments where all of our children can reach their full potential.

I was wondering if the Minister of Education could please inform the House—

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

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased today to be in the MLA for Fort Rouge's riding at the Rainbow Resource Centre with Chad Smith and Jared Star to announce our important work with Egale Canada—the Human Rights Trust.

We are going to be creating a document called, safe and caring schools for equity and inclusion, Mr. Speaker. And we are very proud of doing this because we are the party that has fought for workers' rights, we are the party that has fought for women's rights and we are the party that is going to fight for LGBTQ rights.

And we're going to make sure that—oh, I know they don't want to hear it, Mr. Speaker. They don't want to hear it, but we want to talk about it. Because you know what? We need to make sure all young people have a safe and caring environment to learn in, and we're the party that is going to stand up for young people—

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

Keeyask Centre Project Update

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): On Thursday, the NDP member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) indicated that the money for the Keeyask Centre has been advanced and that's being held in trust.

Does the NDP member for Kildonan have the confidence that the \$6 million already advanced is still in trust and that it has not been spent for other things?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Mr. Speaker, when the member first raised this question in the five hours of Crown Corporations Committee where the member asked about a lot of issues, the president of Hydro indicated that the funding is provided on a project basis to the First Nation committee, who then makes the decision with respect to how that money should be distributed.

And he's wrong; it's not \$6 million, Mr. Speaker. And he's wrong with respect to the fact that I provided the money. It's actually a contractual relationship between Hydro and the First Nation.

It's a better way of doing business, by providing resources to First Nations to mitigate and improve the situation rather than to do what happened in the '60s when they flooded everything. And we have now have to pay a billion dollars in back compensation for the mistakes that they made when they tried to do hydro, the last time they did hydro, which was in the '60s.

* (14:30)

Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation US Markets

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, today at the Law Courts, Manitoba fishers from the lakes of Lake Winnipeg, Manitoba, St. Martin's co-operative are defending themselves from the NDP's charges. In 2010, Manitoba granted, through the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation, permits for these business persons to sell at least their rough fish to some US markets not presently working with the FFMC.

Will the Minister of Conservation today allow the FFMC to provide a new list of US buyers and allow these hard-working family fishers an opportunity to enhance their incomes with no impact to the present monopoly?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): Well, it's an interesting question in the wrong forum, Mr. Speaker. It's a federal agency; the Freshwater Fish Marketing agency is a federal agency.

And, indeed, I understand that the—if the member is trying to politicize a matter that attempts to interfere with what is a federal prosecution in the federal courts, then he can proceed, but those charges are laid under federal law as a result of the workings of a federal agency. He should maybe figure out where he wants to be. Does he want to be in Ottawa or on Broadway, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Wildwood Heritage and Conservation Committee

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): In all great cities, the best neighbourhoods are those that conserve parks and green spaces to promote biological diversity, enhance our quality of life and maintain our spiritual connection to the natural world. A classic example of this in Winnipeg is Wildwood Park, a unique neighbourhood in Fort Garry-Riverview along the Red River where residential development is beautifully integrated within the forest parkland. In Wildwood Park, the built and natural environments stand as one, each enriching the other while all the while serving as a valuable asset for every resident of the community.

As Jane Jacobs once noted, neighbourhood parks and green spaces are not boons conferred on the deprived population of cities but in fact need the boon of life and appreciation conferred on them if

they are to serve their intended purpose. This is the mandate of the Wildwood Heritage and Conservation Committee. WHACC, as it's eventually called—affectionately called, was established 13 years ago by a group of concerned community residents who wanted to ensure that Wildwood Park retained its vibrant natural heritage in the midst of urban development.

WHACC is dedicated to preserving the river-bottom forest that encompasses Wildwood, focusing on planting native species and treating the entire area as one habitat. They work on preserving the forest and protecting it from invasive species, pests and litter, and they plant native trees and shrubs within the park to supplement the aging forest. In its 13 years, WHACC has planted thousands of new trees and shrubs, actually extending the riverbank forest, thereby creating a new habitat and a meadow of prairie grasses and wildflowers. They also dig and pull invasive species, wire trees to protect them from beavers, pick up litter and otherwise confer the boon of life and appreciation on the park.

Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to pay tribute to the members of the Wildwood Heritage and Conservation Committee today and to thank them for preserving this little piece of heaven in Fort Garry-Riverview. Thank you.

June Letkeman

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, a famous saying goes like this: Give to the world the best that you have and the best will come back to you. When June Letkeman moved to the community of Plum Coulee in 1995, she dedicated herself to the community right from the get-go.

June is a shining example of someone who devotes herself wholeheartedly to her community. She has served on the Pembina Valley Tourism Association, helping to organize the Pembina Valley Amazing Race since its inception. Her work on both the Winker and District Health Care Board and the Boundary Trails health-care foundation have allowed for stronger health-care services for the region, and her tireless efforts in this regard led to the greater fundraising for vital activities. Despite her own battle with breast cancer and the loss of her husband in 2011, June has fought tirelessly into creating the best health-care environment for the Pembina Valley.

In Plum Coulee, she's been involved in the chamber of commerce, serving as a secretary and chairperson of the Plum Fest organizing committee,

serving on the Plum Coulee Community Foundation board as well as the board of the Plum Coulee museum. She was also instrumental in planning for the skate park in Plum Coulee, helping to attract young people and young families to the community. On top of all this, she serves as the deputy major on the town council, helping the community to continue to grow.

Mr. Speaker, volunteers like June are the heart and soul of small-town Manitoba. Her efforts deserve to be recognized, and the Plum Coulee Community Foundation named her the Citizen of the Year for 2013 as a testament to her hard work and dedication. I would ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating June on her lifetime of community service and on being named the Plum Coulee Community Foundation Citizen of the Year for 2013.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SSCOPE Inc.

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, mental wellness is one of the most important factors in leading a healthy life. For this reason, I have the utmost respect for groups that work to help those who are struggling with mental health issues.

Self-Starting, Creative Opportunities for People in Employment, or SSCOPE, is a non-profit organization based in north Winnipeg. It provides employment opportunities and other supports to individuals coping with mental illness. Operating for over two decades now, SSCOPE helps consumers of mental health services to find part-time or casual employment. Working crews are visible in the community through involvement in city-wide spring yard cleanups and through their mobile food trailer services. They also work with home and business owners, community groups and associations and non-profit agencies.

For those who are working to get their mental health back on track, securing a job is an important step forward. Integral to achievement and success, the sense of progress and personal development boosts self-worth and self-esteem. Last year over 200 people took part in SSCOPE's program, allowing participants to empower themselves by taking part in individual and group projects, contributing to their communities, renewing their social skills and developing stronger social networks.

And once a month the staff at SSCOPE's Treasures Thrift Store put on a musical evening for

the workers and community. Last weekend the fourth annual SSCOPE music festival fundraiser, Rocking the Bridge, took place. Because this was the city's first major music festival of the season, there was a lot of buzz surrounding this star-studded event. Each of the volunteer performers featured in a diverse lineup offered songs that fit with the theme of mental health and SSCOPE's community work. In conjunction with the musical performances, a large indoor and outdoor garage sale, breakfast specials and the official reopening of Treasures Thrift Store were other festival highlights. Educational discussions about mental health with community members were most beneficial, fostering greater awareness and compassion in the community.

On behalf of my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly, thank you to SSCOPE for supporting an integrated and inclusive society for all people. We applaud your accomplishments and wish you every success for the future.

Thank you.

Ken Blight

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a few words about Mr. Ken Blight, a cherished member of the Portage la Prairie and Oakville communities who recently passed away at the age of 79 years.

As a resourceful, entrepreneurial man, Ken's passion for agriculture was first cultivated on his family farm with his parents. Later he farmed with his brother and then continued with his sons which allowed him to teach them his wisdom of the agricultural industry. He was also in the process of passing on that knowledge and love of farming to his grandchildren, the next generation to take over the operation.

Ken and his wife, Shirley, started the Little Red Barn, a roadside vegetable and fruit stand on Highway 1 just east of Portage la Prairie where travellers and locals alike could always count on getting the finest corn on the cob, farm fresh fruit and other great produce. A friendly chat was always available to those who wanted to know where and how it was produced.

Many young men were extremely fortunate to have had Ken as their hockey coach and mentor in the communities of Oakville and Portage la Prairie. His fine coaching skills for the Oakville Seals from 1968 to '74 resulted in league championships every year. He then moved on to coaching the Portage

Terriers Junior A team from 1977 to '79 and then went on to coach the Portage Hawks A Intermediate team from '81 to '86.

Ken's love of sport both as player and coach resulted in being included in the Manitoba Hockey Hall of Fame in 2009 as a proud member of the 1956-57 Poplar Point Memorials hockey team. In 2003 Ken was inducted into the Manitoba Baseball Hall of Fame as a player for 17 years as a southpaw pitcher, first base and outfielder where he played tournament ball extensively.

Whether as a farmer, businessperson or coach, I am certain that his memory will live on through his innovative work and the many people he touched.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

EMS Week

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, time and time again, Manitobans tell us that nothing is more important to them than their health and the health of their families.

Our firefighters and paramedics provide families with some of the swiftest emergency medical response times in the nation. Emergency medical services are an essential lifeline in our health-care system, offering patients and families quality care that often starts in their homes, which is crucial to achieving the best outcome for patients' treatment when they arrive at the hospital. These dedicated emergency responders deserve our thanks.

*(14:40)

Mr. Speaker, May 26th to June 1st marks Emergency Medical Service Week in Canada. This year, the theme Health Care in Motion reflects how paramedics and firefighters are moving forward to help improve health care in our province. Throughout the week, EMS professionals from across Canada will provide opportunities for everyone to learn more about the importance of emergency services.

EMS personnel provide vital and life-saving care to those who need it most. Over the last decade, our paramedic workforce in Manitoba has changed from largely a volunteer pool, to highly trained health professionals integrated into the health-care system. Firefighters are playing an increasingly important role, delivering emergency medical care and first response.

Earlier this spring, the Manitoba government released the results of our provincial EMS review, which will help us build a new era of para-medicine in our province. Working together with our EMS partners, we will continue to adapt to the ever-advancing world of health care in our province.

Today, we have four separate air ambulance services, including the STARS helicopter ambulance; over 600 fully trained, primary-care paramedics, when compared to just 200 in 1999; plus, nearly 300 emergency medical responders in rural Manitoba.

EMS professionals work in high-stress situations and dedicate their lives to helping others. I ask all members of the Legislative Assembly join me in thanking all EMS personnel for the life-saving care that they provide to those in need.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Grievances? The honourable member for River East, on a grievance.

GRIEVANCES

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): I want to take this opportunity to use my grievance in this session, Mr. Speaker, and talk about what a sad day—what a sad era it is in the province of Manitoba, when we see a government that, in the 2011 election, lied and said absolutely anything to get themselves elected.

And we've seen time and time again since that election how they deceived Manitobans then, and they are moving in a direction that is completely contrary to what they said they would do. And I say it's a sad day in Manitoba because in my 27 years here in this Legislature, I have never seen the kinds of tactics used by a party or a government that will say and do anything to get elected.

And we've seen again since that election, Mr. Speaker, the excuses that they are using and the blame game that they play, trying to blame absolutely everyone else for the circumstances that they find themselves in financially rather than accepting responsibility for what they have done, for their mismanagement and for their spending out of control that has resulted in the fiscal situation that we find ourselves in today in this province.

And let me just go back to some of the things that they said and that they promised in 2011, Mr. Speaker. And I know they ran around River East going door to door, because they had special interest

in winning the constituency of River East. And, might I say, they kicked their campaign off in 2011 in the River East constituency at Gateway Recreation Centre.

Mr. Speaker, they spent a lot of time—I think the Premier (Mr. Selinger) was in River East constituency about three or four times. But, luckily, the constituents in River East saw through what the NDP were trying to do and they didn't buy the lies that were being presented to them at the doors; they didn't buy into some of the things that they were being told to try to get them to vote for the NDP.

And I'm glad, Mr. Speaker—and we did even better in the last election than we did the time before, and I think it's a direct result of a party so desperate that they would say anything and do anything to try to get elected. And I'm glad that common sense prevailed in River East. And I know that many people voted for the NDP based on what they were being told at the doors. They voted for the NDP based on the fact that the Premier of the province in 2011 said, read my lips, there will be no new taxes if we're elected this time.

