

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

**Official Report**  
**(Hansard)**

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**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Fortieth Legislature**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	NDP
ALLUM, James, Hon.	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	NDP
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	NDP
BLADY, Sharon, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
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DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	NDP
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GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Liberal
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WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, March 7, 2014

*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, everyone. Please be seated.

### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

**Mr. Speaker:** Introduction of bills?

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Oh, we're on bills.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Oh, sorry.

**Mr. Speaker:** Any introduction of bills this morning? No?

### PETITIONS

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

#### Provincial Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by L. Boleros, L. Moralee, M. Finley and many, many others.

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

Any further petitions? Seeing none, we'll move on to committee reports.

**Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection):** I'd like to table the third-quarter Liquor and Lotteries financial reports.

**Mr. Speaker:** No, committee reports. This is committee reports.

**Mr. Lemieux:** Committee report?

**Mr. Speaker:** I think we're a step ahead of ourselves here. I'll just wait a moment. We're in committee reports.

### TABLING OF REPORTS

**Mr. Speaker:** Seeing no committee reports, now we'll move on to the tabling of reports.

**Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection):** Thank you. It must be Friday.

I'd like to table the third-quarter Liquor and Lotteries financial reports.

**Mr. Speaker:** Any further tabling of reports?

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

**Mr. Speaker:** Seeing none, we'll move on to ministerial statements.

#### International Women's Day

**Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister responsible for the Status of Women):** I have a statement for the House.

Mr. Speaker, today the Manitoba Legislative Assembly will be joining many others around the world in celebrating International Women's Day.

International Women's Day, proclaimed by the United Nations for March 8th in 1977, has a long history that goes back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. At that time, women in North America and Europe were protesting for better working conditions, demanding the right to vote and calling for peace.

International Women's Day is now celebrated around the world. It has become a time to celebrate the advances in women's rights, to reflect on what is left to be done and to resolve to work towards legal and economic equality and freedom from violence.

We know Manitoba women are leaders in the push for social change. Our partnership with the UN Women to prevent sexual violence and harassment is an example of a global to local initiative where women are taking a leadership role. We were the first in Canada to join the initiative and we are proud to continue our work to stop violence against women.

When I reflect on the prominent women who have shaped Manitoba, I am humbled by their strength and determination. Manitoba was the first province in Canada where women won the right to vote thanks to the courage of women like Lillian Beynon Thomas, Francis Beynon and Dr. Amelia Yoemans; activists Margaret Benedictson and Gertrude Richardson; and, of course, novelist and journalist Nellie McClung. Even though women in Manitoba won the right to vote 98 years ago, it is something that we must continue to celebrate today.

We know women in our province have made important gains for rights and equality. Many have been working diligently and successfully on issues such as child care, reproductive rights, human rights, violence prevention and education.

At this time, I'd like to acknowledge the contributions of Manitoba's Women's Advisory Council and the work that they do to advance women's rights.

The theme for today's event that will be held over the noon hour is Celebrating the Diversity of Manitoba Women. There is strength in all of our diversity, and this day gives us a welcome opportunity to celebrate women from all backgrounds in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleagues here today to remember, well—while there has been some great strides made by women's rights movements over many years, there is still work to do and we can all be a part of the solution.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain):** Mr. Speaker, March 8th is the International Women's Day. The first International Women's Day was held in 1911 and was proclaimed an official day by the United Nations General Assembly in 1977. It is a global day celebrating the economic, political and social achievements of women past, present and future while focusing on areas that require further attention.

The theme for 2014 is Inspiring Change, which is meant to encourage everyone to be an advocate inspiring change for women's advancement.

I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council, who have done great work in their advancement for women's rights.

Unfortunately, though, Mr. Speaker, serious issues facing young women of Manitoba have repeatedly been neglected by a tired, disinterested NDP government. We are seeing a recent increase in girls committing suicide in our province, a tragic pattern to see developing. A focused approach to the prevention of youth suicide is long overdue in our province.

Mr. Speaker, over 90 per cent of people with eating disorders are women, and currently in Manitoba it can take up to a year for these women to receive treatment at the provincial Eating Disorder Prevention and Recovery Program. Manitoba families know that this wait time is unacceptable and as-timely treatment of these serious ill young women is a matter of life and death.

