

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
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WIGHT, Melanie	Burrows	NDP
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<i>Vacant</i>	Morris	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 28, 2013

The House met at 10 a.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 morning, colleagues. Please be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Are we ready to proceed with Bill 300?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: No.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS—
PUBLIC BILLS

Mr. Speaker: For debate on second readings of public bills, are we ready to proceed on Bill 202?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: We are.

Bill 202, The Increased Transparency and Accountability Act (Various Acts Amended), standing in the name of the honourable member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), who has one minute remaining.

**Bill 202—The Increased Transparency and
Accountability Act (Various Acts Amended)**

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave for this matter to remain standing in the name of the honourable member for Elmwood?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): In fact, whenever we look at accountability in this House, it's 'imparent' upon all of us to be sure that whenever we're talking about legislation, that we do the things that I have

been talking about from time to time, and that's making sure that we have ample conversations and consultations with those that are going to be impacted by the virtue of that particular bill.

And whenever we look at what's happened in this government's past, and we look at the PST increase alone—whenever we were out in the last election of 2011, we heard very clearly from the folks that we door-knocked on, and I'm sure the governments opposite, whenever they were knocking on doors as well, about what was really going to be the issues coming forward in the years to come. And what we talked about was taxes and how we're going to balance budget, how we're going to bring in legislation that's going to be beneficial for all Manitobans.

And whatever we really want to be able to do is be taken at our word. And whenever we break our word we see different things come about as a result of that, and it's unfortunate because what we heard at the door was, very clearly, that the NDP would not be bringing forward any tax increases. But we saw different; we saw a different version of early what had happened as a result of those promises that were made by the government, and whenever those promises were broken by the government people are reacting. People are saying, are we really a transparent government? Are we a party that can be trusted? Are we part of what can make Manitoba grow and prosper?

We also heard, besides the taxation, that the First Minister made it very clear and to his candidates that are running, many of which got elected on that promise. And I know very clearly that whenever we talked about those promises that were made at the door, I wonder what the response is going to be like whenever they go back and ask for that support a second time.

And I know that, you know, it was talked about at the convention the members opposite had on the weekend, and they think it's a great thing. Big difference between us and the NDP, and we've always felt that there always has been a difference but what we really couldn't define was how that difference was. And very clearly, as the government's pointed out, that this is their launch pad for the next campaign. They're going to be going to

be able to continue to raise taxes, raise the PST again. We really don't know what the limit's going to be. It could be another 1 per cent. It could be another 2 per cent. It could be another 3 per cent. We really have no idea because we haven't heard from the First Minister or the government on what their take's going to be in regards to an end number for what the PST is actually going to be.

What we've seen was an increase last year of roughly \$188 million on the backs of hard-working Manitobans, those same folks that go out and live within their means. They live under their budget. They live within their guidelines, and they can't go to the bank again and just be able to say, I need more money. I need to be able to live outside my budget. I don't have an empty piggy bank that I can go and just raid and all of a sudden replenish as a result of actually more money from a result of borrowing more money and putting their selves into farther and farther debt when they have no idea how they're ever going to repay—be able to repay that money.

So whenever government does the same thing, they're borrowing on the future. Now, just imagine that whenever you say to your kids and your grandkids that, I'm going to remortgage my house. I'm going to remortgage the car. I'm going to remortgage everything that I have and I'm hopeful that you'll be able to pay that off for me. Now, that doesn't make a lot of sense to me, Mr. Speaker, as I know that all members of this House want to be held to account.

And, again, it comes back to the transparency that we started talking about earlier. As a result of not being able to be able to pay that money back, that puts a burden on the next generation and the generation after that. So whenever we as a government, if we ran our household like that, very clearly we wouldn't be able to obtain that finance from the bank because the bank would say, enough's enough.

Governments operate just a little bit different. In fact, there's legislation in place on Bill 33 that has to deal with the municipalities and a forced amalgamation by this government. And the member yesterday from Arthur-Virden made it very clear, he—mean—he's just starting on the fact that about what this really is going to do to impact all those municipalities. And even the municipalities—the municipalities have guidelines at which they're able to borrow under, and those guidelines are very clear: based on assessment. Based on assessment they're

able to borrow money to match the assessment which they're able to be able to repay within a 10-year, 20-year lifespan of that debt.

Now, it's funny that we, as Manitobans, as municipal leaders, we have certain guidelines we have to live under and have to actually operate under. But yet government has another set of rules. How could that be? We want everybody else to accept the fact that we don't need to live under those means. We'll let your kids and your grandkids and the future generations pay for our mistakes, which is unfortunate because it comes back to being accountable. It comes back to being transparent. It comes back to be able to sit down with our folks and the people, the very people that elect us, and be able to take us at our word. And it's unfortunate whenever we go to the door and we lay out our platforms, that that platform means absolutely nothing. It's unfortunate that whenever those folks that decided to put an X beside the name of the individual they wanted to support based on the information that was provided to them, definitely left it open—open for change.

* (10:10)

And I know that governments get into a box, they get into a position where they're not able to fulfill all those commitments. And we know very clearly that there is things that does have to change. But whenever we talk about no increases whatsoever and the First Minister of this province come out and said, it's nonsense; we will not do that.

And yet, we know that—in fact, I've talked to people on both sides of the issue in regards to the PST. Some have made it very clear that the government needs to operate. I don't think there's a question about the ability to be able to operate and be able to meet the needs of all Manitobans. And we're very much in favour of making sure that front-line services—will there be enough of them to look after the sick, the elderly, those that are impacted by the daily operations?

What they're upset about is the way in which it was done. The way in which this government went out and very clearly said, we will not raise taxes; we will not break our promise—and yet they did. And then, to top it off, the other side of the coin is very clear, is that they wanted to have a referendum. There's legislation in place that was brought in to protect the taxpayers of this fine province that we all represent. And whenever they take that right away—whenever they take the right away to not have a say

until the next election—and we know full well that whatever the campaign of the day is, that—the business of the day—they may remember; they may not.

But what is very clear today, they want their right to be exercised, to talk about the referendum, to be able to vote on that referendum. And whenever we deny that right, it's obscene. It's obscene to the fact that people feel, yes, there is a need for government to be able to raise taxes; that's what they're in power to do. But whenever you do it without consultation—without breaking the law—and we've seen very clearly that this law has been broken.

It's unfortunate that the government's decided to go that particular direction. I don't think that would be the right thing; in fact, I'm very clear with the constituents that I represent. And I've read petitions in this House from almost every day since the—we were able to draft a petition and get it approved by the Assembly to be able to read out. And I know the Speaker's [*inaudible*] been ruled on—many angry Manitobans, and we will never use that word again in this House, because that is true. People are angry; people are upset.

And whenever we start reading these petitions we get a little, maybe, too passionate about the fact that we put these words in, and we're very clear that the ruling is one we're going to support. But whenever we're meeting with these folks, we feel their pain; we feel their unjust in not be able to have a referendum, not be able to have their voices exercised, and in a democratic way. A way that we'll be able to say yes on the ballot box, no on the ballot box; I'm not in favour of the PST increase, yes, I'm in favour of it. But, at the end of the day, we have to be held to account. We have to appear and be with no doubt, no question, that we're going to listen to the public, the ones that elected us to be here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): It's great to be able to rise today to talk about this bill. The member opposite spoke about how, you know, we are not open and we didn't have a transparent process. We had budget consultations around the province during the last budget.

And, you know, they—the member opposite talks about we should be able to take people at their word. Yes, Mr. Speaker, I agree with that. So should we take them at their word where they said, we will not

sell MTS? And then a few weeks after the election, MTS was sold.

So, you know, it's kind of hypocritical to be saying that we should take people at their word and that things will never change. And, you know what? I—maybe some things won't change. The Conservatives will obviously say that they're not going to sell things, and then they will.

You know, they talk about taking people at their word—is this the same word that talks about reckless cuts to health care? You know, the member opposite said he's willing to meet the needs of Manitobans, but yet, in the same breath they say they're going to meet the needs of Manitobans, they propose \$52 million in cuts to health care. So what's transparent and open about that?

And, you know, they won't even table what their—what the cuts are. They say 1 per cent, we're going to just cut. It's a really easy number, we'll throw it out there—\$52 million in health care. What are they going to cut? Is it 700 nurses? That's the equivalent to 700 nurses, Mr. Speaker.

So, you know, they talk about being transparent, but their very own party is less than transparent. And I love how the members opposite have such a great interest in our convention, which is fantastic. It was open and—it was open to the public. In fact, they actually had a staff member attend. He sat at the back. I went over and chatted with him, really nice guy. I actually had a beer with him later on in the evening and we sat down and we talked about, you know, the differences in the party and how our party's open and he's allowed to attend convention. I'm actually wondering, Mr. Speaker, if it was the chief of staff from the opposition that paid for his dues to come to the convention, but, you know, I mean, they want to talk about open and transparency, we're talking about Nigel Wright writing a \$90,000 cheque from their same party, and I'm wondering who paid for the—maybe they'll table that—who paid for the convention fees for their member who came to observe our very open and transparent convention.

I mean, they want to talk about open and transparency. This is coming from the same party whose federal counterparts lost \$3 billion. Poof, mid-air, \$3 billion, they can't find it in the budget. Open and transparent, Mr. Speaker.

Let's talk about open and transparent. We're going to account for every dollar that we're putting

into this Building Manitoba Fund. Every dollar of this PST will be accounted for, and our fine Finance Minister will stand up here next year and he will table a report saying that—every dollar, this is where it's been spent.