Well, Mr. Speaker, what have Manitobans seen? They were deceived. They were lied to. And Manitobans don't deserve to be treated in that fashion by their government. So it's a sad day, here in our province, that we have a government that has stooped so low, and continual—continually tried to blame someone else for the problems that we see.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my children and my grandchildren are the ones that are going to have to deal with the results of the financial situation that this province is in, as a result of year after year of spending more of taxpayers' money than what the government takes in.

And, Mr. Speaker, we know that under this NDP administration there have been significant increases in the transfer payments that have come from the federal government, and it's somewhere between 30 and 40 per cent of our budget today that comes from a federal government, and that's a significant amount.

Mr. Speaker, we saw, when we were in government in the '90s, and I hate to go back to the '90s, but I do want to indicate that there was a Liberal federal government at the time that cut transfer payments to the Province, and there were some difficult choices that had to be made at that time.

But, Mr. Speaker, those cuts were restored, and more money has been provided, year after year, to this government, who is a have-not. I mean, we're considered a have-not province by the rest of the country. People from many other provinces have to contribute taxes in order to support Manitoba.

And, you know, we shouldn't have to be a have not province. We should be able to stand on our own two feet, and I know we were working towards that when we were in government. We were wanting, Mr. Speaker, to take some pride in being able to manage the resources of the Province and taxpayers' scarce resources, in a—in an efficient and effective way.

But, Mr. Speaker, we've seen, year after year, a government whose spending is out of control. We saw a government that dipped into Manitoba Hydro and took millions of dollars out several years ago to try to balance their books, and I don't believe that that monies—the money that was borrowed from Hydro, that was supposed to be repaid, was ever repaid to Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Speaker, they pay lip service on a regular basis to the people of Manitoba, to those less fortunate within our communities that believed that the NDP government—or the party—was the party that was going to help them and support them. Well, we've seen a complete about-face by this government, and it's fine to talk the good talk, but we have a government that needs to walk the walk.

And what are we seeing in Manitoba? We're seeing more and more people have to use food banks as a result of some of the decisions and the policies of this government. They've been abandoned, Mr. Speaker, by a government who talks and says all the right things but does completely opposite to what they say.

And Mr. Speaker, they just don't seem to get the fact that Manitobans today are the highest tax—across the country, and they continue to try to pick Manitobans' pockets for more and more money. They're saying to Manitobans, to hard-working Manitobans, give us more. We know better how to manage your hard-earned tax dollars than you do. Just give them to us. Just give us your money, and we'll make all the right decisions and all the right choices for you as Manitobans.

Well, we believe completely differently. Mr. Speaker, we believe that hard-working Manitoba taxpayers should be able to keep more money in their

pockets because Manitobans make better choices on how to spend their hard-earned resources than this government does.

* (14:50)

We have seen time and time again, Mr. Speaker, this government raid the pockets of Manitobans and, finally, we are hearing Manitobans—and I've been out at the doors in River East constituency in the last week or so and I am hearing my constituents say, enough is enough. We can no longer take a government that continues to raid our pockets to meet their bottom line.

If they could meet and balance the budget as a result, that might be one thing, but we know that the budget isn't going to be balanced, that not only have they in the last two budgets raided Manitoba taxpayers for \$500 million but they're going to run a \$500-million deficit on top of that. That's a billion dollars more. That's reckless spending without any concern for what future Manitobans are going to have to bear as a result.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's pretty hard for me to recommend to my children or to my grandchildren that this is a province of opportunity where they should stay and grow and get a job, because I see significant problems and issues for future generations as a result of what this government has done. It's a sad day for Manitoba. It's a sad era that we are going through right now under 14 years of NDP administration. Manitobans are saying, it's time, enough is enough, and it's time to ensure that Manitobans have some say in what the future of their tax dollars is going to be. I—

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

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): I rise today on a grievance to—with respect to the status of No. 10 Highway in western Manitoba.

Much has been made recently in the media of the status out there and how dangerous it is to drive on that highway, and, indeed, the safety of Manitobans is at risk on that highway daily. We have, in our company, staff that travel it every day, and I worry about them when they're travelling to and from work. I worry about them when they're travelling on behalf of the group of companies that I'm involved with, and, indeed, our family that travels, as well as any—many other Manitobans. It is a vital transport link for western Manitoba and, indeed, for Manitoba, but as I've seen it deteriorate over the last several years

here, especially since the NDP have been in power, I am very concerned about the dangers on this highway.

I am, I'm told, a professional driver. I've had a class 1 licence for well over 35 years and I've lost count of the number of times that I've travelled over No. 10 Highway with fully loaded semis, dodging and trying to make sure you—that you don't cause any compromises for the traffic that's on there while you're travelling with that particular load that may or may not be hazardous in getting to your end destination, hopefully so.

I've seen the changes in No. 10 Highway over a long time here, and, especially since 1999, that highway has deteriorated rapidly. We've seen some minor modifications but, as a whole, for the highway from the border north to Brandon, it just seems to deteriorate every day, because what we see there is it's a very narrow highway, and the highways, for whatever reasons, the highways department doesn't pave it beyond the edge of the road. And what you get, then, is you have the gravel immediately adjacent to the pavement that gets blown away by traffic, by semis, and gets graded away by the graders, and then it falls away, the road deteriorates, it drops into it, there's erosion from rain and everything else and the highway continues to fall apart.

And recently as this weekend, Mr. Speaker, I saw this government's approach to refreshing Victoria Avenue that they spoke about in their budget speech, which, I'm told now by the media and by the government, I guess, was an election budget. Its promises for the election there are there, so we saw the little truck out there that, you know, sprays the asphalt or there—sprays the tar into the holes that are in Victoria Avenue, and they do this on No. 10 as well. And then they drop a little bit of gravel into there from the operation and then move on and then the cars drive over it and they pick up the gravel and the tar and they damage the car, and then the rock spins off and it hits the windshield of the car behind it and again causes a hazard. So, if that's refreshing Victoria Avenue, Mr. Speaker, I am indeed very concerned with how we're going to deal with No. 10 Highway because the road is just—it's just very concerning in terms of the safety. And we did see very recently over the last couple of weeks a number of fatalities on that road, and that is directly attributable to the design of the highway, to how it has been maintained and the promises that this government has broken time and time and time

again. And we've heard, you know, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) say, well, it's harder to maintain roads in Manitoba because of the weather.

So you travel to North Dakota, and I would challenge anybody to show me that the weather in North Dakota is substantially different from what we have in Manitoba here; 40 below down there is still 40 below up here. And you just go over the border and apparently it's magical, they have good highways throughout pretty much all over North America—or all over North Dakota and it's quite surprising. So—but even if you do think that it might be a degree warmer there, well, then, let's look to Saskatchewan, and Saskatchewan's able to maintain their highways.

And I've travelled with semis over a number of Saskatchewan highways and marvelled at how their roads are in such good shape as compared to what we have and, Mr. Speaker, I'm told that they have well over double the paved highways that we have in Manitoba and they are running, let me think now, that's called a balanced budget this year. I know it's foreign to this government. They're able to do that, but, you know, they've got highways that they maintain and they're not falling apart like No. 10 is and they're not unsafe like No. 10 may be. But, you know, they've got twice as many roads at least and they're able to do that within a balanced budget, which is quite a phenomenal thing with—I would think that you'd have to say Saskatchewan has the same weather as Manitoba. You can't say that there's a difference there. So weather is perhaps not the reason, you know, it's—it must be something else perhaps that this government breaks promises time and time again. We've seen that happen in several elections.

I do recall there was quite a debate with Forrest just north of Brandon on No. 10 Highway. The highway goes right through Forrest, and on one side you have the elementary school and on the other side you have the high school and you have houses on both sides and students have to cross the road. So that's certainly not safe, even though the speed is a little lower going through Forrest than it is on full highway speed. So it's certainly not safe for the students, not safe for the residents. So I recall the Province and this government making promises in at least two elections that they were going to fix that. They were—the NDP was going to build a bypass around Forrest, and they bought some land to do that and they negotiated that and then that didn't get done. And then there was a particular minister of the government—I think he was the highways minister,

infrastructure at one time—and he said, well, we'll build a culvert, and the students can walk through the culvert. Well, isn't that just a wonderful thing for Forrest, wonderful attraction, but that didn't happen either. So, you know, those things didn't happen and still we have students on one side of the highway and students on the other side of the highway having to cross this highway and, apparently, we're not building a bypass.

So that's broken promise number—I've lost count how many times these promises have broken promise. And, of course, we still own the land for this bypass so there is potential perhaps somewhere down the road that—I don't know. It could be possibly built, but it doesn't seem like anything is going to happen there now. So we'll put a sign up there. They used to have the portable one that detected your speed, you know, that MPI funds, and it was there that said what speed you were going, warning you to slow down and—but now there's a permanent one. So I guess that's the resolution of this government. We put the permanent ones up there and, well, we don't use fuel, gasoline to power them anymore with the generators, no, now they've got solar power. So that's the green signs I guess we have out there to save us from ourselves.

So it's very disturbing, Mr. Speaker, to see the degradation and—out on this highway and, indeed, in—during the election campaign my NDP opponent was asked the question—we were all were on an open forum talk show on the radio about, you know, what are you going to do about No. 10 Highway and how it's, you know, it's being destroyed and it's falling apart. And he said, well, it's the oil patch; it's all the traffic that's coming up from North Dakota for the oil patch.

* (15:00)

Well, all the equipment that's moving into Manitoba's oil patch is in the southwestern part of the province, so it's not surprising that this government really doesn't understand it's there because its candidate didn't know how equipment gets to the oil patch. It drives east and west, predominantly, from Alberta and Saskatchewan into that section of the province. So, not surprising that this government didn't understand that.

And, of course, there was a very important—well, to me, anyway, one of our good friends' daughters was killed on No. 10 Highway north of Brandon. Very difficult time; just graduated with our daughter, and knocking on that street, going up and down their

street and around that area, every single house that I knocked on, every single house that answered—you have to fix No. 10; this has to be done for her sake. This girl lost her life and her friend lost his life as well on No. 10 Highway, and I see the memorials as I drive by them, as well as many other memorials of people that have lost their lives on No. 10 Highway and I—I struggle with that loss, Mr. Speaker. I don't know how the parents are able to deal with it, but obviously their faith is very important in that.

So the safety on that highway is critical, Mr. Speaker. We have 'neen'—seen little or no response from this government. They make promises after promises after promises and break them. And I guess we're in election mode here, so we're seeing more promises come out, time and time again, and the little trucks running up and down to try to fix them. But, again, it's the safety of Manitobans that's at risk.

It's our economy that's at risk because that is a very critical and important highway to Manitoba and to western Manitoba, and there was even talk when there was a potential flood that we don't seem to get flood reports anymore, when 75 was perhaps going to be closed that No. 10 would be the way that traffic came into Manitoba.

So, Mr. Speaker, I believe this is a critical part of Manitoba's infrastructure that needs to be dealt with.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Are there are further grievances?

Seeing none—

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Andrew Swan (Acting Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, on House business.

Mr. Speaker: On House business.

Mr. Swan: I'd like to call for debate on second readings Bill 33, Bill 43 and Bill 18.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Mr. Speaker: Now call the bills in the following order: Bill 33, Bill 43 and Bill 18, starting with Bill 33, The Municipal Modernization Act (Municipal Amalgamations), standing in the name of the honourable member for Midland, who has—oh, it's just standing in his name, so the honourable member for Midland.

Is there leave to allow the bill to remain standing in the name of the honourable member for Midland?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been denied. I hear a no.

**Bill 33—The Municipal Modernization Act
(Municipal Amalgamations)**

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Mr. Speaker, as Bill 33 is up for debate, there is certainly lots to debate on Bill 33, and, first of all, it's what is not contained in Bill 33 which is most troubling, and that's respect and what is shown as lack of respect to municipalities and to the AMM, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities. It's a—there—this government seems to be very adverse to talking to interested parties, to consulting with parties, and instead they like to sort of run around and sneak around and suddenly spring intentions followed up by hastily drawn up legislation, and this is—this piece of legislation is certainly a good example of this hastiness and poorly thought-out legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I have received—as critic of Local Government, I have certainly received my share of correspondence from frustrated municipalities, from—not only just from councillors and mayors and reeves of municipalities, but also from ratepayers of these municipalities, and the—really the—if we just step back and go back into March to the mayors' and reeves' meetings across Manitoba—I attended four of the six meetings, and it was an experience. That's probably the only way I can describe it. The minister did come to these meetings.