\* (10:10)

Personal safety, we know that Manitoba under the NDP government has been reported as having the highest self-reported rates of violent crime against women. In addition, Winnipeg has the highest rates of sexual offences against women as compared to other major Canadian cities. There are also 111 missing or murdered Aboriginal women and girls, including 10 girls ages 11 and younger.

With the knowledge that we also have over 10,000 children in care in our province, this

government is failing to address the need prevention—for prevention and protection supports to families at risk.

Mr. Speaker, young women beginning their careers are detrimentally provided with a poor economic starting point because of this government's financial mismanagement and excessive tax increases. It is not fair for these young women who will have to pay well into the future for a government who cannot get their spending under control.

Manitoba has some of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the country. This, added to the extra tax burden—many young women start their lives well behind the eight ball.

The government's neglect of serious issues facing young women on our—in our province is unacceptable. The PC caucus is currently working on ways to bring about change regarding many of these issues.

Manitoba—Manitobans celebrate all women and the contributions of all women made to our communities, families, businesses and province. We wonder when this NDP government will also work towards inspiring change for young women in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Mr. Speaker, I ask leave to speak to the minister's statement.

**Mr. Speaker:** Is there leave for the honourable member for River Heights to speak to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

**Mr. Gerrard:** Mr. Speaker, on International Women's Day, I join others in this Legislature in celebrating the contributions of women and the importance of having women involved in all areas of society including politics. I think notable roles of people like Nellie McClung in advancing the vote many years ago—and, of course, she did that as part of electing a Liberal government which did that, which I'm proud of. I'm also proud of the fact that we've got a Liberal Leader who's a woman, and that's also good.

The—you know, I would say it was—we're sorry yesterday in the budget that there have been some cutbacks in funding for HPV vaccination. We hope that that will be changed, but I want to specifically emphasize that this morning I was at a breakfast for—with Marilou McPhedran speaking, and one of the

things that she emphasized was the importance of having a national task force on missing and murdered women. And she said that, you know, if the federal government can have a task force on the number of salmon in BC, they should be—possible to have a national task force on missing and 'wurdung'—and murdered women, and maybe we can all get together and try to do that.

In the spirit of working together, I think it's important that we recognize International Women's Day and I thank the minister for speaking on this.

**Mr. Speaker:** Any further ministerial statements?

### Grain Transportation Backlog

**Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development):** I'd like to share a ministerial statement with the members.

I rise today to raise the serious problems of farmers struggling to get their grain to market. The problem is hurting Manitoba's economy and hurting the family farms. We have raised the need for immediate solutions to the federal government and hope that they act soon.

Mr. Speaker, 2013 saw record crop yields in Manitoba resulting in a sense of optimism for all involved in the agriculture industry. Unfortunately, the optimism began to fade as the elevators filled beyond capacity, leaving producers struggling to find somewhere to store their bumper crop. Now producers are facing a significant drop in prices.

I have heard from farmers. I have heard from Keystone Agricultural Producers and from Manitoba grain companies that we need to work together to fix this problem, and we are calling on the federal government and the rail companies to get together to work out a solution to support the farmers. We have called on the federal government to take immediate action to resolve the problem and help our producers get their grain to market.

We will continue to advocate for solutions that will help Manitoba, because our farmers are very significant impacted by our transportation crisis. We know ships are sitting empty in the western ports, and we know that there are other transportation corridors that we could move our crops to the United States, to the east and to the north through our very own Port of Churchill.

We will continue to keep a close eye on the possible flooding that could cause additional stress for producers and along the grain transportation

system. The Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Ashton) and I have been working very closely on a strategy to respond to this.

As a farmer for the most of my life, I recognize the major importance of this issue. And as Agriculture Minister, I will continue to press the federal government and the rail companies to get together so our grain movement—so that the farmers can see the economic benefits of a record crop that they had produced in 2013 and to ensure that the strong yields in the future will not be met with the same problem. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland):** I thank the minister for bringing this issue to—in the minister's statement today. I would add that this is a serious problem for farmers all across western Canada, and it's creating a cash-flow issue for them, as grain is not able to move.

However, I would also urge that this is a problem that's been ongoing. This is not just this year that it's happened, but it's also become very acute because of the size of the crop all across western Canada this year. And I would also add that this is not just related to the grain transportation industry, as we met with Louisiana-Pacific a couple of years—a couple of weeks ago, pardon me, in Swan River, that they are also having trouble accessing railcars to ship their product too.