And you know what? It's not only going to be our dollar that we're spending. It's going to be federal counterpart dollars because they have a 10-year building program which the members opposite obviously have no problem with because it's their party that's tabled that. And we're going to match that dollar for dollar.

And we're going to keep building Manitoba, building bridges so we don't have bridge collapses like we saw last week in the States, and thankfully nobody was killed when that bridge collapsed. I can't imagine the people's fear when they rode that bridge to the bottom of the river. And, you know, I went to—I was in Québec, Mr. Speaker, and at—in Montréal, and underneath the bridges they have these great big cargo nets catching the chunks of concrete falling from the bridges.

Well, in Manitoba we don't have that, because you know why? We have a plan. We renew our infrastructure and we keep it—we keep building and we keep changing the infrastructure as we need it. We have a plan here in Manitoba, unlike other provinces. And the funny thing is, Mr. Speaker, is we still have the third lowest PST in the country, even though they complain.

And you talk about having the low taxes. Five years ago the GST-PST combo was 14 per cent. On July 1st it'll be 13 per cent, so we're still paying less than we were five years ago. And Manitoba ticked along just fine. Our economy was moving, no problem.

And the member opposite spoke about, you know, when are they going to be done? How are we going to know that they're not going to raise the PST more and more and more? Well, you know, yesterday in the Free Press there was a great article talking about how our Premier (Mr. Selinger) addressed our very open and transparent convention and talked about how—you know what? We have—we're—this PST that we're putting in place is going to be enough to make sure that we keep building the province and moving forward for the next 10 years. And it is a 10-year temporary program that we're going to—that automatically reverts at the end of 10 years, it just disappears—to match the federal

dollars of the federal government and to keep building.

So it's kind of funny that they talk about transparency when their own party is not transparent. They don't have transparency in their own party. The member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Cullen) last week was in the House and he stood up and he talked about how his hydro bill is \$210 a month because he has electric heating in his house. I have a friend who currently lives in Thompson and she was telling me when I talked about this, how he was complaining about his hydro bill being \$210 a month with electric heat, how she lived in BC, and when she lived in BC and she had electric heat in her house there her hydro bill was well over \$400.

And the members opposite have always talked about having a market rate system for hydro. They're not hiding that. So let's just assume that they don't—that they're being open and transparent and honest and they don't sell our Manitoba hydro, our greatest asset to our province. Let's assume that they decide that they're not going to sell it. They're still saying that we should pay market rates here in Manitoba. So the member for Spruce Woods, his hydro bill would go up by \$210 dollars, double or more, if we're paying market rate. So how is that going to affect his bottom line and his income?

They're fear mongering right now about the PST. You want to talk about open and transparent and honest? We had the member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen) stand up in the House saying that his friend had 40 per cent of his income is PST-applicable, and it's going to cost him \$576 more a year, Mr. Speaker. That means 40 per cent of this gentleman's income—he's spending \$57,600 a year. And that's just 40 per cent of his income that he's spending as disposable income with the PST. So that means his total spending overall is well over a hundred thousand dollars. I think the members opposite, if we're talking about transparent and honest, they should be talking about who's the average Manitoban. Does the average Manitoban have \$576 a year and more in PST, \$57,000 a year in PST-applicable spending? I highly doubt that, since the average Manitoban doesn't make \$57,000 a year. So I think that the open and transparency part, they really need to look within their own caucus and start talking about open and transparency.

* (10:20)

The leader of their opposition stands up in this House and says \$1,600 a year, Mr. Speaker, it's

going to cost the average Manitoban. Well, and that might be true for the Leader of the Opposition because he's going to buy two or three Lexuses, or Lexi, as the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) said. So, you know, we've got two or three Lexi, and yes, that might cost him \$160,000—or sorry, \$1,600 a year in PST or \$160,000 in spending, if he spends that, but, once again, how about being open and honest and transparent with Manitobans and talk about how the average Manitoban lives, not spending \$160,000 a year on Lexi.

I don't actually—I can honestly say I don't know anybody that owns a Lexi. So, you know, Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that they talk about all of these big, huge transparency initiatives, but here they are speaking out of both sides of their mouth talking about that we should be transparent but our party isn't transparent—oh, we should be transparent but fearmongering in the public about how much the PST's going to cost.

I did calculations in my own household, Mr. Speaker, and it works out to about \$8 a month for PST [*inaudible*] that I spend in a month, because it's not on food, it's not on gas, it's not on your home heating. There's a whole bunch of things that are carved out.

Now, the members opposite want to talk about open and transparent. They were talking about when they were in the meeting for Finance, when they were talking in Estimates, they talked—they asked the member—they asked for HST. How will we go about implementing it? That's what the member asked. He asked the Finance Department about HST, so let's talk about being open and honest. Why don't they come out and tell us their position about the HST, which would cost Manitobans \$400 million more a year?

So, you know, they're talking about being open and honest. Well, let's do that. Let's have a great, frank discussion and find out exactly where they stand. Market rate for hydro, we know that's where they stand, so let's double your hydro bill. For me, that's an extra 125 bucks a month. So that \$8 on PST that I spend is looking pretty good, actually.

You talk about—they talk about the HST. Well, that would not carve out for all the things that the PST carves out for and costs me a lot more money a month because the HST doesn't carve out for food and on home heating and all that other stuff.

So, you know, they're talking about finding—being transparent and talking about being open and honest, but meanwhile, they're not willing to table where they're looking at their budget. They're talking about HST. They're talking about cuts, 1 per cent across the board. Well, what—table it. Table where these cuts are going to come from. It's very easy for them to say that there's easy to cut. Well, where are they going to cut? Because every cut they're going to make is going to affect people.

The member opposite spoke about how he wants to take care of Manitobans. Taking care of Manitobans how? By closing hospitals? Closing the Grace Hospital was one of their initiatives in the '90s. They looked at closing a hospital. Well, you know what we did? We invested in that hospital, Mr. Speaker. We made that hospital better and we're investing more into it because we realize the value of these community hospitals.

We prepare our financial statements according to national standards. We show them. We table it. It's in the budget. You look at the budget, it talks about how much people are saving in Manitoba. From the time that the members opposite were in power in '99, if you took your same tax structure, and people now would be paying less. In fact, the member sitting in front here, she was talking—she would actually benefit from it, because it's \$80,000 a year. The member opposite's saving a couple thousand dollars a year in taxes under our tax structure.

So I think it's fantastic that they talk about transparency because we are transparent, Mr. Speaker. We're very transparent and we talk about all the advantages that we have in Manitoba and we make sure that we're going to move on and build for the future and build for tomorrow and we're not going to make reckless cuts like the members opposite suggest. Thank you.

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): I'd like to start by thanking the member from Tuxedo for bringing forward Bill 202, Increased Transparency and Accountability Act. Unlike the member opposite, I won't be talking about 1999 because I wasn't involved in government in 1999, but I will go back to 2011, as long as I have been involved in government.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba needs to know the truth about the Province's finances. They have a right to know exactly where provincial revenues will be raised. Manitobans cannot trust governments that hide a billion-dollar deficit until after the election.

The government lied; the books were not even close to being on track.

In the election campaign of 2011, we saw every single member opposite going door to door to—in their constituencies and promise not to raise taxes. The Premier (Mr. Selinger) stated, and I quote, our plan is a five-year plan to ensure that we have future prosperity without any tax increases—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. It appears that the honourable member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) and the honourable member for St. Norbert (Mr. Gaudreau) wish to have a private discussion. Might I encourage both of you to use the loge to my left or to my right to have that discussion so that I'll be able to hear the honourable member for La Verendrye during his comments.

The honourable member for La Verendrye, to continue.

Mr. Smook: Mr. Speaker, I'll start up.

The Premier stated, and I quote, our plan is a five-year plan to ensure that we have future prosperity without any tax increases, and we'll deliver on that; we're ahead of schedule right now.

Mr. Speaker, how could the Premier make such a huge mistake and be that far from reality? We're not talking about a few dollars on a budget. Between the tax and fee increases in the budget of 2012, now the sales tax increase and other increases in Budget 2013, this NDP government will take close to a billion dollars out of the pockets of Manitoba taxpayers in these two years.

Mr. Speaker, this is not some small mistake or oversight. I have little faith in someone who, in October of 2011, said, ridiculous idea that we're going to raise the sales tax—that's total nonsense—everybody knows that. Now, in the last two budgets, the NDP want to give hard-working Manitobans two of the biggest tax-increase budget we've seen in a long time. When he said no tax increases, one can only assume that the Premier knew that what he was saying in the election of 2011 was untrue.

Did the members opposite know that their election promises were untrue? If they believed the Premier, that he would not raise taxes, now that he has, what are they telling their constituents? What are their constituents telling them? Do the members opposite feel it is okay to be untruthful to their constituents?

Mr. Speaker, this government keeps introducing consumer protection bills to protect Manitobans from— from unscrupulous businesses. There presently is legislation, called The Balanced Budget, Debt Repayment and Taxpayer Protection Act, to 'protect'—protect taxpayers from government. It seems very hypocritical that the government feels they have to protect consumers with new legislation, but are willing to gut existing legislation that protects consumers from the government.

One of the key points of the taxpayer protection act is that the government cannot—and I repeat—cannot put into place any major tax increases without a referendum. The referendum lets the taxpayers decide if a tax increase is necessary. With Bill 20, the NDP will gut present legislation and allow them to make major tax increases whenever they want. So this might not be the last one. The Premier hasn't ruled out that this is going to be the last tax increase while he's in his mandate.