He spoke, and he forgot to listen because there was a lot of legitimate points brought up by the mayors and reeves who deal with this every day and who have a lot of experience in dealing with municipal issues. And it seemed that the minister was rather poorly informed of what happens out in municipalities, because he would suggest—and, really, the best suggest—the best example I have is is that when municipalities told the minister—and this was told to him repeatedly—your timetable is too tight, you cannot push this as fast, there's too many issues to deal with to get this done in the timetable that the minister was setting out, and the minister's response to that was, well, don't worry about the details, just sign the agreement and you can finish the details after. And the mayors and reeves in the room and the CAOs in the room just shook their heads in disbelief.

This is major agreements that you need to work out. You cannot simply sign an agreement saying we'll work this out later. That's not how it works. This is a business deal. It—you have to have all the points set out and have agreement on all the points before you enter into an agreement to merge. And that's not to say that it can't be done, and I heard also time and time again at those mayors' and reeves' meetings the mayors, reeves, CAOs all saying, it can be done, but it takes time.

You have to work out the deal arrangements on these. These are very complicated deals, and this is not going to happen on a spur of a moment. And we know from examples from past amalgamations that it does take a long time. The Killarney-Turtle Mountain took, I believe, it was either six or eight years to work out all the details on this. And that's not saying that it can't be done. Municipalities recognize that there are some advantages to amalgamations if they choose to do that, but the difference here is that it would be a choice of their part, not a threat from the Minister of Local Government (Mr. Lemieux), because in his legislation that he has now tabled in Bill 33 he has laid it out saying that if you—either you have the plan to him by December 1st of 2013—if you don't have the plan in place, the minister will then decide for you who you are going to amalgamate and the terms of that amalgamation. And that is not in true consultation. That is dictatorship in—by a senior level of government.

And that is where the lack of respect and the lack of understanding has come through on many of these—from—the concern that's been brought forth from many of these municipalities. And it's interesting some of the letters that you get, Mr. Speaker, and I'll just share a couple of them with you here. And this one isn't even dealing with amalgamation. It's the RM of Mossey River. The RM of Mossey River is very concerned about the impact of the PST rise that's going up to 8 per cent supposedly on July 1st. And they're concerned about the costs, what it's going to cost that municipality in extra taxes, and this will affect—they use different categories—insurance, which is a huge one for them, hydro, gasoline, food products in restaurants et cetera, et cetera, and it's detrimental to the agriculture industry. And the Rural Municipality of Mossey River is opposed to a PST tax increase.

* (15:10)

So now Mossey River is one of those municipalities that is under the thousand population, so now you've thrown an additional burden on these municipalities. Their budgets were based on a 7 per cent provincial sales tax and now you're going to increase that to 8 midway through—partway through their fiscal year, so they're going to have to adjust their budgets. And now you've thrown that on top of them, and it's just extremely difficult for these municipalities to handle this.

But I've also received a number of letters and a number of phone calls from the Rural Municipality of Victoria Beach. And this is one of the examples where one size doesn't fit all, and this government doesn't seem to understand that: that Victoria Beach has about 400 permanent residents year-round; however, in the summertime, they have about 4,000 people. And this—yet they—the local—Minister of Local Government (Mr. Lemieux) is treating them as under-a-thousand population, and yet they are self-sufficient. They have done lots of infrastructure funding within their own municipality and they are self-serving; they've looked after themselves; they've not been a burden on anybody else.

And how, now, are they supposed to go about working on a supposed amalgamation, and how do you fit that into working with other municipalities? It's unique in its own size, and yet, this—the only thing that Bill 33 takes into account about the RM of Victoria Beach is that they are—that because they had a different time for elections—which was in July, I believe—they are now specifically setting them out in this legislation as to—withdrawing that from them and they will be at the same time as all other municipalities. And it's not taking into account the personality of the municipality and of the ratepayers of that municipality.

Mr. Speaker, I've also saw some interesting letters to the editor in various newspapers, and there is one from an Andre Blanchard; he's president of the Greenstone Landowner's Association. And this was in one of the Interlake newspapers, at the Enterprise, and it was a letter to the editor. And this Mr. Blanchard is actually from Ontario and he was talking about visiting some towns in—around Manitoba, and he—beautiful country and most enjoyable, friendly people, truly Canadians at their best, he writes. But then he was reading in the paper about the government forcing amalgamations on municipalities and he wanted to use his own—the only example that they had in southern Ontario,

where they were forcibly merged by the government at—of the day.

And he talks about what happened there, and—they took four municipalities and three unorganized towns and put them together in one municipality. And what he goes on to say is that their rural residential taxes went from approximately \$300 a year to more than \$4,000 a year to offset the high taxes to local municipality residents, and they're not seeing any additional services. So they—we lost, he says, it went—we lost all our rural waste-disposal sites, where local ratepayers were looking after it. They have to—are paying now—they are paying in excess of \$6,000 a year in taxes and not receiving garbage pickup or snow removal. And they are—obviously, they are paying a lot more for a lot less.

And this is the questions that Manitoba municipalities have been asking. Government has repeatedly—through the minister—repeatedly saying that this is going to save money. So we would like to see and municipalities would like to see exactly where is this money going to be saved. And the minister can't answer that or refuses to answer that.

Mr. Blanchard goes on to say in here that the municipalities, when they were amalgamated—forced amalgamation in southern Ontario—it was done in a rushed and very unorganized way. It was—there was no recorded vote ever taken and it was heated debate amongst the residents because of the controversy charge with that amalgamation. And he goes on to say, that my opinion on amalgamation is do not bring it into your neighbourhood. And so we have to look at this, obviously, we have different situations than Ontario, but at the same we need to learn from what has happened and look at the examples and how do we avoid those. And rushing into an amalgamation is—based on the Ontario example—is definitely not the way to do it. And yet here we are within seven, eight months from now municipalities are supposed to have all their information ready to go on amalgamation and there's no substantial reasons or cost savings for the municipalities in this.

Mr. Speaker, the letters to the editor—or, actually, the opinion pieces in the newspapers are certainly interesting to read. There's one from the Free Press just recently, Alvin Zimmer, the reeve of the Rural Municipality of Shellmouth-Boulton, and, actually, this is a very interesting story because Shellmouth and Boulton merged voluntarily back in 1999. They did it of their own accord. Nobody was forcing them to do it, but they saw it as an advantage and so now

they're still under a thousand ratepayers. They are putting in a balanced budget every year. They're keeping up with their services. They have a very large recreation part of their tax base and assessment base, and it has been very good for Shellmouth-Boulton. It has provided—there's certainly their share of challenges, but they, Shellmouth-Boulton, the RM, has been very diligent in dealing with those.

Now, when they first amalgamated back in 1999, their population was 1,100. It has shrunk to 930, and you have to realize that this is permanent residents. They—the government does not recognize the cottages as a part of the census population. So their population's now shrunk to 930. So now they are under this perceived 1,000 threshold, and yet with their Lake of the Prairies developments and the Asessippi ski area—which is very busy all winter—and their population is well over a thousand both summer and winter on a seasonal basis. Those seasonal properties are also paying property taxes so that does help the municipality a lot. So population isn't everything in this. And the—but the crux of it is that, Mr. Zimmer, the reeve, his—he believes his local voice will be lost if amalgamation is forced for no other reason than a population number. He believes, and I agree with him, that elected officials are the best suited to make the decision to amalgamate based on the voice of their ratepayers. It should be based on the ratepayers, not on a provincial government.

And he ends his article with, is bigger better? He asks the question and what has it done to our school divisions and our health authorities? And we know that we've gone from hallway medicine to highway medicine in rural Manitoba with the closure of over 20 emergency hospitals—in the emergency wards in 20 hospitals. So we certainly haven't seen an improvement in there, and now we have even more merging in the regional health authorities which is really causing us some huge logistic problems across Manitoba, across rural Manitoba.

*(15:20)

But there's—another one of the towns that's been very adamant about this forced amalgamation is the Town of Plum Coulee, located in the good member of Emerson's constituency. Now, one of the questions that has always come out—it came out at the mayors' and Reeves' meeting, it's come out repeatedly in—at the bill briefing—is that hidden costs are in here. And policing costs were one of these costs that the local ratepayers are very concerned

about. And despite the department adamant that there will not be increased costs, that is not how the Town of Plum Coulee is looking at this bill and their understanding of this bill. Because what it is—well, first of all, let's just step back for a minute. In Plum Coulee, they're at 940 people. They've got new developments on the go all the time and they expect their population to be over a thousand within the next year or so, and yet they are not being exempted from this arbitrary number of a thousand.

So there is some real concerns that Plum Coulee has in there, because they would be merging with the adjacent municipality and it's not a good fit. At least, they don't feel it would be a good fit with different interests between the two groups. But, going back to the policing costs, they're—they look at this as a losing their peace of mind because safety becomes a cost—an additional cost to them. Right now, they currently pay \$110,000 a year in policing, and I believe they have the Altona municipal police policing the town of Plum Coulee. But, under this legislation, within three years they are to be merged—their policing force—with the RM, which is covered under the RCMP. So their policing costs are going to go to \$175,000, so there's an additional \$65,000 a year that this new municipality will have to pick up. Now, part of that cost—and a substantial part of that cost—will have to come out of the Town of Plum Coulee. So they really legitimately ask where's the cost savings, because we've already seen that costs are going to go up. And that is only in policing costs; they say nothing about transition costs in terms of moving their offices and of everything even from just paper and new names for the municipalities—their new logos, et cetera, et cetera. That all comes at a cost.

Now, there are some other municipalities that have taken a rather different perspective on it. And I know my colleague from Arthur-Virden is—his—most of his municipalities in his constituency are affected by this forced amalgamation, and there was even some talk about a couple of municipalities saying, well, you know, maybe we'll just join Saskatchewan rather because at least there they would not have the adversarial government that we have in this province. And it was rather interesting, because if I remember correctly the Premier of Saskatchewan, his lighthearted take is that so he would welcome them, but they would have to become Saskatchewan Roughrider fans. But, in all seriousness, when you look at the sales tax difference—and that's what's going to hit these municipalities very hard on all our

borders is that you have a 5 per cent provincial sales tax in Saskatchewan. You have proposed to have an 8 per cent here as of July 1st. That's going to cause a lot of cross-border shopping, and when people go to shop for something, they end up picking up all their shopping and that's what really hurts the local businesses and this is a real cost. And, if I go back to Shellmouth-Boulton, they are on the—situated beside Saskatchewan, too—just bordered right on Saskatchewan—and that was one of Alvin Zimmer's real concerns, too, was the cost to businesses of missed opportunities.

And so, Mr. Speaker, this—we keep asking the Minister of Local Government (Mr. Lemieux) what his real purpose is in this, and we've never ever had a straight answer out of him. And we've had lots of scenarios thrown out which have all been thrown out as being totally wrong or irrelevant, and we've seen—when I was at the mayors' and reeves' meeting in Crystal City, and the reeves of Louise and Pembina and the town of—or, first of all, the RM of Louise, which has both the town and Crystal City and the town of Pilot Mound in them, and this is—they're all under that thousand threshold. And so, you know, it wasn't that many years ago when you couldn't even get these towns into the same room without having a severe disagreement, but, over the years, they have worked very hard to work together. They share services; whether it's fire and garbage collection, whether—and the many other shared services that they have, and it has really grown to—into a working relationship between the two towns and the rural municipality.

In fact, the Rural Municipality of Louise and the Town of Crystal City actually share the CAO duties, and so that's an administrative saving for them. But in talking to the CAO, she is quite concerned about this proposed amalgamation, forced amalgamation, because of the amount of work that it's going to create to try and do this. And she would—she says, we can probably do this if you give us sufficient time and—to work out the issues involved, but to force this is going to cause long-lasting problems that are not going to be solved at—by the time this forced amalgamation's supposed to take place, and so—that they're really concerned.

They're really concerned about the relationship that they've managed to build over the last number of years and is now going to deteriorate because Local Government is forcing this onto them. And, you know, if any of you are ever from a rural community, there's a lot of pride in our rural communities. And

what the—Local Government has—Department of Local Government has failed to recognize is that you have to—you need to recognize that rural pride in those small communities and work towards making sure that you build on it and not destroy it.