So we would certainly like to work, and we continue to work, with Keystone agriculture producers and other farm organizations across western Canada. We're supportive of any federal action that the federal government can use to hold railways to account to improve grain transportation, and we will continue to advocate for changes in here and make the—hopefully make the rail companies become more accountable for grain transportation. Grain needs to move, this is a cash-flow issue for all of western Canada farmers, and as spring approaches, this becomes even more acute. So thank you very much for the opportunity.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I ask leave to speak to the minister's statement.

**Mr. Speaker:** Is there leave for the honourable member for River Heights to speak to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

**Mr. Gerrard:** Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that the minister has raised this extraordinarily important issue of grain transportation. We had record crops last year and yet we have too much of the crop sitting

there and not able to get to port and to market. And I think it's very clear that improvements in this transportation, if we can effect them, would have an immediate and very positive impact on Manitoba farmers, on Manitoba's economy and on the Canadian economy. And so it's imperative that we act, and I think we need to act together.

And I would refer to a situation—I think it was 1979—where there were similar backlogs of grain, and a summit was organized here in Winnipeg, and one of the participants was the federal minister, who was Otto Lang at that time. And out of that summit came an action plan who—which was then implemented. Now, that summit was held in January. Here we are already in March; we could've had that summit already. But perhaps now we can get everyone together and get that summit in place, get some action in place and make a real difference for farmers, for our economy in Manitoba and for the Canadian economy.

\* (10:20)

**Mr. Speaker:** Any further ministerial statements?

#### ORAL QUESTIONS

**Mr. Speaker:** Seeing none, we'll move on to oral questions.

#### Budget Promises Government Record

**Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, the government's big on promises, not big on keeping them, but big on making them. Yesterday was another example of that.

But just two years ago the NDP targeted Manitoba voters and then they went shopping for votes with promises. And their big three promises were: to Manitoba seniors that they would eliminate the education component of the property tax—strike one; to Manitobans generally there'd be no new taxes—strike two; and that they would balance the books as of yesterday—strike three.

Yesterday a lot more promises were made, but those promises are a lot like a bounced cheque.

When will the Premier realize that he's drawing on an account that's long ago been overdrawn?

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the budget projected a future deficit of 0.6 of 1 per cent of the GDP at the same time as it invested in jobs for young people in Manitoba, as it

invested in infrastructure 5 and a half billion dollars which will generate 58,000 new jobs in Manitoba, as it plans to lift the economy by \$6 billion or 2 per cent over the next five years. And all of those growth stories in the economy and good jobs in the economy will allow us to fulfil these obligations.

We're taking a balanced approach, not the across-the-board cuts that the Leader of the Opposition is proposing, not the raising of the gas tax while he cuts the highways budget, which is the approach he took the last time he was in office.

And, Mr. Speaker, we're doing this so all Manitobans have a bright future in this province.

#### **ADM for Immigration—Actions Chronology of Events**

**Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition):** There you go again, Mr. Speaker, more promises made, more promises to be broken. This government sold its integrity for 1 per cent a while back. And yesterday's promises are made by drawing cheques on an empty account, and no one believes those promises now.

Now, I asked the Premier yesterday, and he did not answer me, on what date did he learn that he had misled this House concerning the accusation that a civil servant had orchestrated a politically partisan participation by other civil servants in a rally. Now, perhaps he's simply being evasive, but perhaps he has no memory of this.

So I'm going to ask him today: Which is it? Is it that he's being evasive or is it that he's simply forgotten?

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier):** Members will recall that in April 2012 the federal government did decide to make changes in immigrant settlement services in Manitoba. We resolved to do something about that, which became a resolution that we put forward to debate in this House for which we hoped to obtain all-party support because of the very high importance that we all place on immigration.

During that period, Cabinet, caucus and senior staff did outreach to the community to invite them down to hear this important debate. Also during that period, the former minister did direct staff to invite the public down here. She has apologized for that and put her corrections on the record and has apologized for that, Mr. Speaker. And, as I indicated yesterday, this came to my attention during the summer of 2012.

#### **Budget Promises Government Record**

**Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition):** You know, a Cabinet colleague of long standing misleads you, and you can't remember the date that happened? Is this an everyday occurrence over there, Mr. Speaker? For heaven's sakes.

I ask the Premier again. If I asked the Premier on what date did he break his promise and decide that he wasn't going to eliminate the seniors'—reduction in seniors' tax, I hope he'd remember that. On what date did he decide to break his promise and not balance the budget? I'd hope he'd remember that.