To make matters worse, the NDP is forging ahead with this PST increase no matter what anybody says. Mr. Speaker, is this NDP government going to listen to the taxpayers that come to committee to express their views on Bill 20? Minister of Finance (Mr. Struthers) has already said the bill is going into place. They're starting to collect PST as of July 1st, doesn't matter what anybody has to say. And I think that's wrong. People deserve the right, in this country, to be able to vote on things that are important to them, and this government does not have the right to break the law.

When Budget 2013 was introduced, there was such an urgency to get the budget passed, to get the sales tax installed so they could start collecting money on it. This government, at first, kept saying that, well, it's for flood protection; it's for flood mitigation work. But you don't start flood mitigation work in the middle of a flood.

* (10:30)

Was the government being truthful to the people of Manitoba when they were asking for that money? But when asked about what projects they had, they couldn't produce any projects that were engineered, drawn and ready to go. It's kind of difficult to—it's like putting the horse before—or the cart before the horse. The—if there's no projects that are ready to go, you can't really start doing it, so there was no need to start spending money immediately.

The next thing they came up with was infrastructure, our roads and our bridges. Yes, our roads and our bridges in this province need a lot of work, but where have this—where's this government been for the last 13 years? How can everything just pile up at the last minute where it's so important? I think the government needs to look at and come up with a plan, because you don't start spending the kind of millions and billions of dollars they want to spend without having a plan, and the citizens of this province deserve to be part of that plan.

The one thing they have done in this province is double the debt during their time in office, all when we've had record transfer payments from the federal government, some of the lowest interest rates in history and some good economic times. During times like this we should not be running a deficit, let alone increasing our debt and doubling it. This is when we should be putting money aside for a later date. They had a rainy-day fund, which they squandered.

This government really needs to take a good look at what they're doing in this province—they have not been truthful with the people of this province. And I feel that they need to start telling the truth, because if they don't, anybody knows that people work hard all their lives to establish credibility. This government, in the last year and a half that I've been here, has nothing but destroy the credibility of government with all the untruths they've told, with all the different ideas they've come up with.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think this government is on the right path. They're not being truthful with the people of this province. They need to be more accountable and they need to be transparent, because if they're not going to do this, they won't be in government for very long.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs): I'm pleased to put a few words on the record on this interesting proposal. I look forward to saying what we have continued to do as a government and simple things about accountability. Accountability is where you put information and give people information that they can then look at and deal with. So, I look at some of the accountability measures that our government has put forward.

One of them is the fact that we actually put waiting lists for health-care tests online. Now, yes, sometimes we even get criticized from the members

opposite by putting them online. The big difference between us and them, though, is there were no lists, they never tracked the lists; they never tracked any waiting; they just ignored the whole situation. And then they sit there and they say, now we have a waiting list. Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe it is appropriate to actually have the waiting lists online to measure against other jurisdictions and actually have appropriate transparency.

I look at the members opposite—the members opposite often talk about accountability, but their federal cousins in Ottawa who have the ability to put MPs' and senators' information online, choose to hide it, and they continue to hide it. And their party votes regularly to ignore Auditor General and other people to provide transparency as their federal counterparts. And, by the way, when they say, oh, it's not us; when the Conservatives were in government, they did not put ministerial expenses online. I'm pleased to be part of a government that puts ministerial expenses online quarterly, itemizes them, et cetera. And I'll have you know, Mr. Speaker, I look at Senator Duffy and others who actually not only inappropriately claimed things but also did not have the transparency that we enjoy in Manitoba, and so I think that's very important.

When we talk about accountability, I am pleased to say that we have one set of books that follows generally acceptable account—privili—process. And what's interesting is that the members opposite, the Conservatives, not only did not have—follow the generally accepted accounting principles, but they had two sets of books, one on top of the table and one under the table. They actually did not account for debt. They didn't pay off debt.

So when they were building two casinos, they were building two casinos off book. There was no way of paying for them. They didn't even record them in the one set of books that the government had. And so it's interesting how they have not responded to the claim where they were not open and transparent on their economics of those two casinos, and it's there. It's in black and white.

Mr. Speaker, I also look at the fact that the auditor did not sign off on the last two sets of books that the federal—that the provincial Conservatives passed. So in other words, they had books that were not transparent, that were not accurate, and did not provide a plain and true disclosure of what the accounting of this province was.

And it's interesting because they say, well, you know, you're about bad managers, and I disagree because here's what's happened. We actually put money into the pension liability. They're saying, oh, the liability wasn't debt. It just was some that we owed in the future. I'm pleased to be part of the government that actually put money into the pension liability for civil servants and teachers because that way there's real money there. And they didn't even account for that in their books when they were government. They did not put government money in and contribute the employer's half of pensions to teachers or civil servants. I'm pleased that we're doing that so that there's real money there so that people are entitled to their pensions.

And I think it was bad accounting, but even worse, employment standards. When you are having employees, you have teachers, and you don't actually put money there so that they can have a long-term pension. So I find it interesting when the auditor—I would be embarrassed if the auditor didn't sign off on our books.

I also am very, very pleased that some of the other measures that we've taken into account was the fact that Hydro under the Conservative government had a 90-10 debt-to-equity ratio. In other words, they only had 10 per cent equity in the entire company. I'm pleased that we continue to pay down the debt. We continue to build up the assets and modernize the assets. And, Mr. Speaker, now it's a 75 per cent debt to 25 per cent equity. So it's two and a half times better than when the Conservatives were in power. And we're building the company. And we're building—were renovating some of the dams, and we're bringing them up so that they're up to date and they can have more energy efficiency. And, you know, those are all things that we have done.

And the other thing that's really important is we've looked at the debt and we've said that we want to continue to pay down the debt. We actually look at it and amortize things and pay it down, and I think that's a very, very positive thing.

Mr. Speaker, other things that we continue to do is we require department annual reports to be posted online for access to all people. We make sure that there's additional information made available to public on departmental websites. We make sure that we follow—our financial statements follow national accounting standards and make sure that it—our summary budget is available online. We provide an annual report as part of the Public Accounts process.

And, you know, we make sure that we comment and have dialogue with the Auditor General to continue to improve our accounting or reporting processes.

These are all real things and they make a difference because—whether it's the waiting lists or supports or access to information, we think that we need to continue to do that.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that we continue to do is we actually put comparisons in our budget, and we look at that and say how we compare against other provinces. And I'm pleased to say that we continue to move that forward.

We also have other accountability measures. And I look at the members opposite and right now they're fighting to keep all these municipalities, regardless of size, regardless of ability to move forward—they fight. They want to believe in more government and they want all these municipalities. And I find it passing strange that the Conservatives—the Conservatives—want to keep hundreds and hundreds of small municipalities. I am—I was surprised, but not shocked that they want to support more government, more layers of government, and so I find it passing strange that they want more and more municipalities rather than having larger municipalities that create—have more capacity and more ability to create service.

*(10:40)

I find the interesting part is where we merged health authorities, they actually created a lot of health—RHAs. We actually moved that down. So while they are creating I believe 12 or 13 RHAs, we're now down to five. So five is less than 11 to 13; I know that, Mr. Speaker. In fact, they used to have 2 RHAs here in the city of Winnipeg, and so that was interesting.

I also look at the merging of school divisions. We actually moved forward on an amalgamation of—when we used to have 52 school divisions, we moved it to less and less school trustees, less administration, and, you know, I find it funny that they're not—

An Honourable Member: Fifty-seven.

Mr. Rondeau: Oh, there was 57 school divisions. Thank you. So from 57 to about 32?

An Honourable Member: Fifty-four to 37.

Mr. Rondeau: Fifty-four to 37. Thank you very much.

I also—and by the way, 37 is less than 54, for the members opposite. I also look at accountability this way, when we know that we need to follow an appropriate example. So I'm pleased that we led by example and took a 20 per cent reduction on ministerial salaries because I think that's a fair move, and I look at expanding lean management practices to more departments. We're making sure that we look from outside in to make sure it's efficient.

I know that when I was minister of Industry, we put in BizPaL, which was a great efficiency measure. Not only that, it was supported by the federal government—the federal Conservative government. It was supported by industry and business. It was supported by municipalities and, of course, the Province, which is all positive.

So we're amalgamating government offices. We're looking at lean manufacturing and making sure that the lean does take place in government. We make sure that we're merging liquor and lotteries to create more efficiencies to make sure that we save money. We look forward to putting more things online to make sure people have access to the information they need, and, Mr. Speaker, I think what we have to do is continue this accountability and transparency that we have started that wasn't around when the Conservatives were in government. Thank you, Sir.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to recognizing the next speaker, I want to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today from Westgrove Adult Learning Centre 10 adult students under the direction of Val Christie. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger).

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

* * *

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to stand up on behalf of the Lac du Bonnet constituents to put a few words on the record in regards to Bill 202, The Increased Transparency and Accountability Act, which was brought forward by our member of Tuxedo. Basically, we're going to chat for a little bit about this bill in regards to exactly what the title has to say, the transparency and accountability act.

Mr. Speaker, this government said, back in September 2nd, 2011, and I quote: Today's release of the 2010-2011 Public Accounts shows that the First Minister's five-year economic plan is on track to return to the budget to balance by 2014 while protecting jobs and services without raising taxes. The Premier had said this early on in the election of 2011, and where are we at today? We're at—the new plan is a 20-year plan or a 25-year plan or 30-year plan—we're not quite sure; it keeps changing every year.

The whole point, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that many of the members across the way on the government side of the House had gone around and did their campaigning during the 2011 election, and not one of them had actually gone to the doors—knocked on the doors and said hello to their constituents and informed them that once they get into government, they're going to put in some increased fees and taxes in the 2012 budget, and then they were going to follow that up with a one-point PST hike, which equates to approximately 14 per cent in the 2013 budget.