So there were—and this bill has just—this bill has set back rural relations between the Association of Manitoba Municipalities and this government. It's set them back years and years, because they had a working relationship—yes, there was always concerns about not enough infrastructure funding and where that infrastructure funding was being sent and how it was being divided, but they—but what they've done now is that they have just destroyed a relationship that was working fairly well. And what you—how you—and this is really a textbook case on how to destroy a relationship between two working groups, because what you do is, first of all, is you come in and you tell one group what they're supposed to do and then you're not honest with them as to why you want them to do this.

And we've continually asked this—what is the real purpose behind this? And we know that the AMM has been very effective in terms of lobbying; they have a very successful convention every year. There is municipal minister meetings that happen during that convention, and we really have to wonder if perhaps the AMM has been—is a victim of its own success, in that this government—because they don't want to consult with anybody, because they don't like to have to be accountable to anybody, if that's really what they're trying to do is to cut the number of municipalities in half and thereby have half as many people that they have to deal with.

And if that's really what their purpose is, first of all, that's very disingenuous of them to take that attitude, and secondly, if that's what their real purpose is, then get out there and say that's what our purpose is; is that we want to cut the number of municipalities in half. Not pretend to go out there and say if you're going to save money but not giving any examples of that because municipalities know better than that. These are organizations. They're corporations that balance their budget each and every year. They face challenges. They face flooding issues. They face drought issues.

* (15:30)

I know this past week there was still a fire ban in a few of the municipalities on the west side of Manitoba while the rest of us were getting a fair bit of rain, and so there is different challenges across the

province. And for this government to come out and just have a one size fits all shows that they're totally out to lunch and totally are disconnected from the municipalities, or that they really don't care and that they've decided that this is what's best for their own government, for their own 37 MLAs in here and they really don't care about what happens out in the rural areas—36 MLAs.

The—Mr. Speaker, this—we have to really wonder what the true intentions of them are because they're not about to tell us by any means.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would—I'm disappointed in this legislation in the fact that it even came out like it did. I think that that was—the fashion that it came out as an announcement in a Throne Speech to divert attention away from real issues of infrastructure and flood compensation, that was the first warning that we knew it was going to be bad legislation: the fact that they never consulted with the AMM or with any municipalities for that matter. And then, once they did bring out their plan, made their plan public through the Throne Speech, they've never really gone back and spoken to their real—been honest with municipalities and spoken with their—about their real true intents.

And then on top of that when they finally throw this piece of legislation out before us, you can see that it's poorly written, that there are things in the wording in here that's—they're now legislating co-operation. They've got in here that every municipality shall co-operate, and I would like to see what they're definition of that one is. They have left it open to the minister to have—to his discretion about penalties should they not amalgamate. And when I asked that question about that in the bill briefing there was some hesitation from the minister and, well, it was, basically, I guess I'll decide when the time comes what the penalty will be. And that's not how good legislation is written, Mr. Speaker. And I would think that the best thing to do with this piece of legislation is actually just to put it off for a while.

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

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 33 this afternoon in the Legislature. I thought maybe some of my friends across the way in the government wanted to speak to the bill and, clearly, they didn't take the opportunity. And that's part of the concern that I have regarding this bill is that the government hasn't taken the

opportunity to speak. Not necessarily to members of the Legislature, we'd be happy to hear them if they wanted to speak to the bill, but more concerned that they haven't really had consultation with the municipalities who are impacted.

We know, for example, that municipalities were surprised in the Throne Speech—the last Throne Speech when the issue of amalgamation was dropped upon them. The—*[interjection]* Well, the member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar) seems to disagree that he feels perhaps that there was consultation and that AMM shouldn't have been surprised, Mr. Speaker. I would challenge him to speak to those municipalities, to take the time to talk to the individual municipalities about this particular issue whether or not they were consulted about amalgamation. And I would suggest to you that the majority of them would say, no, they didn't have any consultation, any idea.

In fact, I remember being at the annual meeting for the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, there was quite a rousing speech given by the deputy mayor of Winnipeg at that event. I know the members opposite enjoyed the speech. I think it was Mr. Wyatt who spent some time talking about this issue and how there should have been broader consultation. I don't agree with everything that the member for Transcona in the civic level brings forward. He wouldn't agree with everything I'm sure, that I speak about. But, on that issue, I think there was certainly unanimity within—almost unanimity within that hall of more than a thousand people, that there should have been consultation, that there should have been real discussion before the government brought forward this initiative and now brought forward legislation. Yet, that didn't happen.

And so our hope, Mr. Speaker, is that the government will reconsider, will take some time, will have time over the summer months and into the fall for the government to go and in the evenings, or when this House adjourns on those days and speak to the municipalities and say to them, well, we may have taken a bit of a heavy-handed approach.

And this is a government, of course, that isn't adverse to the heavy-handed approach. Now, sometimes that runs them afoul to the law; we saw the approach that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) took with the Assiniboia Downs and he found himself hauled before a judge in the Law Courts building, a judge who gave him a legal dressing-down, as it were, that he had broken the law and that he wasn't above the law. Now, it's

unfortunate the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) doesn't want to acknowledge the decision by Justice Dewar, doesn't want to acknowledge the fact that the heavy-handed approach they use with the Downs landed the government in a lot of legal hot water and there was good justification for them being in a lot of legal hot water.

So that's one example of the heavy-handed approach that this government uses when it comes to organizations, Mr. Speaker. We've seen many other examples where the government has tried to use the bully pulpit, as it were, to try to force organizations to do things that they might not otherwise want to do, that they might be concerned about. And I know that this is certainly among a prime example because what we have is one level of government, a higher constitution level of government, saying to a lower level of government on the legislative perspective, not on the—in terms of the work that they do, saying to this other level of government, well, we're going to change now your jurisdictions without any sort of discussion or consultation.

You know, we see more dialogue and consultation in terms of how our own jurisdictions are changed, there's more of a process in place than this government has put in place for municipalities. Now, the minister responsible for this piece of legislation, he's indicated that they—that these are often decades-old in terms of how the boundaries were drawn and if that's the case, Mr. Speaker, maybe there can be some discussion, maybe there can be some discussion among neighbouring municipalities about what might make sense.

But, ultimately, what makes sense, Mr. Speaker, is to have that dialogue, that you don't simply go in and foist this upon municipalities because it affects many different people. Of course, it affects obviously those who are duly elected and there was a democratic election for the—those who are working on the civic level, on the municipal level, and so they have every expectation that things weren't going to change without consultation. And, ultimately, it's about respect. That's really what we're talking about. We're not asking the government not to look at possible amalgamations in consultation with municipalities. We just want them to respect them, put in place a respectful process so that these duly elected officials, the reeves, the councillors, the mayors of these communities know, in fact, that they are being respected and they have a voice in this process. They could bring that discussion back down to the municipal level in terms of the individual

ratepayers; they could consult with ratepayers to see what might make sense, in terms of jurisdictions.

I think that the government sometimes underestimates how connected individuals can be and why there's some good reasons, some good logic. Now, the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson), I think, spoke at one point about municipal changes that happened to his area and how he felt about it at one time. I listened to the speech and I don't begrudge the member for Gimli's comments or what his feelings were. Those were his feelings. There might be others in municipalities that have the same feelings but ultimately it's about going and asking because some won't have those feelings, Mr. Speaker, and you might learn a lot.

And I don't know what this government is concerned about learning from individuals, Mr. Speaker. I don't know why they're opposed to speaking to people in a respectful way and whether it's the Minister of Finance, you know, kicking down the door of Assiniboine downs and telling him that he's willing to wage a war with Assiniboine downs, that he's willing to go to battle because he's a politician and he knows best and he's already won the war before it even started, I think, were—to paraphrase his—words. Well, you know, he didn't win anything; he hasn't won anything in court, he's not won anything in the court of public opinion, and he's about to go 0 for 3, depending on how the new court case goes.

* (15:40)

So you'd think that the government would have learned a lesson. And some of my friends on the other side, if they would, you know, go back into their caucus, into their Cabinet, and with a reasoned explanation say, you know what, maybe it's not a bad idea to talk to people; maybe it's not a bad idea to consult. Now, we know on other things they don't want to talk to individuals in government; they don't want to talk to people, Mr. Speaker.

We know in terms of the referendum that currently exists—still exists today, in law, Mr. Speaker, that there is a required referendum before a government increases major taxes like the provincial sales tax here in the province of Manitoba. And the government decided without consultation, without forewarning, to do away with that referendum and to increase the PST—but not in that order. Instead of changing the law—and I acknowledge that the government has the right to change the law; nobody has ever said they don't have the right to change the

law—but they don't have the right to do the very thing that the law says you can't do, until they change the law. And that's where the government's gone so drastically wrong on both the issue of Assiniboia Downs and the provincial sales tax increase. They didn't first change the law before they do the very thing that the law says that you can't do.

And I don't know why the government can't grasp that, but ultimately I think if they would have consulted with Manitobans, the point would have been made a—much more clear. If they would have gone to Manitobans and say, well, we're looking to do a change to the referendum but we're going to bring in the PST tax increase probably before the law even gets changed, Manitobans would have said, well, that doesn't seem fair; that doesn't seem right.

And certainly I wasn't in the room when the discussion happened with the Assiniboia Downs folks, but I'm sure that there were some who expressed that very same concern. They would have said, well, this isn't fair; this isn't right. It's not how government should act—it's not really how anybody should act in negotiations, Mr. Speaker, where you force your will upon someone who doesn't have the same equitable power. In some definitions, that would be called bullying—in some clear definitions, that would be called bullying—where there's an inequity of power.

But I know that this government doesn't like to deal with clear definitions. And so, instead, Mr. Speaker, they kick down doors and they make threats. They say they're not going to allow people to have a democratic voice. They tell people that they're going to change how they get funding.

And it takes a judge—it takes a judge, to come in and set things right. Now, there might be other legislation that ends up before the courts in the long run, Mr. Speaker, and again we have to rely on judges to do this very thing. Why should we have to rely on government—or judges to set the government straight, when the government has forewarning? Now, I know sometimes the—ultimately, things end up before the courts; that's what the courts are there for. There are times when that simply happens; I understand that and I can accept that. But there are many times when government knows well in advance that they are on very soft legal ground. And, when it comes to the issue of Assiniboia Downs, when it comes to other issues that have been debated before this House and which will be debated in the future, this is very soft legal ground.

And all we're asking the government to do is to respect individuals when it comes to amalgamation, when it comes to Bill 33. We just want them to go and to consult with individuals, Mr. Speaker. And I suspect that there are members on the opposite side who haven't given this bill a great deal of consideration, who haven't really looked into the nuances of the bill. They don't live in the municipalities that are going to be impacted, they don't like to drive outside the Perimeter—it seems scary to them. So they might have an opportunity, if given the opportunity, to spend a bit of time, to go out to these municipalities that have smaller populations and actually talk to the officials. To say to them, well, what do you think about what's going on here in terms of the bill?

And we'd want them to do that because we think Manitobans believe in consultation. They believe in the whole process of—that's the Manitoba way, I'd say, Mr. Speaker, to meet with people and to talk to them, and not to run or scurry out the side door, is what happened with the government during the protest on the PST, where the minister for—or the member for Dawson Trail (Mr. Lemieux) had his keys in his hand and the command start ready and he was rushing out the door as soon as the vote happened here on some point of order, I think, before the protest. They were rushing out the door—how do we avoid this protest? How do we avoid seeing Manitobans? Well, how does a government act that way? How does a government purposely try to avoid Manitobans? It's baffling, you know, that the very people who say that they're in a—that there's respectful democracy, that they want to hear from Manitobans, those very people, on the other hand, don't actually want to listen to Manitobans even when they come to the very front door of the Legislature.

You know, it's not like they were asking people to travel across the country, you know, to come and speak to them. They weren't even asking them to come to their homes. These are Manitobans who came to our—well, not—to our home sometimes during the day, Mr. Speaker, to the Legislature, to the steps of our building here, and the government ran outside the side doors, jumped into the back of the pickup trucks that were running so they wouldn't have to talk to Manitobans, they wouldn't have to speak to Manitobans.