Let's try it on this: On what date did he decide that he was going to hike the PST? Can he give me that date?

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier):** Mr. Speaker, this budget invests dramatically in infrastructure improvements in Manitoba, 5 and a half billion dollars. The member knows full well when budgets in past have been delivered.

The budget we've delivered today generates another 58,000 jobs, good jobs for young people to have opportunities in Manitoba, to make a life in Manitoba, to be able to have a family in Manitoba. And the date for that, Mr. Speaker, was yesterday. I hope he remembers that date because it's a turning point in the future of Manitoba.

**Mr. Speaker:** The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a new question.

#### **ADM for Immigration—Actions Chronology of Events**

**Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition):** I didn't ask him what date he made his promise on, Mr. Speaker, I asked him what date he broke his promise, and I'll continue to ask him that.

You know, it's so easy for the NDP to make promises, Mr. Speaker. They make them all the time; they don't mean anything. But it's so hard for them to remember when they broke those promises, those same promises, so hard to remember.

So I'm going to repeat the question again for the Premier, because summer, we hope, is a long time in Manitoba. A civil servant is falsely accused by him of participating in a partisan way in organizing a protest rally. On what date did he first learn that this had occurred and that he had misled this House?

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier):** Mr. Speaker, in the spring, April, of 2012, the federal government decided to change the way immigration settlement services were delivered in Manitoba. We took action on that in the form of a resolution in front of this Legislature. Members of Cabinet, members of caucus, senior staff all did outreach to the community to invite them down to this important debate.

During that period of time, the former minister directed civil servants to invite the public down here. The Ombudsman launched an investigation in the spring of 2012. And during the course of that investigation, it came to my attention that the former minister had played a role in directing the staff. That was during the summer of 2012. The former minister has since corrected the record as to her role and apologized.

**Mr. Pallister:** Again, Mr. Speaker, obfuscation and evasion is the Premier's approach on this, a problem of his own making. I wouldn't have to ask these questions if the Premier was forthright in his answers. But I'll ask again.

And I'll ask his colleagues to consider this: Would you work with someone for 11 years and appoint them to senior Cabinet positions of trust and importance in Water Stewardship, in Family Services, in Immigration and then learn that they had violated your trust and not remember that? And not remember the date that happened?

I ask the Premier again: On what date did he learn that he'd misled this House?

**Mr. Selinger:** Mr. Speaker, I'm tempted to ask the Leader of the Opposition on what date he decided to sell off the telephone system and break his promise to the people of Manitoba. Maybe he can put that on the record.

As I've indicated earlier, Mr. Speaker, settlement services in immigration are a key policy driver of economic prosperity in Manitoba, an issue for which we all believe is an essential building block to future prosperity. And when those changes were made in that program in the spring, April, of 2012, we thought it was important to have a debate on that in this Legislature. And, yes, Cabinet, caucus, senior staff were all involved in inviting people down to hear that debate.

Yes, the former minister did ask civil servants to invite the public down here. That came to our attention, my attention, during the course of the

Ombudsman's investigation in the summer of 2012. And subsequent to that, the member identified that she had misled the House, corrected the record on that and apologized to the House.

**Mr. Pallister:** And I give the Premier this, that perhaps he inadvertently misled the House too. Though no apology's been forthcoming, the fact remains that he did. And the fact remains that he is evading an answer to a simple and straightforward question.

On what date did he learn that he had misled this House, however inadvertently? On what date did he learn that an 11-year colleague, senior colleague in his Cabinet had misled him? On what date did he learn that?

And if he doesn't remember the date, simply say so. But I don't believe he doesn't remember the date, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Selinger:** We're still waiting for the date when he decided to reverse himself and sell off the telephone system after he said he wouldn't. We're still waiting for the apology on that, Mr. Speaker.

In the spring of 2012, the federal government decided to make major changes to how immigrant settlement services were offered in Manitoba in terms of how they were managed, Mr. Speaker, and from which the management control came. We thought that was a matter of important public debate. That debate was focused through a resolution in the Legislature. Cabinet, caucus, senior staff all invited people down to hear that debate.

The minister, during the course of those activities, did direct civil servants to invite members of the public down here. This came to my attention during the summer of 2012. The member subsequently corrected the record after the Ombudsman's report came out, and co-operated with the Ombudsman in disclosing her role.