So transparency and accountability, again, we seem to be taking the voice out from the grassroots, or many of our Manitobans; this government doesn't seem that they want to even be listening to those people.

I know that the member from Assiniboia had mentioned about how we, on this side of the House, are looking to municipalities as far as increased levels of government. Well, that can't be farther from the truth, Mr. Speaker. It actually is the fact that we're not opposed to amalgamations of municipalities. What basically—what we're in favour of is the fact that how the process is thrown out there in the Throne Speech—in 2012, they basically brought it out in the Throne Speech and sort of hammered it down to municipalities, basically forced amalgamation.

And the point is, is there are some municipalities out there that actually do want to amalgamate with their neighbours and I think that this government should turn their sights on some of those municipalities that are looking to get some guidance to get those amalgamations done, Mr. Speaker, as opposed to some of them that are being forced and basically the government is changing some of the rules on what constitutes a municipality and the different sizes—they're taking again those voices away from a lot of Manitobans.

Two examples of that—and I know I've mentioned maybe once or twice in this House—Victoria Beach, which has permanent residents under a thousand, but when you tie in all of the seasonal residents we're looking at about 2,200 to 2,400 taxpayers, Mr. Speaker. And so why do they not deserve a vote in regards to the amalgamations?

Then we have the town and the RM of Lac du Bonnet who stood up willingly at AMM convention in November and said that they were more than willing to start the process for amalgamation. So part of the issue here, Mr. Speaker, is that it's a forced amalgamation and there's no reason why the Minister for Local Government could not have actually sat down with those municipalities that they were seemingly being forced—or that they are being forced to amalgamate and have those conversations and start a good plan. A lot of those municipalities have been in effect for 90-plus, a hundred-plus years. And the minister for some reason wants to squash all those municipalities in a matter of 10 months.

That's one example, Mr. Speaker, as far as the lack of transparency and accountability on the government side. The other ones, again, as I mentioned in my little bit of a preamble, is that in the budget of 2012, they brought in \$284 million in extra fees and taxes and they were hidden, they didn't go out to the public and have a conversation with them and see what they sort of—would have—liked, what they could sort of stomach, or what they couldn't.

And then what do they do in the Budget 2013? They raise the—they decide to raise the PST by one point, which is again, as I mentioned earlier, approximately 14 per cent, which is equating to 270–\$237 million in extra taxes on hard-working Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

And they stand up in the House—the government side stands up in the House on a day-to-day basis, touting how they are the party for the poor, Mr. Speaker. And these fee increases over the last couple of years are totalling just over—or just about \$500 million—half a billion dollars, which is going to equate, if you take in last year's fee increases, this year's PST hike, which is going to equate to about \$1,600 per family of four of Manitobans. And what are they going to do with the shortage of that \$1,600?

So with this bill, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, it is going to increase the accountability of this spenDP government for their decisions and make information easy to access for all Manitobans.

* (10:50)

I urge that all parties in the Legislature support this bill and the concept of transparent and honest accounting in this government. So I thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): It's a great privilege to provide some commentary and my perspective about the Bill 202, and I want to refer to my past experience as being a municipal official for 20 years of my life.

And we have to do a fair comparison when we talk about the position I represent today and what I did as a councillor and a reeve in the RM of Mossey River for 20 years of my life. The reality is, is that there is unexpected expenditures that occur on every day in governments regardless what organization you represent. And there are times that you have to make the tough decisions, but the reality is that as municipal governments we have to raise mill rates occasionally to improve infrastructure, we need to improve bridges, we need to improve our roads, we need to buy new equipment for the betterment of the ratepayers. And that is exactly what the provincial government has made forward when we talk about the budget of 2012. I know the past president of the AMM organization is making some commentaries right now, but I do remember, being involved in the AMM organization, about some of his commentaries about amalgamations. But I do want to refrain from elaborating on those commentaries at that point in time.

But I want to stay focused on what we talk about—the visionary of our government in the Budget 2012. The fact is that we are working in co-operation and 'transparency' with the taxpayers out there 'about' the betterment. You know, we are faced with costs of \$1.2 billion of the flood of 2011, and we are continuing to work. The unfortunate thing—the partnership that we assumed that we would have had with the federal government of cost sharing on some of the flood costs is not quite evident. And speaking on behalf of agriculture, I know the producers out in Lake Manitoba have been challenged with ongoing flood of 2011. And I want to assure, for the record, that I've been in communication with Minister Ritz asking for additional compensation for the Lake Manitoba producers. And let's be honest; the commentary is that the federal government is not prepared to pay flood costs of a continuation from the previous—2011. But I want to ensure, for the

record, that we continue to talk to the federal department of continuing concerns we have for the Manitoba livestock producers around Lake Manitoba. And I want to acknowledge my friend, the MLA from Interlake; we've been working constantly, communicating with the livestock producers in Lake Manitoba, for the betterment of the economy of the province of Manitoba.

Let me also ensure, for the record, when we talk about challenges we face financially—I'm sure members opposite are quite familiar with community pastures—and it's quite evident that it would be a perfect world if our government chose to say, you know what, we're no longer interested in this component. And let me refer to the community pastures. The federal government has taken the 'dedious' task of saying we're not interested anymore, but we'll help you for another year, and then from thereon in let the provincial government or let it be sold privately. Well, I want to assure the members opposite the government of Manitoba, the Agriculture Department, is working with community groups' co-operative inventions for the importance of keeping the cattle industry viable. I'm sure members opposite are quite familiar with the challenges cattle producers are facing today, and we need to sustain community pastures as a viable, economical means of providing grazing opportunities for the young entrepreneurs, the young ranchers that are upcoming. As we all know, the average age of agricultural producers, in the mid-50s and greater, and we need the young generation to continue the livestock industry in the province of Manitoba. And I see it very important. So I'm very proud of Manitoba Agriculture being involved with other organizations for the viability, the importance of the livestock industry, community pastures being one of them. And I want to make that known on the record.

I also want to be very proud to say that we are very focused on health care in the province of Manitoba. Just recently, in the village of Winnipegosis we were able to get a doctor to come into a small community that services a very large area of residents. And the challenge is, is to find a medical professional to come into the small communities. And I want to thank the Health Minister for her dedication. I want to thank the regional health authorities for their commitment to provide that service in small communities and the rural economy of the province of Manitoba

And that is what the budget was all about. The 'transparency' is that we need to stay focused on

front-line services, whether it's health care and education. And when we talk about education, we want to talk about the apprenticeship program. If there's economical means of providing services, whether it be in Dauphin, whether it be in Swan River, whether it be in Beausejour, or whether it be in these small communities, the fact is that we have some visionary of providing a strong education for the young apprentices of the world. And there's no need to come in to the large centres of Winnipeg or Brandon to continue your education. There is alternative mechanisms when we talk about education for the young entrepreneurs.

And I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, you're quite aware of the potential building Hydro dams, the Bipole III lines, the new dams. Obviously, our records are showing if we can create—and we will. We will create 2,000 new employee jobs when the hydro dams are being—when we talk about Bipole III it's basically the economic benefit of the province of Manitoba to move forward with the hydro development for the betterment of employment.

But the young entrepreneurs that I'm talking about, we're talking about trade people in the carpentry. We're talking about the people that work in electrical, the plumbing. The opportunities there are so, so great. You know, we're often compared to the Albertas of the world. What we're saying today is Manitoba has a visionary to move forward to be a government-run operation as far as Manitoba Hydro to provide strong employment for the future young entrepreneurs of the province of Manitoba, regardless of what.

We are still facing—let's be honest about it. We're in no position to sell Manitoba Hydro. And let me tell you, the scars of the sale of MTS, when the members opposite were in government chose to sell MTS, we are faced with challenges of the cellphone services. That we're challenged—on a daily basis I get calls from people from here all over the province of Manitoba. What happened to cellphone? What happened to the MTS? I was quick to remind them, do not forget that members opposite when they in government, they chose to reduce MTS services by selling the Crown corporation.

We as a government are in no position to consider that at all. And I want to assure you, the requests of the MTS—we are, as a government, on constant communication to provide cellphone service, and that is a commitment our government is moving forward on end—on cellphone service.

Because not only do we see it as a communication, but it's truly becoming a safety factor in agriculture provide in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I want to assure you that our government is committed to providing good, strong agriculture services. I want to elaborate on going forward too. We've been in very strong consultation. We have signed the deal. We are moving forward in agriculture, and I want to ensure the general public: agriculture is one of the greatest economic spinoffs we have in the province of Manitoba. We generate 10.1 billion indirect economic dollars in the province of Manitoba. We have set the visionary movement towards providing alternative markets. I am very impressed, being involved, the Agriculture Minister for the last year and a half and it's a true honour. It's a true honour to have delegates come from India, China to talk to our province of Manitoba. We are interested in moving forward of—in new business partnerships in international markets.

One of our greatest assets that our government has been involved in: the Food Development Centre in Portage la Prairie. I'm sure the MLA from Portage is well aware of the benefits our government—we had the visionary. We continued to see the visionary of the Food Development Centre. What we have is the products we grow in this province of Manitoba, agriculture products. We have the opportunity to use the Food Development Centre as a secondary idea of the processing of we—so we can build a secondary industry to have a finished product not only grown in here, but also processed in here and sold to the Third World countries regardless where they are.

But our government is committed to agriculture. Our government is committed to front-line services, Mr. Speaker. We are committed to the doctors. We are committed to the teachers of the education of—and I'm very proud to speak on behalf of the budget of 2012 and the 'transparency' our government sees in it, and we truly believe in bill—do not believe in 202 needs to be brought in.