And that's the problem that we have when it comes to Bill 33, Mr. Speaker, that the government didn't actually speak to anybody. They didn't actually

talk to anybody. They didn't actually go to AMM and say: We think this is a concern, we think this is a problem; and how do we work through this, how do we do it in a respectful way, in a co-operative way? No, they decided to wait for a Throne Speech and to drop it on them unexpectedly. I mean, what kind of reaction did they expect? Could they have expected any other kind of reaction but that municipalities would feel that they were betrayed, that they weren't being respected? Could they have expected anything different? I don't think they could have, and so that leaves me with the conclusion that's what they wanted. They wanted these municipalities to feel disrespected. They wanted these municipalities to feel that they weren't actually being listened to by their government. I don't understand why any government would want that to happen.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to give this government time. I want to give them, the government, time to hear the concerns of municipalities, and that's why I move, seconded by the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire),

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

Bill 33, The Municipal Modernization Act (Municipal Amalgamations), be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), seconded by the honourable member for Arthur-Virden,

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

Bill 33, the municipal modernization–municipal amalgamation–the municipal amendment modernization act, municipal amalgamations, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.

The amendment is in order.

Now, we'll now be speaking to the amended motion on Bill 33.

The honourable member for Arthur-Virden. *[interjection]* And I understand that I've been advised that the honourable member for Arthur-Virden has been provided unlimited speaking time by the Leader of the Official Opposition

(Mr. Pallister) to Bill 33, speaking to Bill 33 on all motions and amendments related to Bill 33.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): First of all, I'd like to commend my colleague from Steinbach for putting forth a very reasoned amendment to this bill, Mr. Speaker, Bill 33, The Municipal Modernization Act (Municipal Amalgamations), as brought forward by the member from Dawson Trail. And I relish the opportunity to speak to this particular bill, but I'll wait for another opportunity because today I want to speak to the hoist motion that my colleague from Steinbach has just brought forward that I've had the opportunity to second.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very reasoned approach to a flawed bill in regards to the ability of giving Manitobans an opportunity to speak, which is a much more reasoned approach than what the government has done with the municipalities in this province. They dropped this bill on them unsuspectingly, and I'll get into that later. They didn't give them any time or forewarning and no debate, no comp–no discussion, no consultation.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're moving this hoist motion for six months down the road so that this government can have time to rethink this particular bill—as they are with the PST, as we've done there as well on Bill 20—with the forced—this one being the forced amalgamation of municipalities, Bill 33, but Bill 20 being the forced increase in PST upon unsuspecting Manitobans as well. And further to that, even worse is taking away their right to have a vote on a—whether or not the taxpayer protection act should be allowed to stay in place to protect them.

* (15:50)

So I think that this is a very reasoned motion amendment that my colleague has brought forward that I've had the opportunity to second, because, Mr. Speaker, the whole program is based on what—giving the government an opportunity to rethink the bill, to rethink the opportunity of bringing in a consultation approach to look at the common sense of what's presently working in rural Manitoba. And what's presently working is the 192 or 196 municipalities that we have in the province of Manitoba—192, I believe—the opportunity to work these things out on their own in their own time frame, not being dictated to and forced upon them by this government through their colleague, though, Minister of Local Government (Mr. Lemieux).

I mean, I know from being at some of the public meetings where he was at—particularly at the mayors' and reeves' meeting in Waskada—from hearing what he did at the Association of Manitoba Municipalities annual general meeting last November and how dictatorial he was in his approach to dumping this upon them, that it may—it certainly didn't just come from his department or himself. I mean, this is a government edict that says thou shalt amalgamate municipalities throughout Manitoba and you're going to force them to do so, Mr. Speaker, in spite of the fact that he's given some lip service to some particular dates in the legislation in the House that will provide him with that opportunity to look at amalgamations, I guess, down the road.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the government has brought this forward in a very heavy-handed manner, and we've brought forward the hoist to provide them with an opportunity to rethink it.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

There's other things that go on about having to have this bill done right now as well. They've waited until most municipalities in the province of Manitoba, by not bringing this forward at their earliest opportunity since it was brought into the House and keeping the PST bill before us, we haven't had an opportunity to debate, to get this moved. But it's such a bad bill that we know we need to give the opportunity for the government to rethink this and move it the six months down the road.

That will also give the opportunity for municipalities across this province the opportunity to come and make presentations at the committee in a more, if I could say in a more amenable time frame to their living. And by that I mean that virtually all of these municipal councillors on the rural municipalities, as well, are farming. Quite a number of them are farmers and they're in the middle of a very late spring seeding that will put the spring season back further as well, and harvest probably a bit as well. Now, all of the towns, of course, many of the communities, smaller communities that I know of—many of those persons that are councillors either have farmed or help on farms back out in the rural neighbourhoods that they came from, and that's something to consider. But, of course, the government didn't consider that when they brought this forward last November.

I know that the program that the government wanted to work with was—I mean, they may be well-intentioned, to say that, well, you know, why

don't we just—look it. We've had all these municipalities for all these decades, if not a century, and it's time to do something with them. Well, there wasn't any reasons given. There really hasn't been any reasons that have come forward that carry any water because, Mr. Speaker, they don't—or, Deputy Speaker, pardon me—they don't really, you know, they've come up with a couple of ideas that maybe this'll save some money, that it will provide some efficiencies in the departments. But I want to say, the number of the meetings that I've been at and the number of municipal officials that have phoned me across the province of Manitoba about this issue, and, particularly, I get a lot from our—my colleagues in the municipal level of government in the constituency that I represent. I have 15 rural municipalities and 11 or 12 towns in that area, and they are all concerned to a person in regards to the manner in which this bill was brought forward, to the lack of consultation that the Minister for Local Government, the minister from Dawson Trail, brought—the member from Dawson Trail brought forward. So dictatorial is one of the more pleasant words that I've heard used by many of these colleagues out there in rural Manitoba to show their displeasure with this bill coming forward, Bill 33, in the manner that it did.

So I want to say that there is a great deal of time. To say that this has to be done by certain deadlines is certainly a bullying issue for a top-down government to provide to local governments. It doesn't show any respect. I know the r-e-s-p-e-c-t has been used in this House a number of times, but it doesn't show any respect for your colleagues at another level of government.

So here's a government, the NDP in Manitoba, who are off base with the federal government, off base with the municipal governments, so who are they on base with? I would say, Mr. Speaker, that—Mr. Deputy Speaker, that there's 36 of them taking on the world. They're taking on the federal government on most issues. They're taking on the municipal governments at another level.

So who are they consulting with? Well, each other perhaps, but if that's the case, they're not doing a very good job of governing for the citizens of this province, and there's a whole plethora of examples that one could use in regards to that, least of all being the finance side of it. But also they're not respecting the poor in this province, the low-income earners of this province either, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And so there are both ends of that spectrum that they have

taken on and said that they know better how to run people's lives than the people themselves. That's what this bill is partly about, is just not understanding what's occurring in Manitoba on the ground in the local areas.

I want to say that there is lots of time as we won't be rising for some time. We certainly aren't going to be out of here on June the 13th, that the government may still have thought that there was some hope of doing that once they brought the PST forward. So you better turn up the fans and get them working. I mean, I remember being here in the summer of 2000 when my colleague at that time, Mrs. Asper, Linda, was here, and she used to have a little electric fan that was sitting up, about a two-inch blade on it. She was sitting it right in front of her chair, keeping herself cool, and she said, what in the world are we doing in this House, Larry, one day when I met her in the hall. I said, well, your government brought forward this terrible legislation or we wouldn't be here. You know, we'd be out enjoying the summer, Mr. Speaker, and doing these—Deputy Speaker—doing these, but here we are. Same example.

For my colleagues, they expect me to be here debating these bills and trying to provide better responses and better governing for them in the province of Manitoba, and if we were in government, it wouldn't—we wouldn't be looking at this particular bill in the manner that it was brought forward. The process that my colleagues have mentioned earlier is that—and I have stated in this House before, it's one where you consult with people. You let them know what you're thinking about. You bring forward their ideas, combine them with yours. Talk about it. Give them an opportunity.

You can have a—your consultative approach around the province of Manitoba. My colleagues did that back in the '90s when I remember going to those meetings. Very good consultative approach brought—came up with a rural development initiative out of that, and this government has cancelled most of that. They've cancelled the rural economic development program in the province. They've shifted the responsibilities around. They've centralized a lot of the local jobs back into centralized areas, Mr. Speaker—Deputy Speaker, in this province, and therefore, again, showing that they don't understand how important one job is in a rural municipality or in a rural town, because that's not just the one person that that jobs entails, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's the family of that person as well, man or woman or

student. It helps keep the schools going in our regions. It helps the local grocery store, the local clothing stores, the shoe shops, the service stations where people buy gasoline, and it's just one more person out of those communities that makes it a little bit more of a struggle for the mayors and reeves to be able to manage the affairs of their own municipalities.

And so there's a great deal of opportunity there for the NDP to learn from the mistakes that they've already made, and they've made many. So we know that, and I guess it's an opportunity for us to look at the time frame that we've given them. It's an opportunity for the NDP to look at and seriously consider six months down the road where this bill should be at.

* (16:00)

We can debate the other bills that they have, Mr. Speaker, if they were to bring any of them forward. But until they deal with some of these very, very out of date and out of jurisdictional areas—I guess it is within their jurisdiction to do these things—but all I'm saying is that it gives them time to go out and do that consultation with citizens of Manitoba, whether it's an increase in the PST, whether it's taking away their right to speak to have a say in increased taxes as the—what was considered to be the best legislation in North America at that time, the taxpayer protection and debt reduction balanced budget legislation in the province of Manitoba. From 1995 it was the best—considered the best in North America at that time and this government has completely gutted it with three changes to it already.

And now they still can't win on that basis, so they're taking a vote tax because they can't raise money, you know, outraise us in the regular channels that they established the rules for. They established these rules and it's very disconcerting to see them having to change the—to gut the balanced budget, taxpayer protection law again in Manitoba to suit their own needs again.

And so—and I'll get to the lies of the Premier (Mr. Selinger) in a short while in regards to the 2011 election I'm sure, but I want to make sure that we talk about the process that they went through in regards to—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The honourable member just said the lies of the Premier. I've been advised that's inappropriate language. I wonder if the member would consider withdrawing that.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I would withdraw that comment in regards to the speaker—to the Premier (Mr. Selinger). I know that that's unparliamentary here in the House and I apologize for that—unlike what the Premier hasn't done to the people of Manitoba. He has not apologized for bringing forward the bill that he's dumped on top of them called the Bill 20, the increase in the PST.

When you've taken away people's right, as they've done by bringing Bill 20 forward, it really shows the arrogance of a government that seems to be extremely out of touch with its general population. They tried to convince several organizations around the province that they could use 1 per cent of the PST for infrastructure.

Well, they brought forward, you know, they—the business council, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, the heavy construction industry. They know that we have a huge infrastructure debt—deficit in the province of Manitoba that isn't even on the books. It's not part of the \$30-billion largest debt in Manitoba's history that this government has brought in today. It was 27 until they brought the budget in just a month ago, five weeks ago.

So now that the debt of this province has hit an historic high—as it was even before—I think Manitobans might say, well, what have we done responsibly to be able to reduce that deficit? Well—or the debt. Well, you can't do it. You can't reduce that debt when you've still running a billion-dollar deficit last year and a \$518-million deficit this year. It just doesn't leave you any funds to do that. What it does, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is rob you from the important programs that all of the ministers over here, I'm sure, on the NDP side of the House would like to have. There's \$518 million there that I think they could probably find use for in their departments. But their own government has now got a situation where the interest on the debt—on the debt in the province of Manitoba is the fourth largest line item in the budget behind health care and education and child and family services.

And so the government needs to look closely, the Finance Minister needs to look extremely closely at that type of programming, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and where the finances are going in this Province. Now, maybe that's why he felt he could just cancel two and a half million dollars out of the parimutuel betting agreement that he had with the jockey—Manitoba Jockey Club.

And he has the right to change the law, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but he hasn't changed the law, therefore he has broken the present law that's in existence by holding back money what rightfully should be in the hands of the Manitoba Jockey Club.

So the member from Dauphin certainly has not been responsible in his efforts, in his management of that affair, and so if he's not responsible in that manner, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how can citizens of Manitoba expect to believe him when he says that he's going to balance the books down the road? Of course, that was the Premier.