And when the Ombudsman's report came out, Mr. Speaker, we paid very careful attention to the recommendations. And we are going to follow the recommendations to put guidelines in place to clarify the relationship between elected officials and civil servants in areas where there could be a perception of partisanship.

\* (10:30)

I've been very clear, Mr. Speaker—



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

### Departmental Spending Government Record

**Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler):** Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Finance Minister got up and tried to convince Manitobans that the NDP government is suddenly turning over a new leaf, that, after 14 years and a government that managed to double Manitobans' debt, which now exceeds \$32 billion, a government that has missed every target it sets for eliminating the deficit or balancing the budget, a government that has raided the fiscal stabilization account to make the picture look rosier, they now say they've seen the light and they're going to hold core government spending increases to 2 per cent. But I want to remind this Finance Minister that the deficit alone this year is projected to be at \$613 million for core government.

Why would Manitobans believe the NDP this time when they talk about reducing spending?

**Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Finance):** I thank the member for the question.

What we did yesterday was bring in a budget that was focused on the priorities of Manitobans. We—[interjection] Well, we listen to Manitobans. What we hear from them is that they want us to work to protect the growing economy. They want us to make sure that their children can have the great opportunities that we've had in Manitoba, that they can get the training and education and skills today for the good jobs that we're creating today through our infrastructure investment and the good jobs that will be here tomorrow.

Those are the priorities of this budget. We do that while being responsible with Manitoba tax dollars, investing them wisely in the services that are important to Manitobans, services like health care and education and child care. That's what this budget is about.

**Mr. Friesen:** Mr. Speaker, what this government is focused on is blame laying and excuse making while Manitobans pay more.

Mr. Speaker, the minister's new idea is to increase spending for some departments while cutting budgets in other departments, and she says it will result in not exceeding 2 per cent. But one of those departments slated to be cut is Agriculture. The problem is that even this year Agriculture overspent

its current budget by 7 per cent, and the same is true in Justice overspending its budgetary allocation. The same is true in other core areas. It is the undeniable fact that unless we're talking about infrastructure, departmental spending exceeds budgetary allotment under this government time and time again.

Why would Manitobans expect this time that the NDP could control its spending?

**Ms. Howard:** I know the member hasn't had as much time as I have with the budget books, but if he looks in the budget books he will see that as a percentage of the GDP, as a percentage of the economy, spending on programs in this province is coming down and is staying stable. Even through a time of recession, that spending level is coming down and staying flat as a percentage of the GDP. That's referenced in these books.

But, Mr. Speaker, we have invested in the priorities of Manitobans. We have invested in the things that matter to them, like health care and education. We have not followed the path that the Leader of the Opposition has set forward, the path that would lead to deep cuts to those essential services for Manitobans. We know that's the path they took the last time they had their hands on the wheel. It's a path that didn't work then, and it's a path that leads—

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

**Mr. Friesen:** I mean, it is a fact that this NDP government can simply not control its spending.

And I know that that Finance Minister has been in her role long enough to know that the core government deficit for this year was stated as \$505 million, but at the second-quarter update they bumped that projection up to \$540 million, and at the third-quarter update she bumped it again to \$613 million. That's a difference of \$108 million over their own projection.

Mr. Speaker, how can that Finance Minister say with a straight face that this time is different? Manitobans won't be fooled again.

**Ms. Howard:** If the member would review the third-quarter report that they have, they will see that \$100 million in the '13-14 year has been set aside to help compensate people who are affected by flooding. Without that \$100 million, the deficit is very close to what was projected. If what he is saying, that the choice he would make instead would

be to leave those families without the compensation, that's a choice he can defend.

### **Tax Increases Interprovincial Migration**

**Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo):** According to The Manitoba Prosperity Report by the Manitoba Employers Council, it states, and I quote: Manitoba is the only province to post a net interprovincial migration loss each year for the last 12 years. It goes on to say: Manitoba witnessed a net loss of approximately 56,000 persons through interprovincial migration.

Will the Minister responsible for Jobs and the Economy just admit that her high-tax-and-spend policies are driving people out of our province?

**Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Jobs and the Economy):** I thank the member for the question. Of course, it gives me an opportunity to reiterate for the member once again that our immigration here in Manitoba is very, very strong. Thousands and thousands and thousands of newcomers, Mr. Speaker, who are bringing their innovation, their ingenuity and their hard-work ethic to Manitoba, they're growing our economy.