Thank you for the time, and it's a great honour to speak on behalf of that.

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, in the unlimited time I have available this morning, I—but I just want to make a comment about the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko). And he did offer his support in the House to amalgamation, which is a great thing and I'm hoping that he'll convince his colleagues to cease their filibuster on Bill 33 and

pass it so we can have amalgamation here in this province—

* (11:00)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Selkirk will have nine minutes remaining.

The hour being 11 a.m., it's time for private members' resolutions, and the resolution we will have under consideration this morning is the one sponsored by the honourable member for Maples, titled "Observance of Funeral Customs".

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 11—Observance of Funeral Customs

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): I move, seconded by the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe),

WHEREAS cremation is an important custom of many religions to respectfully honour a loved one that has passed away; and

WHEREAS cremation is a controlled process that is strictly monitored and regulated; and

WHEREAS there are no regulations specific to the scattering of cremated remains in Manitoba; and

WHEREAS in many jurisdictions, including Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador and Ontario, cremated remains may be scattered on waterways and Crown land.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba recognize the significance of the religious custom of scattering of cremated remains and consider adopting a policy similar to Ontario, allowing cremated remains to be scattered on waterways and unoccupied Crown land.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Maples, seconded by the honourable member for Concordia,

WHEREAS cremation is an important—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

And is it the pleasure of the House to consider the resolution as printed in today's Order Paper?
[Agreed]

WHEREAS cremation is an important custom for many religions to respectfully honour a loved one that has passed away; and

WHEREAS cremation is a controlled process that is strictly monitored and regulated; and

WHEREAS there are no regulations specific to the scattering of cremated remains in Manitoba; and

WHEREAS in many jurisdictions, including Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador and Ontario, cremated remains may be scattered on waterways and Crown land.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba recognize the significance of the religious custom of scattering of cremated remains and consider adopting a policy similar to Ontario, allowing cremated remains to be scattered on waterways and unoccupied Crown land.

Mr. Saran: Mr. Speaker, the resolution—be it resolved that Manitoba recognize the significance of the religious custom of scattering cremated remains and adopt a policy similar to Ontario, allowing cremated remains to be respectfully scattered on designated unoccupied Crown land and waterways.

Manitoba is proud of its multiculturalism. Our multicultural society gives our province and our country an excitement and vibrancy like no other place in the world.

We are dedicated to building relationships and connections among communities so that barriers of racism and prejudices are eliminated from our society and that our society is one of inclusion, where all feel welcome and accepted.

Because of our respect for human diversity and promotion of multiculturalism, Manitoba tries to accommodate cultural practices in as many ways as possible, including when they differ from mainstream practices.

Our Province is recognized as being at the forefront of successful multiculturalism policy, programming and celebration of diversity. The New York Times called Manitoba a bastion of parka-clad diversity.

Manitoba's commitment to immigration was affirmed in 2003 in the government's Action Strategy for Economic Growth, which identified growth through immigration as one of the seven growth pillars for the province.

With the ever-rising popularity of the Provincial Nominee Program, so too grows our province's international profile, as well as the rich fabric of Manitoba's traditionally diverse society.

The Manitoba Human Rights Code prohibits unreasonable discrimination and advances inclusion on the following relevant grounds: ancestry, nationality or national origin, ethnic background or origin, religion or creed or religious belief, religious association or religious activity. The Manitoba actively supports—the Manitoba NDP actively supports and enforces the Manitoba Human Rights Code so that every Manitoban feels welcome, included and safe.

We strongly value our province's history and recognize our important relationship to the First Nation and Metis people of our province. Our Aboriginal communities play a vital part of our province's culture, and our government has taken important steps to recognize and protect Aboriginal culture and traditional lands of First Nation and Metis communities.

And we also strongly value immigrants and the fresh perspectives they bring to Manitoba. Because religions such as Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Buddhism mandate cremation, the permission of this practice in Manitoba is of utmost importance to many members of the groups. Immigrants belonging to these faith communities are settling in Manitoba in large numbers. Recent newcomers to our province come from over 140 countries, with India and China as some of the top countries.

According to Hindu tradition, the reason for preferring to cremate a loved one by fire rather than burying it in the ground is to induce a feeling of detachment into the freshly disembodied spirit which will encourage its passage into the afterlife.

Cremation is a controlled process in which human remains are reduced through the application of intense heat and flame to ashes and bone fragments. Residual bone fragments are further processed to create a uniform material.

Retorts used to cremate human remains reach temperatures in excess of 800C and effectively sterilize all the residual material. Public Health confirms there are no health concerns with the remains of this cremation process. Properly cremated remains are not considered to be a pollutant and/or hazardous waste under provincial environmental legislation.

The scattering of cremated remains occurs in most Canadian jurisdictions, although there is little legislation specifically governing the activity. In Manitoba, many of the rules around the cremation,

cemeteries, are contained under The Cemeteries Act; however, there are no legislations specific to the scattering of cremated remains.

In many jurisdictions, including Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Ontario, cremated remains may be scattered on Crown land and waterways. In Ontario, federal compliance promotion personnel participated on an intergovernmental working group to develop a policy for scattering of cremated ashes and other religious offerings into watercourses. As a result, cremated remains may be scattered on unoccupied Crown land and waterways. There is no need to obtain government consent to scatter cremated remains on or in such areas, which include provincial parks and conservation reserves and the Great Lakes. Individuals wishing to scatter cremated remains on private land or private land covered by water must obtain the owner's consent.

The global perspective that diverse cultures bring to our province is a valuable resource that strengthens and advances our communities in countless ways and helps to promote the value of pride, equality and partnership, the principles on which multiculturalism in Manitoba is based. When we accept new immigrants and celebrate our ethnic cultures, we demonstrate our respect for and appreciation of social diversity. Cultural expressions, including religious practice, can be the greatest indication of a social group's identity.

Since 1999, over 100,000 new immigrants have settled in Manitoba. Over 25,000 of those newcomers have immigrated to rural Manitoba, contributing to the economic development of over 130 communities. Nearly 30,000 immigrants came to Manitoba over the last two years; 2011 saw the highest level of immigration recorded since 1946.

Manitoba's Provincial Nominee Program is a national leader, accounting for over 70 per cent of all immigration to Manitoba. In October 2010, an independent study noted the success of the Provincial Nominee Program. Some of the main findings of the study show that 85 per cent of provincial nominees were working after three months and 89 per cent had permanent jobs.

*(11:10)

The 2011 Manitoban Immigration Facts report highlights Manitoba's continued commitment and success in attracting and integrating new Manitobans

who enrich our communities and help us sustain our province's prosperity.

This resolution is non-partisan resolution. This is a very sensitive issue and very important to many communities. I hope this resolution will be passed unanimously. Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): It again gives me great pleasure to stand up and rise in the House and speak to the resolution recognizing the significance of the religious custom of scattering cremated remains brought forward by the member from Maples, Mr. Speaker.

The practice of scattering cremated ashes is an integral part of religious burial ceremonies for several faith communities in Manitoba. This resolution allows any individual or family who wishes to scatter the cremated ashes of their loved ones on Crown land and waterways. I am happy to see that this resolution clarifies where Manitobans can spread the ashes of their loved ones. I know in Ontario there has been many discussions on the cremations and the scattering of ashes in regards to rule.

I would just like to reference the CBC news a little bit of—the title was, Hindu group to release scattering ashes rules. Hindus and Sikhs believe ashes must be scattered in water. Pandit Roopnauth Sharma, a Hindu priest and president of the federation, said one guideline calls for mourners to scatter ashes at least half a kilometre from the shoreline, and there's many other guidelines in regards to—that comes from this Hindu priest, Mr. Speaker.

Another spokesperson, Christine Lall, a spokeswoman from the ministry of consumer affairs from Ontario, had said that the Ontario government is committed to ensuring that laws affecting burial practices are respectful of Ontario's cultural diversity while also preserving our environment, she said in a statement, Mr. Speaker. And I believe on this side of the House we share those sentiments and—as the member from Maples also said. She continued to say, Ms. Lall said, cremation has been a part of Ontario's bereavement industry for many years. In recent years the popularity of cremation has significantly increased across Canada, and for many cultures scattering cremated human remains is an important religious rite and tradition. End quote.

Now, in Manitoba, as well, Mr. Speaker, as the member from Maples had mentioned, more and more

people are choosing cremation for their lost loved ones. Manitobans are looking for bereavement services that meet their needs and reflect their traditions and values. Further, this resolution recognizes that Manitobans require more options to respectfully honour a loved one that has passed away and implements regulations to ensure that these services are available to all.

This resolution clarifies that individuals will not need to obtain government consent in order to recognize important religious customs. I am pleased to see that this resolution provides some guidance to families grieving the loss of loved ones. The unfortunate reality is that once again Manitoba is years behind other provinces in this issue. As I read the resolution, it does say whereas in many jurisdictions, including Alberta, Newfoundland, Labrador and Ontario, cremated remains may be scattered on waterways and Crown lands.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I do absolutely believe, or I'm hoping that the member from Maples is bringing this resolution in good faith, but I'm asking for leave of the House to have the opportunity to ask questions of the member from Maples because we feel that it's a—I'll just hold it there then.

Mr. Speaker: Is there a leave of the House to allow the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet to ask questions pertaining to this resolution to the member for The Maples? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Ewasko: Because we, on this side of the House, feel that—and as the member from Maples had mentioned earlier, that it is a very important religious resolution in regards to faiths. And of spreading the cremation and the ashes in various other areas of the province, there are a few questions that I would like to ask.