And so, Mr. Speaker, when I use the term that I did earlier in regards to the situation with the government across the way, I do it with considerable thought, because it's the truth. There is a situation in this province where the government has not listened to Manitobans. They have had a hundred and forty billion dollars to spend over the last 14 years in this province, and where has their priority been? Well, it's been to hire another hundred and—hire up to—increase their numbers of communications staff—we call them spinners—up to a hundred and ninety-two. That's a priority for this government. They've got at least a third more than they had under any previous government in the history of Manitoba. Even their own colleagues in the 'preyer' and—Pawley and Schreyer years never had anywhere close to that number.

So it's relevant, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we would look at the kind of mismanagement in that budget and look at why they're bringing forth a bill now to try and amalgamate municipalities under the auspices of trying to save some funds. Well, who are they saving the funds for? Are they trying to convince Manitobans that they will save money by forcing amalgamations on them, at a time when municipalities have got flood compensation issues to deal with from 2011 that are at historic levels, when they're running the biggest debt in Manitoba's history, when they're running the biggest deficit two years in a row, virtually, in Manitoba's history, when the taxes that they've increased since they came into power in 2011 in the last election have actually increased by a hundred—by \$1,600 per household in the province of Manitoba—family of four? They have taken \$1,600 out of each family's pockets in this province. The math is all there; they only have to check in the Hansard to see how my colleague from Tuxedo clearly described where those numbers came from.

So I ask that members of the government across the way, I tell them to go look in Hansard someday—go look in Hansard someday, you know. Just read it up in Hansard for those that are chirping across the way. But they don't like the truth, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They're just like the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and they're just like the Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) who've both broken the law at different times. And, so it's a matter of credibility, and this government has no credibility. They've got a counterfeit mandate, actually, to operate in this province.

Now, why do I say that? Well, I say it because they—the Premier ran on an election campaign—in fact, all of the members across the way, even all of the presently elected backbenchers came across the way—they all went to the doors in the last election, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they said: Hey, we're not going to raise your taxes. That's nonsense, the Premier said. We're on time to raise to a—balance the books by 2014, which I believe is next spring.

And we're on—this was in the fall of '11, of course, when he was trying to get re-elected and he was saying anything he could to get re-elected in those days, including: we'll give you multi-year compensation for your flood compensations to the people around Lake Manitoba, right from the member from Dauphin who was in the middle of the flood himself—may well—yes, he may not have known he was going to be Finance Minister at that point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but he was certainly there in the government in Conservation and Agriculture, in those areas that he knew were being hard hit by the flood.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for—to be able to go out and—and they did put him out into those areas, and he stood up and said that we would have multi-year compensation for the flood controls, and of course now he reneges on that promise.

So, if he's going to renege on promises like that, and he's going to renege on a number of other things that he's put forward, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how can we now believe him when he says he didn't break the law in regards to the Manitoba Jockey Club? It's clear that he did. We've listened to Judge Dewar's and read Judge Dewar's edict in the documents that he brought down in the case analysis, and so when the minister speaks it's very difficult to believe what he's continuing to put forward in the comments in this House, because I know of many situations in his own riding where people have phoned me now, as

the minister—or the deputy for Conservation, dealing with the flood issues, and he still won't even deal with them. In fact, his staff told one of them that maybe they should suck it up; sometimes you have to just deal with these things yourself.

* (16:10)

Well, that's not a manner—that's not the kind of compassion, I guess you could say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that one should deal with. When a person in a distraught situation, in a—not just from a physical situation of being flooded, but from a mental situation of wanting to make sure that you do as much as you can to both—to help these people recover in their households and families as well as their physical yards and land, that's not a way to treat Manitobans. And that's the way the member from Dauphin treated these folks that have phoned me.

So I feel that it's—you know, it's something that's two years out; it's still outstanding. And I know the member from Swan River has constituents in his area that have phoned me as well, and fairly similar discussions with those people as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So I think that there's a situation where the government members need to start listening more to the province of Manitoba, to the people on the ground. And I get back to the reason for bringing this hoist motion in, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that's because we have lots of time to debate, to discuss this issue. But it's, more importantly, to give the government a chance to change their mind.

So what am I asking them to change their mind on? Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they really need to look at the parts of the bill where they put in deadlines. You know, I want to go back to how this bill was brought forward in the first place. I said earlier that there was no discussion with municipalities across the province. Well, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities was out, held public meetings in many areas. I was at one in Oak Lake where the government came out to talk about a number of different things in regards to the flood.

I've been on the ground in Oak Lake beach when the Oak Lake lake itself was flooding over its banks, and I commend the government for doing some repairs along the dikes in the Oak Lake beach, and there are a few areas where that has happened. But I want to say that they didn't have any way of telling municipalities how they were going to force this amalgamation upon them. They didn't have people

on the ground, they didn't—same with the meeting that my colleague from Midland and I were at in Hartney last January. In the 'height' of the cold weather in the middle of winter, people drove from two thirds of the way across the province of Manitoba. About 180 municipal officials cramped into the community hall in Hartney, Manitoba, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and it's a big hall—to hear—to put forth their concerns. And my colleague and I were there to listen to what they had to say, and there wasn't a government person within miles. No one was there; didn't even see department officials there at that particular meeting.

So—and it's at that particular meeting as well, that one of the reeves—or one of mayors-reeves of an amalgamated municipality already, Mr. Rick Pauls, from Killarney-Turtle Mountain, stood up and spoke and said that there was no—that they had done amalgamation, done it voluntarily—it had taken them six years. They had got through that; they still had two assessment processes. They had an assessment for those in the community and another one for the rural municipality of Turtle Mountain, but the mill rates were different in those areas. And so, therefore, the funds were still being raised, in the same manner they were before, to operate.

They still had the same amount of streets; they still had the same amount of highways to look after, whether it was grading the roads in the summer or was plowing the snow in the winter or dealing with policing in the municipalities. They still had all of the same issues to deal with, and they had dealt with them, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in a very co-operative manner for years. So they amalgamated their offices into one office, but they indicated to the—publicly, to the meeting that night—and I've had other municipalities, certainly, say the same thing—there were no financial savings to what they did.

And at these meetings, I have heard a lot of—and I've lived beside municipalities—or in a municipality all my life. When I was farming, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I lived beside the—an excellent reeve that had been the association of Manitoba municipal president in Manitoba in Cameron municipality from that area. And there's a great deal of effort that goes in to being a municipal councillor, or the mayor and a reeve by all of these people in the province of Manitoba. They don't—you know, they get a stipend for their gas and maybe attending a few meetings. They are very, I guess I would say they're certainly not compensated for the time and the energy and all the phone calls that they put in in the role that they

have as municipal officials. It's not completely a voluntary role, but it is not something that they're going to make any living at either in most cases. So I say that because this is a situation where if these jurisdictions are going to get that much larger in area at least—particularly in my area of the province and in many others if they're going to amalgamate—then they will have to in all likelihood I'm told probably have to seek a larger stipend for the work that they're going to do.

Now, that may not lead to any savings in a municipality, in fact, it might actually end up being a more costly process than what we presently have today, and that's not what I think the government was hoping for in this whole process. I mean, we saw them amalgamate school boards years ago and that ended up costing 30 million instead of saving 30 million. We've seen the forced amalgamation of regional health authorities in the province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we've got a—the, I guess I would say the jury is certainly still out on that one. I know the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) says many times that she saved many millions of dollars in that process, but it's certainly not what I'm hearing on the ground at this particular point. And looking at the size of the regions and I'll refrain from getting perhaps into the health-care needs of our municipalities today.

But I will say that whether it's health or fire or land planning, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the government has had very little foresight. Number one, I will say that all of these municipalities continue to work together on a regular basis. They are already dealing with fire and emergency personnel, with ambulance requirements in a much larger basis in many cases than just their own jurisdictions. There are agreements already set up between the towns and the surrounding municipalities no matter what size they are, whether they're under a thousand or over a thousand in population, and so I think that it's incumbent upon the government to continue to take into consideration and listen to what's already happening on the ground in those areas.

I know that the government, you know, they should know. I mean, I'm assuming they know that they are the ones that put a land-use planning process in place in this province as well since they've come into government. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was the critic for Local Government for some years and we went through that whole process of having land-use planning processes put in place. And the municipalities all bought into that one and, well, they

were kind of told they had to as well in that area just like they asked the conservation districts to come up with a plan for your conservation district and then have continued to expand the number of conservation districts, but not the budget, not the global budget. So, therefore, each conservation district gets—keeps getting fewer and fewer dollars. Looks good from the provincial perspective, but it certainly means that the real municipalities and local people are being unloaded upon to help fund those projects that these conservation districts have, and many of them have extremely good projects.

Speaking as the Conservation and Water Stewardship critic right now, I know that there are hundreds of extremely good projects across the province of Manitoba, but their funding is being cut this year in this budget when the government talks about cuts. And it's fine, I guess, if that's what they feel they want to cut rural Manitoba. Maybe that's why some of my colleagues mentioned earlier some people want to leave the province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I hopefully have time today or tomorrow to get into that as well in my comments. So I'll come back to that again.

But I think that the plan, therefore, local land-use planning is something that if we were to go through that whole process only five or six years ago, then why didn't the government have the foresight then to demand their forced amalgamation? Then these people wouldn't have to go all through it all over again.

* (16:20)

Well, maybe their thought is that, well, they really won't have to because they have larger planning districts. In my case, there's a Mid-West Planning District in western Manitoba, made up of many, many municipalities and towns in that whole region. And on a regular basis, they get together and look at land use planning processes for that whole region. They all get together and have meetings, and they look at what each other are doing. They share ideas and new plans for development in their areas, and there are cost-costing measures for dealing with both the revenue and the expenses in dealing with new businesses and new industries that could be set up.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I could say that things do change in municipalities. And I'll get back to the number of a thousand that I mentioned earlier at some point here, because there is growth going on

in some areas that hasn't had growth in a whole number of years.

I mean, if you look at the statistics, Manitoba right now—it would say that the area of Dauphin and Swan River is declining in population. My area in southwest Manitoba that I represent has had a similar situation for a number of years, but things do happen, things do change. We've got a strong agricultural economy in both of those regions, but in southwest Manitoba today, for the first time in probably 70 years, every school in my constituency has at least a stable or an increased school population in the last two years—certainly in the last five years from five years ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And that's because of the increased petroleum industry activity that's taking place in the—throughout the region that's helping the community of Brandon. Maybe it hasn't produced as much of an increase in population as yet, as Maple Leaf has, so that's why you want to make sure that we take care of industries like those so that the population will continue to grow in our regions in Manitoba and will be able provide the tax base that the Province needs for the social programming that we have in this province, that we all count on. And that's why it's so imperative that we don't force these municipalities into detracting away from the issues of the day that keep them functioning and operating and—with little sidebars and distractions, like being forced to amalgamate.

Mr. Speaker, I haven't even got to the point of how this all happened, and I'm going to start into that. Last November, in this very House—in this very House—when the government brought down their budget, we all came in thinking that it was going to—you know, we were going to—or their Throne Speech. We came in thinking that it'd be a normal Throne Speech, you know. There'll be the vision for the future, as lacklustre as what I've seen for the last 14 years under this government. They—their vision for throne speeches hasn't been great, but this one dropped another bombshell.

What was it? Well, it was the forced amalgamation of municipalities. They didn't talk about what they were going to do in next spring's budget, with an increase in the PST and stripping people of their right to have a say in the taxpayer protection law; they didn't mention that at all. They just dumped on the people of Manitoba and said, we're going to force you 192 municipalities to amalgamate. We're going to force you—there's 92 of you in Manitoba that are under a thousand people—we're going to force you all to amalgamate.

But what they didn't know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that several of these areas were already starting to talk, on a voluntary basis, about amalgamation—as I've mentioned, Turtle Mountain and Killarney just to the east of the constituency that I represent. I know that the Town of Hamiota and the RM of Hamiota are presently in discussions with how to look at a future in their region of working together.

That's because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you know in your own constituency, people are dependent—they're interdependent on each other. You can have a grocery store and a service station and you—as I met some folks on the steps of the Legislature today from one of the communities in the Interlake that were here with the Manitoba–Lake Winnipeg, Manitoba, Lake St. Martin fishers' co-op, this individual ran a service station, he runs a restaurant. And others out there in some of the communities, whether it's a clothing store or a shoe store or any kind of a commercial entity in these smaller communities, they depend on the—as much on the rural people coming to town to purchase and purchase at home as they do on—as the rural people outside of the community rely on having those stores in their local community so they don't have to drive any further than they have to for the very basics of their livelihoods. So that's the important part of keeping this—these entities. All I'm saying is that they are co-operating. They do have a cost-sharing basis.

And I may get to the situation, I know that—I think it was the RM of Morton, the RM of Turtle Mountain, Riverside, the RM of Whitewater and the towns of Boissevain and Killarney years ago when the—first brought the—forward the idea of wind energy that this government wouldn't allow them to move forward with, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But they had a co-operative agreement that—between those municipalities. Before there was any hint of a contract for a company to come into their region, they had already established what the arrangements would be for sharing the revenue and it didn't matter what municipal jurisdiction a factory or a business might have been dropped into. They had—if it affected that region it was going to be a shared revenue for that whole region and the road infrastructure costs and those types of things would have been shared by the municipalities as well. We don't need to force them to get together to do that. These are sound people of sound mind with expertise in the local economy and the local infrastructure needs that know full well what their needs are, and that happens all across the province of Manitoba. It's

not just in the example that I just used. It happens everywhere.

I mentioned the communities of Hamiota and the surrounding RM. A more accelerated approach has already been undergone—undertaken by the Town of Oak Lake and the RM of Sifton where those two jurisdictions have held public meetings already, have given public notice that they want to amalgamate and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's going to work out, I believe, very well for them both as they move forward with a municipality that has great potential—a jurisdiction in this province. We've already seen the growth in the region. The housing prices have gone up because of young people moving into the region. There's an expanded tourist industry in that jurisdiction and it's impacting the whole region similar to what's happening along the US border at Lake Metigoshe. Some of these areas are growing in spite of the government, and they're growing because they've done a lot of planning. They've planned ahead.

I've seen—just in the community that I live in in the town of Virden, there's been a tremendous growth in businesses moving in into that area, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But they're starting to look at what happens with the 1 per cent increase in PST, the fact that our PST is 60 per cent higher than Moosomin on the other side of the border. It's affecting the towns of Virden and Elkhorn and Reston and Pierson and Tilston and Melita, and all away across that southwest corner right on up through to Flin Flon. I'm sure where—that is a prime example, the town of Flin Flon and Creighton just have a line down the middle, basically, in the mine there. And it's very interesting that now these folks can just drive across to the hardware in Saskatchewan and bring all the goods home they need.

I think that the government has not given much thought to the fact that the PST being 60 per cent higher on Manitoba's side than Saskatchewan is going to create some difficulties. It may not be felt as much here in the city of Winnipeg. But it's certainly going to be felt by the economy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because all Manitobans will not get the benefit of being able to purchase in our home communities and the impacts of the tax collected in Manitoba on that, never mind the differences in the basic personal exemptions between Saskatchewan and our side of the border just about 2 to 1.

But I want to say that the whole idea of bringing this forward and dumping it on the people at the

Throne Speech was certainly the—at a last minute decision. Because here you are five days later, the Association of Manitoba municipal—one of the largest conventions in Manitoba, certainly the largest that impacts rural people and others, Mr. Deputy Speaker, certainly that convention starting just five or six days after the Throne Speech gave very little, I guess, credence to the fact that there'd been any discussions done. In fact, the government didn't even try to hide the fact that they'd never talked to a municipality in Manitoba about this issue. There was no consultation with the president of AMM, Mr. Doug Dobrowolski from Morris. There was no discussion with Joe Masi, the general manager—executive of Association of Manitoba Municipalities, based in Portage la Prairie; there was no discussion with the—any of the reeves or mayors around the province; there was no discussion with councillors in the province of Manitoba anywhere in the towns or in the 192—in the towns and as part of the rural municipalities, the 192 that are out there including those towns.

*(16:30)

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

There wasn't any discussion with them and yet they're saying, by the end of January, you've got to—2013, just two months down the road, you've got to tell us who your partner's going to be. Who you going to dance with? What partner are you going to have in regards to who you are going to amalgamate with? Oh, and by the way, that partner has to be somebody that has a common border with you at present. Well, Mr. Speaker, in the case of Edward, they might want—I don't think they'd probably go so far as to want to move to partner with the US, because their southern border's right on the US border, but, you know, they do have that green opportunity. They are up against the Saskatchewan border, as is the municipality of Albert and the municipality of Pipestone and the municipality of Wallace and the municipality of Archie, that I represent.

They're all—border the Saskatchewan border, and Edward would—having two borders that, basically, you know—I'm saying there is, that my colleague had said earlier, some areas might want to amalgamate with Saskatchewan—I'll come back to that as well. But it's not an option—it's not an option; we know that in the province of Manitoba. These people can't escape from the hard—from the heavy-handedness of this bill or the PST increase by just saying, well, we

want to leave the province of Manitoba. Mr. Speaker, this is very pertinent to the fact that there's so much interchange in the amount of activity that takes place on a daily basis in southwest Manitoba right now with our neighbours in Saskatchewan, that the border is practically nonexistent other than for tax jurisdictions and differences in governing.

There is so much, and I know that most of my colleagues in this facility—I know that the member from Kildonan and a few others have been out there a time or two, but there is so much activity taking place across the border with Saskatchewan and Manitoba. But, Mr. Speaker, it's not Manitobans going to work in Saskatchewan; it's Saskatchewan people living in Saskatchewan, coming to work in the oil fields in Manitoba.

We have some youth that are working in Saskatchewan, and I have had—in fact, I had a mother of one of these people on Saturday at a tea in my community indicate to me that their son works in the mine at Rocanville, and they're trying to figure out why in the world he doesn't buy a home over there with the differences. And I thought, you know, even with the low taxes in some of the smaller communities—that is a plus, but it's the same thing in some of their small communities. I've also had a lady from the Interlake, from up in Lake Winnipegosis, actually, about three weeks ago on the phone. We got talking about the whole issue of environmental management and that sort of thing in her area, and she indicated she had a son that was presently working in the Redvers area of Saskatchewan in the oil field. But he really wanted to come back to Manitoba last fall, and she said, well, why would you ever come back? You're there, you know, you can come and visit us any time you wish. And so, you know, you've got that opportunity. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I find those kind of comments disconcerting to say the least.

The fact that bill was brought in, sort of, at the last minute, and brought forward to AMM's meeting in a dictatorial manner, saying you will have to amalgamate, is very disturbing. It's disturbing from the point of view that, apart from the fact that there was no consultation, it gives a black eye to the Province in the manner in which we are supposed to be co-operating with all levels of government.

I want to say that just like in the Throne Speech, where there was no hint of increased taxes that I've referred to earlier, there certainly was the dictatorial approach; that we are going to force amalgamation

on these municipalities. Mr. Speaker, they said that if you were under a thousand, you have to amalgamate; you have to go further. And now we've seen studies come out that say, oh, well, maybe that number should be 3,000 or 5,000—and I'll get to that at some point.

But there is no magic number. I know my colleagues, I've heard a few of the NDP members across the way say, oh, but under the Conservatives you guys put the thousand number in place. Yes, there was discussions in those days, in the mid- to late '90s, that if there was rural development taking place, and municipalities decided that they wanted to get together—and the key here is in a voluntary manner—I repeat that for my NDP colleagues across the way—in a voluntary manner, that municipalities could go ahead and amalgamate. And, if you're going to do it, you know, maybe the number that you should amalgamate would be a thousand.

But there was no talk of a forced amalgamation, and there still isn't from this side of the House. We believe and respect those who are out there as municipalities today that might want to amalgamate, Mr. Deputy Speaker—or, Mr. Speaker, now—that we encourage them to go ahead and do so. But do so by getting together and talking about it in a manner that the two municipality—jurisdictions that I just spoke about, the Town of Oak Lake and the RM of Sifton, or the community of Hamiota and the surrounding RM, just to name a few.

Now, I've got others that say: Well, we're neighbouring jurisdictions. We're neighbouring municipalities, but one has a surplus, a fairly secure bank account, whereas others are in debt, haven't—you know, maybe stretched in their borrowing abilities, even though municipalities can't run deficits.

Maybe the federal government will do that to Provinces some day, say you can't run a deficit either. And I don't think this government would like that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they'd be broke and they'd have to dump that on top of Manitobans or hope that the federal government would bail them out, as they've been doing for 14 years with some of the largest transfer payments in the history of this province and the lowest interest at a time of the lowest interest rates—two things that have been extremely valuable to this government and their spending habits that they've had in Manitoba.

And they certainly have become the spendDP; now it's the spendDP with the PST. It's a—their

spending has caught up to them, and that's why they're increasing the PST by that other per cent, at least, after having widened out the base of the PST in the province of Manitoba to include lawyers, architects and accountants, they broadened it out on life insurance, haircuts over \$50, they've done it to property insurance as well.

They've increased it to—the labour to build a house as opposed as to just being on the materials at one point when I first was elected in 1999. None of these were in place; it was only the materials for a building that were charged a 7 per cent PST.

So now that they've broadened it out to include virtually everything that an HST would almost have, they upped the whole percentage—the whole cost of PST by 1 per cent effective here on the 1st of July, whether or not the bill is going to pass in the House or not.

So I think that that's certainly a dictatorial, and it's not done in a manner that Manitobans respect.

And I want to go back to those jurisdictions that were—that they kind of bought into the idea of the 1 per cent going for infrastructure. Well, Mr. Speaker, that would have been fine, but they probably didn't tell them they were going to increase it 1 per cent to get those funds.

And, as soon as they found out that they were being stripped of the taxpayer protection law that allowed them to have a say, they all backed off and said that, you know, this is dictatorial, this is a wrong approach in Manitoba, we have to have a say in how this is done. And we need to maintain at least some semblance to the best legislation in North America from 1995, even though that has been changed three times under the jurisdiction of the NDP in Manitoba already.

The concerns of these organizations has been mentioned in several of the papers across the province of Manitoba. Many of them have been interviewed. The restaurant owners association have been doubly dumped on, if you could use that term, by seeing the taxes increased on beer and spirits and wine, Mr. Deputy Speaker—or, Mr. Speaker, pardon me. And then, of course, they did that and crept them out about a month and a half before the budget came down this spring. And then, in the budget to these restaurant owners and business people's surprise, they they—there was a—another 1 per cent PST added on top of that, which is also a, you know, a—kind of a sneaky way to do it from a government's perspective.

* (16:40)

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that—so once Throne Speech was given and the Minister of Local Government (Mr. Lemieux) went into the AMM convention and said, we're going to force you to amalgamate, and this is how you're going to do it. Then along came the Premier (Mr. Selinger) at the banquet that night, and he said, and I was there, he said: We're here to help you. We're going to look after you. We're going to help you, and all the co-operation that we have across the province of Manitoba—oh, and by the way, but we're going to amalgamate you. We're going to amalgamate you, and you have to give us who you're going to amalgamate with by—well, he didn't say the date. That—the member from Local Government had already done that. By the end of January 2013, you've got to tell us who you're going to amalgamate with.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, municipalities were thunderstruck. Here they are; they're trying to deal with flooding from 2011, which was a year and a quarter before that, and they had not received the compensation.

Many municipalities that I know of today still haven't received all their compensation from the gravelling of the roads and everything else. And they're into bank accounts; they're into their line of credit; they're extended on their lines of credit in some shape.

Mr. Speaker, they're being charged interest, and the government won't pay for the interest. They're not paying for the interest, in many cases, of these municipalities to carry those loans. And that is why municipalities are so upset with this government. They are extremely upset. If this government would talk to them, co-operate with them, keep their word—because before the election, the minister, the Premier, indicated that he would look after them: you do what you have to do to look after yourselves in this flood and we'll look after—we'll be there for you.

You know, and he put some programs in place that only the Province was involved in. But he had that choice. There is a DFA program, disaster financial assistance, with the federal government, where it's 90-10 shared cost on most of those areas, Mr.—90 per cent with the federal government, 10 per cent by the Province, Mr. Speaker. And so there's a great deal of understanding in those processes, but the government here jumped in, took all the photo ops and everything, before the election.

The Premier was out there all over the place, saying, just do what you have to do to look after yourself. Well, I know, the calls I'm getting now, a year and a half after, are from people that said: We did what he said. We looked after ourselves. We stopped our place from being flooded. We did the very best we could, and we succeeded, but now we're being penalized because they're not paying for that dike or they won't pay for the sandbagging we did around our area, and we worked hard with ourselves and our neighbours, whereas, you know, we didn't have time to go and hire somebody and get this done, but if we'd have had a bill for it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we could've—or Speaker, we could've turned that in, perhaps, more.