So, the first one—please provide if you can—please provide specifics in terms of the legislation referenced in the proposed resolution and how is it structured.

Mr. Saran: Yes, I think the resolution has been given guidance in the other areas. If this resolution has been passed, we will look into that and then we can create a kind of a system where we are allowed to scatter our ashes.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, with further questions?

Mr. Ewasko: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

So, to the member from Maples, through you, Mr. Speaker, could he possibly please reference the relevant sections of the legislation from the other jurisdictions that he could see us incorporating it into our regulations here in Manitoba?

Mr. Saran: Yes, Mr. Speaker, there's not any specific resolution. It's a policy in Ontario and those provinces. Once—if we agree to create a policy, and then we can get all the information and we can get all the input from the other provinces.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, with further questions?

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member from Maples for that answer.

Are there any circumstances whereby one's remains would be ineligible to be scattered in some of those other jurisdictions? For example, if radioactive seed implants were used to treat prostate cancer, could these ashes be spread in a waterway?

Mr. Saran: I think this is an environmental issue sometime. That's why we have to—first to have consent that we are going to work on it. And then we can talk with the environmental people and convince the federal government that we can get that exception. So in that way, it's a matter of—this regulation's a matter of having consent, that we are willing to work with the community. We are willing to work with the community, and after that we can do all the research and we can all consult all the other jurisdictions, we can work with the federal government. But at this point, we need just a consent and willingness to give that opportunity to those communities.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, with further questions?

Mr. Ewasko: Yes, I do have some more questions, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member from The Maples for that answer.

I guess the point also, to some of these questions, is the fact that it is a very important resolution, and in order for us to, you know, see it move on, which I don't see us necessarily not moving this on—I mean, we're going to be here for a while and I know that there's a few colleagues that maybe have some questions or would like to state a few words and put them on the record, Mr. Speaker.

But we know that there, besides the radioactive seed implants, there has been other things, such as tooth fillings which contain mercury. We know that

mercury can settle into bodies of water and negatively impact water quality. What consideration has been given to the potential negative impacts on Manitoba's fresh waterways as a result of this resolution?

I know that the Minister for Conservation has stood up on more than one occasion and has, you know, pledged our allegiance to Mother Earth and to make sure that we're protecting her and for our future bounty. And so I would like to ask the member that question.

Mr. Saran: Yes, Mr. Speaker, this is a—this is new science and we have to look into it. But we cannot overrule the religious preference because science is in the way. Because sometimes science and religion, they don't see eye to eye. But we have to look at the human side of the resolution, why it's important, and everything else we can discuss and overcome later.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet, with further questions?

* (11:20)

Mr. Ewasko: Yes, Mr. Speaker, you know, part of the observance of the funeral customs in regards to scattering ashes and that, I mean, it is an integral part of the religious burial ceremonies for several of the faith communities, as the member had stated. I know that because of many of the public spaces in the other jurisdictions where people may scatter ashes have a high concentration of plant life—provincial parks, for example.

What regulations will be in place concerning the spread of ashes in public spaces where plants can be impacted?

Mr. Saran: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Well, first of all, I thank the minister to ask me that many questions and to so have some practice to stand up and answer those questions, and I did not have that opportunity before.

But I think, again, as I said, like, those parameters we can look into it. And the main thing is to have consent to oblige those communities, because those are minority groups. If we don't take care of their issues, then who else will be there? Because we are an inclusive society. So, first thing, to have this consent to accommodate those minority groups is important. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Lac du Bonnet's time has expired.

And we'll move on with now the next person to speak to this resolution.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): It is my great pleasure to second this important private members' resolution brought forward by the member from The Maples and to bring attention to this unique aspect of multiculturalism and the practical application of multiculturalism in Manitoba.

I also want to acknowledge the fact that this was a unique experience for me hearing from the member from Lac du Bonnet, asking questions during his time allotted, Mr. Speaker. This was somewhat different from my experience in this House. And, you know, it occurs to me that, while I appreciate the interest in the specifics that the member has, we are all honourable members in this House; I think we're all pretty cordial with each other, and there is an opportunity, I would imagine, that we can have these discussions either before it comes to the floor or after it does. But it does sound to me—and maybe I'm not hearing this exactly right, but it does sound to me that there is broad support in the House for this resolution. So, I do look forward to the opportunity to vote on this and to pass this resolution here this morning.

I also want to acknowledge that we do have guests in the gallery, and so for them to hear—to get a chance to hear what all of us have to say on this issue, I think, is important. And so, I want to again thank the member for The Maples.

You know, I do take every opportunity, Mr. Speaker, in this Chamber, as many know, to stand up and talk about the economic benefit that our policy on immigration and the increased immigration in Manitoba has had. And we do believe that it is a major component of our success. I think if you would canvass, you know, certainly every member on this side of the House, on the government side of the House, that we would certainly stand behind our policy and stand behind the focus on immigration and increasing immigration here in Manitoba. It's a major component of our success, and those who have taken that bold step to leave their home country, to venture out, to come to Manitoba, to put their best foot forward here in a new place is a big part of why we have had success. And their entrepreneurial spirit has made the province what it is today.

We don't always, though, in this House—and, again, I would say that I'm certainly—you know, I'm guilty of that in that I focus on the economic benefits. Sometimes, we don't take the time to

appreciate the cultural impact that these newcomers to Manitoba have had, and, you know, it's 'rarer'—rarer still for us to take the opportunity to move a resolution that actually protects their values, protects their culture and protects their religious heritage. So, again, special kudos to the member for The Maples (Mr. Saran). And I know the member for The Maples was one of those individuals who—well, going back a few years now, and I won't say exactly when the member for The Maples came to Canada, but it was a few years ago—but he came as a young man and put his best foot forward and came to a place that he didn't know much about, but was willing to step out on his own to come here and, of course, we would all recognize he has made an incredible contribution to Manitoba.

My own knowledge and experience in Indian culture was greatly increased this past January when I joined the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and joined the member for The Maples to visit India and, in particular, to visit the Punjab, which is where the member for The Maples is from and many of my constituents and many people who call Manitoba home are from. The focus of the trip, of course, was economic development and a building of trade relationships, but we also took the time to recognize the cultural heritage and to provide a bit of a cultural exchange, if you will, bringing some of what we value in Manitoba to India and to learn from what the Punjab and India has to teach us.

We visited all the big cities. We went to Chandigarh. We went to Ludhiana. We went to Amritsar. Beautiful places, very unique, very culturally significant places with great history, but that wasn't the only places we went. We went also to the small out-of-the-way places, Mr. Speaker. In particular, we went to a little town called Vairoke, and Vairoke is by all accounts in the middle of nowhere, but it is where the member for The Maples is from and I got to experience village life, small village life in India.

And one of the things that was most significant to me and one of the things that stuck out was the importance of faith in these small towns, and it was a unique experience. The place that I was staying was just steps away from the local gurdwara, the place of worship in the town, and prayers start at about 4 a.m. and that was announced throughout the town. The prayers were broadcast, and I thought, well, the prayers are broadcast, maybe people are in their homes and they're worshipping separately. Well, that wasn't the case, they actually—if you looked out and

saw the people that were coming at that time to come worship really demonstrated what faith means to the people coming from India. It felt like a small town. It could've been a small town anywhere. It could've been a small town—I think, you know, my impression of small towns here in Manitoba is that faith is equally as important, and it really did have that small-town, faith-centre feel.

So I feel that when we get an opportunity to stand in this House and talk about how we can protect and respect the faith and the cultural differences of those who have taken that bold step to come to Manitoba, I think it's a unique experience and unique opportunity for us here in this House.

The member for The Maples talked about the human side. There's—as he mentioned a lot of details that we need to work out and exactly how this goes forward, but I do know that this is the human side of our immigration policy. This is where we get to recognize the human factor and, again, in particular, the faith factor when talking about how we can respect and appreciate those that have come to Manitoba.

So with those few words, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to again thank the member for The Maples. I'd like to, of course, give my wholehearted support to this resolution and, again, I do believe that I've heard that there is broad consensus on this and I do believe that this is something that we can move forward with and pass here in this House today.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Certainly a pleasure to rise today to speak to this resolution, and I do want to thank the member for Maples for bringing forward this resolution and I do want to thank him for asking questions. That's something—I've been around here for nine years I think now and—*[interjection]* Yes, some days more than others. But clearly that's the first time I've been engaged in that sort of a back and forth with questions and answers, and you appreciate that. It certainly helps from our perspective to understand why the member—where he's coming from and why he's brought this resolution forward and, certainly, in looking at the resolution and talking about the religious aspect to the funeral services and cremation I think that's very important that we recognize those customs.

* (11:30)

And that, certainly, Mr. Speaker, gets us into a whole discussion about immigration policy that we

have here in Manitoba, and some of the good work that continues to happen. Certainly, our member from River East is very important back in the '90s, spearheading the immigration and nominee program here in Manitoba, and we certainly acknowledge that government was very—played a very important role in terms of enhancing our immigration policy to Manitoba.

And, clearly, you know, in my community where I grew up, we had, certainly, a number of different ethnic immigrants arrive from different countries, and it was quite interesting to watch those relationships build and to partake in the different cultures. It was quite interesting. And it's something that continues to evolve, and we're still doing that in a lot of our communities.

Take, for example, Mr. Speaker, my wife is a teacher, teaching grade 6, and quickly recognized there was a lot of different cultures, even in our community, which seems—doesn't seem quite right, but when you do look around, you know, we do have a lot of immigrants from a lot of different countries, and we don't always take time to recognize that because they quite often assimilate into the community.