But, Mr. Speaker, so the forms are there; you're supposed to, you know, analyze what it cost you and put that down, sign it. That's a document that's a clear document of intent, and so—but these people aren't being paid. So we've got a Throne Speech that dumped the PS—the forced amalgamation on people. We've got a minister that walked in and said, this is how you're going to do it, and we've got a Premier that said, we'll be there to help you, but you're going to be forced to amalgamate.

That only took us to the end of the second week, 10 days after the Throne Speech, Mr. Speaker, and it's got worse since then. In spite of the government saying, we're here to help you, and we've got a few more people hired to do that, when asked at these municipal meetings this spring when that was going to occur, they said, well, it's going to start, you know, right away. First of April, I believe they indicated at the meeting I was at in Waskada which was only about 10 days away. But they couldn't—when asked who they'd hired, they couldn't name anybody. They didn't have anybody.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's why the municipalities are so untrusting of the process. It looks like it's being done on the back of a napkin as we go, and they're not very happy about that, when they are being held accountable and carrying loans for the Province in regards to other jurisdictions. And, I know, the federal government has a responsibility, here. But on these programs that are shared, it's the Province's jurisdiction and responsibility to apply to the federal government, to let the federal government know what they're going to pay for, who has already—and the federal government has already paid a hundred million dollars to the Province of Manitoba, just to help them with their cash flow, here in the province, to get that job done.

So, Mr. Speaker, there will be hundreds of millions of more, I assume, that the Province will be still putting in for, and seeing whether they get that money coming forward for payments like payments to municipals, municipalities in the province of Manitoba or for individuals, in many cases.

So I look at it and say, no wonder that these municipalities are a bit skeptical about they're being in a trustworthy situation when they haven't really received the respect or through financial commitment that they were promised. And I know that many of the—my colleagues have been frustrated with the government given the fact that it's two years away. And the government should remember that when they were in opposition, after the '97 flood, they were complaining to the then Premier Filmon and his Cabinet that, you know, it's been two weeks, it's been four weeks, it's been six weeks and you still haven't paid these people. Well, now we're two years and, you know, we're kind of coming back at the government and saying, when are you going to help these people deal with their own situations and their—not only at the personal level but for municipalities not to be paid in these areas seems unconscionable.

And then to turn around and tell them that, well, we're going to distract you away—we're going to take your attention away from the fact that you were, you know—we're going to take you away from the fact that you're concerned about your day-to-day finances and balancing your own books and managing the flood impacts and fixing up your roads and dealing with the fact that we've got the biggest debt as a Province that we've ever had, that our deficit is a billion dollars, when even the Auditor General said there was probably only about \$300 million of it that—if that, responsible from the flood, for the programs that the government even put forth where they were the only ones paying the bill, such as some of the cottage owners and some of those areas around St. Laurent, Delta Marsh and other areas around Lake Manitoba that my colleagues and I toured last fall, last summer and the year before, and looked at all of the marshes that were still completely underwater, many of them in 8 feet of cattails. No natural vegetation growing, no hay to be got, can't have cattle back in your own ranch and all of these things.

And in the middle of this, the government says, ah, but now's the time—we picked the time now to force you to amalgamate and that's—that didn't seem

to be a responsible approach when many of these people are so busy that they can't even take the time to complain to their local councillor or reeve, because they're so busy trying to get their footing back underneath them with their own farms and families.

I saw a house, Mr. Deputy Speaker when we—Mr. Speaker, pardon me, when we—I just got used to saying Deputy Speaker now the Speaker's back so—I just—I saw a house that was half built last year, last fall when I was travelling in the Interlake and throughout the area around Lake Manitoba; this one just happened to be on the east side of the lake. It was half built. A young family wanted to come back and farm with their parents, and they just weren't sure if that was going to happen in spite of the fact that there was two children that could go into the local school and help out in that area, as I pointed out earlier, is happening in my region.

We may have lost a lot of cattle in my area as well, but the population of young people moving back is something that we should all strive to achieve in our rural municipalities—keeping as many of those young people in our areas and helping those jurisdictions municipally and commercially stay in business. And when you see how that works, as I pointed out with the one or two people in each community, it makes sense that we do everything we can to grow the economy, have the vision that our population is going to increase, not force them all into the City of Winnipeg, or maybe into Brandon or some of the larger centres in the province.

They are growing on their own as well, but it takes things like a Maple Leaf plant, like a CentrePort venture—it takes some vision in those areas to make things happen. And we haven't got a government—I was quite proud to bring forth the private members' resolution in this House to make CentrePort a tax-free location. And I think that that's the kind of vision that we need in this province to encourage opportunity for growth. You don't come in and say, we're going to force you to amalgamate, we think this is good for you without any consultation. Where it makes sense it's going to continue to grow.

*(16:50)

I talked about the thousand number, about how our party felt that that was a number that could be used for those who wanted to voluntarily amalgamate, and yet this government has taken it

and said: That's the number; take it or leave it. You're going to be amalgamated, and you have to have over a thousand people in that jurisdiction.

Or, as the—there's a study that was just done by the Rural Development Institute, strong rural municipalities in Manitoba, that was just released. Well, they said that the threshold should be 3,000 or more or maybe even a hundred-and-thirty-million tax base. Well, that sounds good, but even the municipalities have said: We're very concerned about those particular levels because there's still no magic in efficiencies in those areas. And, you know, a hundred-and-thirty-million-dollar assessment in some areas would be—you'd have to cover an awful lot of area to get to the hundred and thirty million in assessment, whereas in some towns that are growing faster than others and some rural-surrounding municipalities it would be much quicker.

And I would use the case of even a little community like Waskada. If you took the surrounding activity that's taking place there, it—you know, it may not have as high an assessment, but there's certainly lots of commercial happenings there with the number of oil companies that are in, the number of activities that's taking place there, right up through north of Elkhorn, through Sinclair and Tilston and some of those smaller communities on the west side of the province, through Melita, and Reston and Hartney and all of them up that west side, right up into Birtle. There's even wells being built in Foxwarren and seismographing being done in some of those areas now.

And I think we need to make sure that we're not putting things in place that will inhibit that growth because things do change, as I pointed out earlier. They do change, Mr. Speaker, to the point where, you know, you may not know what kind of activity will take place in those areas in the near future, what kind of growth may come along, whether, you know, in Brandon 20 years ago—wouldn't have thought that they'd have a hundred-million-dollar hog plant as the centre of slaughtering for meat production in the province here, a centre of exporting that product to places like China and Japan. Who knows what opportunities will come along? But you've got to keep the opportunity for those places to grow and be in place in order to have a strong opportunity to have a growth in the future.

So, Mr. Speaker, I say that there's a huge distraction brought forward by this government when

they brought this forward, and they were hoping that everybody'd forget about the problems of their own debt, their own deficit, the government, the NDP government's own debt and deficit, I mean. The municipalities certainly haven't forgot their own. They haven't forgot the commitment that this government made either in helping them out, and that has been broken as well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the last deadline I spoke of was the December 31, 2013—or the January 31, 2013 deadline. That was when the municipalities were supposed to give to the government its—their ideas for amalgamation. Well, a lot of the meetings that I went to, and I haven't even got into the plethora of letters that I've received here in regards to this project, municipalities across Manitoba have called my colleague the member from Midland and myself and others, MLAs from rural Manitoba, about why in the world did the government do this to us at this time. So where do they have the ability to force us to do this? And what happens to us if we don't?

So many of them took it upon themselves, and that's why we were at the meeting in Hartney in mid-January. It was a hundred and eighty people got together to say: We don't want to have anything to do with this. We are municipal officials. We weren't consulted; we didn't have anything to say on this; we don't want to have anything to do with it. And we're not going to.

And they wrote letters to the minister—maybe his colleagues don't know that, but the minister has many, many, many letters from municipal jurisdictions across this province that say they aren't going to—they aren't going to give them the names of the people they want to amalgamate with. Now, they run the risk of being forced, then, to, say, by the minister: We'll have the edict that you are a partner with that municipality or this one. And I said earlier sometimes there is a huge difference in the way those municipalities have been run.

Sometimes, through no malice from anyone, but because there might be a commercial entity in one municipality that gives them more revenue than another municipality, and that's where they need to work together closely to come together on a voluntary basis. But to force them to is something that I think that if left to their own wherewithal, they could come to over time.

The problem is that they're being told that they have to do this—you have to do it so that your new municipal boundaries will be in place in the spring of 2014 so that the municipal election that takes place in October of 2014 will be done under the new rules, and most of the municipalities that—in fact, the chairmen—the two—the co-chairs at that meeting, Mr. Atkinson and Mr. Drummond, that were at that meeting in Hartney that night indicated that, even if we all got along and we wanted to amalgamate, that it would probably be very, very tight on all of our agendas to be able to do that within the time frame that's been given. And, at that time, it was over a year and a half from last January.

Well, then, the bill didn't come in. The government didn't call—it was such an urgent thing they didn't call the House back in 'til April, Mr. Speaker. They could've brought it in two months before that, and we could've dealt with this legislation in February and March and helped—you know, maybe the government would've have their—but they didn't have their act together. That's why they didn't bring it forward.

So—but they could've called the House back earlier and dealt with some of these issues instead of, you know, now forcing us to put a hoist motion in place to have a discussion on this six months down the road. It gives people the time that they could've had to consult with them back in the winter, when municipalities had the time perhaps to do more of it. They are looking at the kinds of things that they would be forced to do, and there are a number of policing jurisdictions and other areas, when you look at the bill, that indicate that they're changing some other elections, and I just wanted to say that the deadline was—that I spoke of was January 31st.

What really got the municipal officials also upset at that particular meeting in Hartney—and there had been one, Mr. Speaker, in Oak River about a week or 10 days before this one where a number of municipalities in that jurisdiction had got together as well and indicated that they didn't want to have anything to do with this either and sent a joint letter to the minister to that effect, and a joint letter did come out of the meeting in Hartney.

And I know one of the councillors in Hartney very well, and he's quite adept at drafting a very succinct letter at times. And he put forward a very clear letter outlining why these municipalities felt the way they did and why they should not be forced to

amalgamate in this time frame by 2014. Many of them, then, at the mayors' and reeves' meetings around the province, said, why don't you at least give us four more years?

Now the minister in the bill is saying, well, we—under certain circumstances, we might give you until 2019, which is even after more than the municipalities wanted, but only under certain circumstances will I do that and I will have all the say as the minister, the member from Dawson Trails, how and when I decide to do that for you, if I do.

But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, the municipalities have no confidence in those words in that bill because they have been told to their face in those public meetings that when you will—that when he said that, well, now we have something to talk about—particularly, I'm referring to the meeting I was at in Waskada—when somebody said, well, why don't we just at least give us—defer this until 2018 municipal election? We'll have that opportunity, and he said, well, now we have something to talk about. But, in the next breath he said—well, then will you allow us to do that?—and he said, no, we're going to go ahead. We're going to force that amalgamation by two thousand and—by next spring.

So what's the use, Mr. Speaker, they feel like they are, you know, one minute you say, well, we'll do what we can to discuss this with you, even put things like this in the bill, but it gives him all of the significant complexities exist, I think, is the terminology in the bill that states that the minister can move that date—but he's going to force them to amalgamate by next summer.

So all we're trying to do is tell the government that they need to look at rethinking this, bring forth some more clearer thinking, have more time to discuss this with the ratepayers across the province of Manitoba and, never mind, the municipal mayors and reeves and councillors, and don't rush into it, Mr. Speaker. Give them time to be consulted and understand where they're going in regards to the whole process.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) will have unlimited time remaining.

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

CORRIGENDA

On May 16, 2013, page 1381, first column, third paragraph, should have read:

Now he's saying last year, then, infrastructure spending was \$1.4 billion. Can he give us an itemized list of where that \$1.4 billion is? And, if he's saying that this year it's going to be \$1.8 billion, and he knows that, can he provide us with a list of that \$1.8 billion in infrastructure spending? Otherwise, why should we believe him then?

On May 16, 2013, page 1388, first column, sixth paragraph, should have read:

Mr. Selinger: Normally, the minister will canvass the community for good names and we also—as the member might know—have a website where people can go on and register their interest in serving on any board or commission in Manitoba.

On May 21, 2013, page 1515, second column, 10th paragraph, should have read:

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 27, 2013

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are also available on the Internet at the following address:

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