So what she's done, she—once a year, she will organize an event where each of the kids are asked to, you know, bring some food which is representative of their culture, and it's—and at the same time, too, they engage the parents and the grandparents in this. So it's quite an enlightening event for the community and certainly for the kids to recognize just how diverse their community is. And, you know, it's something we don't really appreciate as much as we probably should, but it's something that's certainly growing.

I know, like, Brandon, the community of Brandon, certainly recognized the changes that they've had in terms of their population over the last number of years, primarily the last few years. And as a result, they—they're now hosting a Lieutenant Governor's event, which recognizes the different cultures in the—in Brandon and in, actually, western Manitoba, and I think that's something that people really caught on to. And it's really encouraging for us, you know, to see and to get involved with those different cultures and those different societies.

And, you know, I've seen in some of my other communities, too, where we've had just a real diverse number of cultures coming from every corner of the world to work in the, in a lot of cases, in the hog

industry, whether it be in the production side of the hog industry or into the slaughter side and the food production side. And it's very important for, certainly, the community of Brandon and southwestern Manitoba and the community of Neepawa as well. They've certainly had a—quite an influx of immigrants there as well.

So it's something that we certainly have to be aware of, and I—member from Concordia talked about economic development, and I think he's bang on. We have to make sure, as a province, that we have an economy that is welcoming to immigrants, that we have the characteristics and the framework where people want to come here and they want to work, they want to stay here and they want to raise their families, and they want to carry on and do business, and it's certainly a benefit for all of us. And that's—I think that's very important, Mr. Speaker.

And, clearly, when we have a discussion about—a budget discussion, actually, that we're in the middle of—clearly, we want to make sure that we develop a financial framework so that the immigrants want to stay in Manitoba. We think that's very important for them to come here and want to stay here and raise their family. And I know that's a challenge for us right now is to keep our younger generation here in Manitoba. We certainly have a—I guess we probably lead the country in per capita out-migration of people, and that's a challenge. We're still very good at having immigrants come to our country, and that's very positive. The challenge for us is to try to maintain the other people that may find—look at greener pastures. And that's very important. So that's why we have a really important discussion about budgetary affairs, and I think that's key that we have that open and honest dialogue as we go forward.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of funeral services, I know that's a very important part of the resolution that's brought forward here, and some of the cultural practices, and, certainly, we recognize that different cultures have different practices, and we certainly appreciate that. And it would be interesting, I think, to do some more research in terms of what exactly is happening in some of the other jurisdictions. And I appreciate the response from the minister from Maples and in that regard.

The other thing I think is important that we have a discussion with the funeral directors around the province of Manitoba as well. Certainly, they play an integral role in terms of dealing with people in a time of need, quite frankly, and they, I think for the most

part, they do a very good job on that aspect, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly very important to have somebody that is there with the family to understand what the rules and regulations are at the time of death and what's needed and what framework has to be adhered to.

So I want to certainly acknowledge the good work that funeral directors do around in the province and actually just in the process of lining up some meetings with the funeral directors association on a number of topics. And, certainly, this will be a topic that we will want to discuss with them in broader depth as well. There's certain to be some impacts in their business as well.

And we want to have a look in terms of what the legislation says and what the regulations are around how they handle some of the situations, and, in particular, cremation and how that's all dealt with. And, certainly, they will have a pretty good sense of what happens in other jurisdictions as well, Mr. Speaker.

So to say, certainly, the—I appreciate the member bringing forward this resolution. I think it's very important and I know from a culture perspective some cultures certainly have pretty strict codes in terms of what has to happen with remains. The other side, I think, in more general terms, a lot of members in society are turning to cremation as well. And, you know, they have a lot of issues and questions around what they should do with, you know, the remains of family members.

And it's probably an important discussion we should have as legislators, you know, how we want to move forward on dealing with remains of loved ones. And I think it's a very important topic, an important discussion we have. And that's why I certainly appreciate the member for The Maples (Mr. Saran) bringing forward the resolution and taking the initiative to bring forward this resolution, Mr. Speaker.

And in general terms, you know, everyone has their own thoughts in terms of where they want to move forward in terms of whether there's burial at a family plot or whether there's going to be cremation involved and then the question becomes what do you do with the ashes, whether you have those on display and keep those forever or if you're going to opt to spread them somewhere. And those are tough decisions to make because once you've made that decision to spread ashes, it's not something you can't get the egg back in the shell, so to speak,

Mr. Speaker. So those are very important decisions that have to be made and it's good that we're having this discussion. And I think it's good that we all engage our family members in these discussions as well. Sometimes these are decisions and discussions we don't want to have with family members but clearly it's important that we do have that discussion.

So with that, I just want to say I thank the member for bringing forward this resolution and we look forward to having a further discussion and further dialogue on this important topic. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): It's a great pleasure to rise today to speak about the observance of funeral customs in our country. You know, the face of Manitoba is definitely changing, Mr. Speaker, and I would argue it's changing for the better. I think it's fantastic.

The member for Maples, I was informed, came over in 1970, the year before I was born, actually, Mr. Speaker. And you know what? He has made a tremendous difference to this province. The amount of dedication and work he has put into this province has truly shaped a better province for all of us.

I have to applaud the member for Maples for taking that big risk and leap. I currently live just a few miles from where I grew up my whole life and I can't imagine the, you know, coming across the—from overseas and coming across and moving to a whole new area. And I think it's just fantastic that people take that leap and that risk and they come here and then they find that, when they get to Manitoba, that they're welcomed with open arms.

* (11:40)

You know, we've heard that France and Germany, England and Holland have all said that multiculturalism has failed, and I would argue that they need to come to Manitoba, and they need to be here and come and see what we do in Manitoba, because we're the example for the world. We're the shining light that goes across the world and that we—they could learn from us and they could make this—make everything work better, because we all do work very well together and Manitoba is a fantastic place to live because of all the people that come here, Mr. Speaker.

Last week, I had the opportunity to present a PMR on World Day for Cultural Diversity and then we had a nice rotunda event here in the Legislature, and it was a fantastic event—I think there was over

150 people there. And I got to speak to some people from all over the world, Mr. Speaker.

And one of the gentlemen I spoke to is actually now an RCMP superintendent of—the Selkirk area is where he's from, so the member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar), you know, might want to hear about this. He's been all over the world. He started out in Iran and then he ended up going to live in South Africa for a bit, because there was some instability where he was. And then he came over to Canada, and he's lived in every province across Canada. And I found it interesting when I was talking to him, that he said—and he—I mean, anybody would know, it would be him—he said that Manitoba is definitely the friendliest province he's ever been in for people for immigration. He said he cannot believe the supports that we have here and how fantastic it is to live here when you're coming from another country. He said, you know, he just wishes that we could expand our program and make it better for everyone, you know, across the country.

And I heard that story over and over actually that night. There was someone from the Congo that was talking to me about the same thing, that they've never felt so welcome and how great it was to be here.

So I think it's just an amazing thing what Manitoba has done—and how welcoming we've done, and since '99, over 100,000 newcomers and in the last couple of years, we've seen over 30,000 newcomers come to our province, which is just phenomenal. And it—not only—like the member for Concordia said—it's not only an economic driver, but it's a human driver.

We all have learned so much. They say you learn something new every day. You know, with this PMR, I—speaking to the member from Maples, I learned about their traditions and customs and, you know, that Hinduism and Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism mandate cremation.

And I found it interesting because my mom was a born-and-raised Roman Catholic, but towards the later years in her life, when she got cancer and she was sick, she actually started to embrace a different view, and I would say it's more of the view of what Sikhism and Hinduism would be. She became more spiritual and actually she decided against—what her traditional faith was is to have a traditional burial; she decided on cremation. And what we did, Mr. Speaker, was there's a place where my aunt has a cabin in Ontario and we actually—her last wishes that

she said—she wanted to be spread at this little site where she liked to go and blueberry pick at that lake.

So that was the wishes that we honoured. We took her ashes and the family all headed out to the lake for the weekend. We rented a couple extra cabins on the lake, and a ton of people came out and we spread her ashes there. And my nieces from Alberta were—came in and they, you know, they—it was actually kind of a—it's kind of a cute story when they spread her ashes at the site where she blueberry picked and then some of them into the water where she liked to go swimming. And my nieces said that they wanted to have one last swim with grandma, so they jumped into the lake and they swam with their grandma. And I thought that was just such a—amazing experience.

So I could see why their—practices of that, and you're coming back to the earth. And, like I said, every day I learn new things about new cultures in Manitoba, and it's fantastic. And I'm so proud that we welcome people here and that we're very inclusive and that it's such a great province to be in.

And with that, I will thank you, Mr. Speaker, and let other members have some time to talk.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, and it's a pleasure to rise and discuss this resolution brought forward by the member for The Maples (Mr. Saran).

It is certainly a point, as we welcome a wider diversity of people into our province and something that we're all very proud of and is certainly an element that has driven growth in the province, we need to be aware of their customs and the needs of their customs and what might be necessary in terms of changing the way we handle things.

And it's certainly far more common now, actually, to have cremation, actually, in many different groups. And, in particular, even the Catholics which have historically stuck with body burial, have certainly changed, and we're seeing a lot more cremations take place. And the disposal of the ashes has increasingly become an issue, and we need to look and have a good discussion around how best to have these disposed in a way that puts no one else at risk.

And, certainly, there are some factors to consider because these days there are often things put in the bodies for health reasons that need to be part of the considerations. There's certainly implants that are used far more often now for health reasons in the

human body, and whether they are properly removed at the point of cremation or how they're disposed of is a factor that we need to consider as part of this process.

We certainly need to pay attention to that and have a good discussion around that. But, at the same time, we need to be aware of the other customs that are in place here now, and how cremation should be done to suit those and the disposal thereof.

I mean, Crown lands, as certainly mentioned, we've all seen or heard of a lot of ash disposal on private land, often done because of the roots in the community. I know of a number of farm families have actually moved in that direction as well, where loved ones' ashes are often scattered on the original homestead. And, certainly, it's done. Whether or not it's done within the letter of the law, as it stands, certainly a point to consider, and I know the member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Cullen) is planning on having this discussion with the funeral directors, and perhaps we can find some ways to make sure that we stay within the letter of the law now, and try and make that work for everyone, and, at the same time, recognize the value in terms of the customs in the community.

I had an opportunity in my youth to travel fairly extensively in parts of Asia and was certainly exposed to the wide range of customs that take place there in terms of disposal of loved ones. And, certainly, obviously, we have some differences as to how it's done. We need to be aware of these, make sure we can do what can be done to accommodate them, so that we can make them feel welcome in our community, and make them part of our community at the same time they are able to retain some of the customs that they have developed over many generations where they originated.

And we're seeing quite a substantial shift even in our own community as to the use of cremation. It's far more common now than it was even a generation ago, and so we need to be more aware of disposal. I think this is a very excellent resolution that the member for The Maples (Mr. Saran) has brought forward. I think it should be used to kick off a fairly extensive discussion about what should be done and how best to do it, and make sure that, within the legislation that we have in this province, that we make the change that is necessary to accommodate this where it can be done. Certainly, funeral directors are one area that we need to do some following up on.

So I certainly appreciate the opportunity to rise and make a few comments on this, and I will give further members the opportunity to speak to this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in support of the resolution from our member from The Maples, and I'm please to put a few words on record in support of this.

Manitoba is a very successful multicultural province. It gives our society a richness and a vibrancy that makes our province and our country a great place to live. I can speak personally from my own constituency, Rossmere, which is a wonderfully diverse community, and it's always been a very welcoming place for new Canadians, from its history of the Selkirk settlers, and over the early 1900s, the Dutch and the Mennonites. And, currently, we have a wonderfully vibrant community made up of people who have joined our community from all over the world, from India, from Asia, eastern Europe and Africa, the Philippines. We have representatives that have come from every corner of our wonderful world.

As new Canadians settle and contribute to our communities economically and culturally, they also bring traditions and a variety of cultural expressions, all of which enhance and certainly strengthen our communities. And, in turn, I think what we need to do is we need to respect and to demonstrate our appreciation for the qualities that they bring to our neighbourhoods.

As one of the most important aspects of any ethnic group is their faith, religion is central to the lives of many Manitobans, and we pride ourselves, as Manitobans, in welcoming these many religions from around our globe. And, especially as new Canadians, you cling to things that give you a sense of stability, and faith is certainly one of those. And in, certainly, our community, we have a variety of places of worship that you see every weekend being centre of worship that you see every weekend being centre of community activities, family activities and faith activities. As a Mennonite, there are many faith traditions that I carry on, and I certainly can appreciate the desire of others who too wish to practise the dictates of their own faith.

* (11:50)

End of life traditions are very important in our lives. Funerals, wakes and memorial services are honoured ceremonies and are commemorated in many different ways. And creation has also become a

more frequent custom, and the wishes of the deceased to place their ashes in a special place is heard of more often. In my constituency, this is very important. We are blessed with a wonderful Sikh community in Rossmere and in Winnipeg as a whole, and I know that cremation is a fundamental after—pardon me, is a fundamental principle in the end of life and afterlife in their faith. Through this resolution, we can honour the important—honour an important faith tradition in their community.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that we can pass this private member's resolution, and I thank the member from The Maples for bringing it forward. And with these few words, I give someone else the opportunity of speaking to this resolution. Thank you.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I want to thank the member for Rossmere (Ms. Braun) for her invitation for me to speak to this resolution this morning. I appreciate that there are many members who are interested in speaking on this issue.

I want to welcome our guests here to the gallery. It's wonderful to see you. You witnessed a fairly unique thing here this morning. Generally, during this time of the day we don't have the questions and answers that transpired between my friend from Lac du Bonnet and the member for Maples, and I want to say on the record that I think that that's a very helpful process. I appreciated the answers that the member for Maples provided. There were more questions that the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) had, and those might take place in another forum privately with the member for Maples, but it was great to see that sort of dialogue on a private members' resolution. That doesn't happen very often.

It's not really contained within our rules. It's something I have suggested that should be contained within our rules. I think it happens in other provinces where—*[interjection]* Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry that there are some members, like the member for Riel (Ms. Melnick), who can just never put partisanship aside, who can never just, you know, put down the sword of partisanship. Because there are many things in this House that shouldn't be partisan, and I'm sorry that the member for Riel can't identify when those issues should be. And I appreciated the member for Rossmere asking for other speakers to come forward, and I'm sorry that her members now don't want to hear other people speak to this particular resolution.

As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, I think that within the context of our rules we would be served well if we would look at doing this more often in terms of

our resolutions to allow—and private members' bills, I would say, to allow us to have that back and forth between members. Because I often think that members who are either part of the opposition or who are part of the backbench of government don't often have the opportunity to speak to their own ideas in a way that has that interaction between members. And the member for Maples did himself well and he should be given credit for the answers that he gave, and I appreciated the thoughtful questions of the member for Lac du Bonnet. And that is the kind of democratic discussion that serves all of us well, and I would leave that for the record that I think that this was a good example of how things can be done well.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that members of our party, of the Progressive Conservative Party, have a long and proud history of standing up for the principle of religious freedom. We believe that regardless of the religion that one holds or doesn't hold that that should be something that should be cherished and should be able to be practised in a free way. And so, I think that this is part of the principle that the member has brought forward from—the member for Maples has brought forward that we want to ensure that there are mechanisms in place to ensure that all of our friends in the religious community are able to practise their religions freely. I would say that there are other bills in the Legislature that have caused some concern about freedom of religion and freedom of the practice of religion. And I hope that the passion that the members opposite spoke of before would extend to other issues that I know are a matter of debate in the public in Manitoba when it comes to the issue of religious freedom.

And I hope that the member for Rossmere, when she speaks about the importance of protecting religious freedom, will also ensure that when other issues come before the Legislature—and they are before the Legislature already—that she'll take the same comments that she made on this particular resolution, that she'll ensure that she reflects that in her comments on other matters of debate that'll happen here in the Legislature.

We believe that's a uniform principle, Mr. Speaker, that, in fact, our Charter speaks of freedom of religion, and we will want to ensure that for all of our—all of those who have a faith belief in the community, whether it's in the Hindu or the Sikh or the Buddhist community, or whether it's in the Christian community or the Muslim community, that

they have the freedom to practise their religion in a way that they are comfortable with, and that they are entitled to, under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in the great country of Canada.

So I hope that the member's opposite comments—from Rossmere—and other members who spoke about the importance of that, will translate to other issues here in the Legislature and other debates that we might be having on bills, Mr. Speaker, because I haven't seen it translate as well as it should.

But on this particular resolution, I want to say that there are some outstanding questions that the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), our critic in this particular area, would have for the member of Maples. I'm encouraged by the dialogue that they were able to have here on the floor of the House.

I suspect that if they were able to sit down outside of the House and continue on that dialogue, that all of us, as an Assembly, could come to some type of positive resolution on this, to ensure that we're not going to do something that is more restrictive than we already have now, Mr. Speaker, or something that is not going to be reflective of the faith communities that we have.

So I want to give an assurance to our—my friends in the gallery, that as the House leader for our party, I will ensure that the member for Maples and member for Lac du Bonnet have the opportunity to speak. I will offer leave in the days ahead if the members want to bring this resolution back for debate, once those questions have been resolved between the member for Maples and the member for Lac du Bonnet. I'm happy to put on the record that I would offer leave in the future to allow this resolution to come back in the days that we have ahead.

Apparently that's not good enough for the member for Riel (Ms. Melnick). She might want to make another political point, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy, in a non-partisan way—*[interjection]* in a non—I'm happy, Mr. Speaker, in a non-partisan way, in the interest of dealing with issues of religious freedom and religious protection, which members don't always have the same interest in on other issues. I'm happy to ensure that this resolution,

before the end of this session, can be brought back with leave of the House, once those discussions happen between the member for Maples and the member for Lac du Bonnet.

And so, I want to thank the member for Maples for bringing forward this resolution. I think it's an important issue that all of us might not have the type of background on that we should. We might not have all the information that we should, Mr. Speaker. We might not all have the understanding that we should because each of us have our own faith perspective and it might not be the same as others. But what we do have to continue to ensure is that we respect the faith perspective of individuals in this province, that we don't chastise those who have a faith perspective, that we don't say negative things about those who have a faith perspective.

I would hate to see a situation where a minister of the Crown, an Education Minister, for example, would say negative things about individuals who have a faith perspective in the province of Manitoba—an important position, Mr. Speaker, something that's protected by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

So I'm hopeful that this discussion about protecting freedom of religion that protect within our Charter, will extend beyond this resolution to other issues.

But when it comes to this particular issue, again, I want to give my assurance to our friends in the gallery, that we will bring back this resolution with leave of the House, Mr. Speaker, so that we can have further discussion about the questions from the member for Lac du Bonnet and that the member for Maples brought forward.

And I, again, want to thank him for bringing it forward and for representing, in the questions that we had—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Steinbach will have one minute remaining.

The hour being 12 noon, this House is recessed 'til 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 28, 2013

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