We know very well that all jurisdictions in Canada, indeed, globally, have faced an economic downturn. Manitoba has fared very well during that time, increasing the number of jobs in the private sector and seeing steady growth in our economy.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Mr. Speaker, a net loss of 56,000 people, that's the equivalent of just—of the city of Brandon. A net loss of 56,000 people to other provinces is nothing to stand and be proud of.

I ask the minister: Will she just admit that her NDP tax-and-spend policies are leaving us less competitive with other provinces and driving people out of our province?

**Ms. Oswald:** Once again I will reiterate for the member that we, of course, want to capture the entire population of Manitoba. We actually care about newcomers here in our province, and we count them, as opposed to practices I've seen by members opposite in not so long days gone by.

Yesterday a budget was presented to Manitobans that included many initiatives to grow our skilled workforce. When I speak to employers in Manitoba, their No. 1 concern is having a skilled workforce, ensuring that we're doing all the training that we can to our young people, all the opportunities that we can

to increase those skills to work in the workforce. Mr. Speaker, \$5.5 billion to be invested in core infrastructure will not only create good paying jobs for our young people today but will invest in that infrastructure that will drive our economy in the years ahead.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, Mr. Speaker, if the minister cares so much about newcomers in this province, then why isn't she encouraging them to stay here?

She is, Mr. Speaker—the report says, and I quote: Manitoba is the only province that saw net interprovincial outmigration each year for the last 12 years.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister just admit that her high-tax-and-spend policies are driving Manitobans out of this province?

**Ms. Oswald:** Well, Mr. Speaker, not only on this side of the House do we care deeply about immigrants and actually count them, not only on this side of the House do we care deeply about individuals staying in Manitoba by providing innovative and creative opportunities for them to have good paying jobs, whether it's through our \$5.5-billion infrastructure plan or investments in post-secondary education in our schools, not only do we care about that, we're bringing Manitobans home so that they can work in the health-care sector that they want to privatize, so that they can get good jobs in our post-secondary institutions that historically that they have cut, and so they can be innovative in a growing and dynamic young ecosystem of interactive digital media, for example.

### **Winter Tire Loan Program Tax Increases**

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP have come to the sudden realization that Manitobans can't all afford snow tires. Now, I wonder why it is that Manitobans can't afford something that could increase their safe. Now, I wonder if maybe they can't afford it because the NDP increased the vehicle registration fee. I wonder if they can't afford it because they increased the fuel tax. I wonder if they can't afford it because they've increased insurance costs, or, the granddaddy of them all, maybe they can't afford it because they increased the PST. The reason that Manitobans have to now go hat in hand for a loan for snow tires is because the government took the money from them to begin with.

\* (10:40)

Why don't they just allow Manitobans to keep their own money and not have to go begging for a loan, Mr. Speaker?

**Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act):** Mr. Speaker, any time the member from Steinbach or any member of the PC caucus wants to get up and talk about affordability of auto insurance, I am more than happy to answer those questions.

First, we know that Manitoba has the lowest cost auto insurance premiums in the entire country. Deloitte has done a study. They have looked at different classifications, different vehicles, different drivers. And what do they find? They find that Manitoba has the lowest average auto insurance costs in Canada. Families in Manitoba pay \$862 a year less than the Canadian average. They pay \$1,339 less than similar drivers in Alberta and they pay \$4,228 less than Ontario every year.

If we're going to talk affordability about MPI, bring it on.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, then why do Manitobans have to go begging for a loan, Mr. Speaker?

You know, the Minister of Justice—I mean, the government is a bit like a robber who robs a victim and then says to the victim, I'll give you a loan so you can buy back the stuff from me that I just stole from you.

I mean, the government has brought in a high-tax policy. They increased the fees. They increased the PST. And then they discover, they wake up one morning and they go, oh, Manitobans can't afford something that maybe they should have, so let's make them come hat in hand and beg for a loan.

Why don't you just allow hard-working Manitobans to keep the money that they earned instead of making them come to you and beg for a loan to get it back, Mr. Speaker?

**Mr. Swan:** Mr. Speaker, hard-working Manitobans can be very satisfied that MPI provides the best value and the best service of any auto insurance system in this country.

You know, just since 2004, Manitobans who insure their vehicles have enjoyed an overall rate decrease—a rate decrease—of 14.9 per cent. That's not even adjusted for inflation. That's really more like a

25 or 30 per cent reduction in the cost of auto insurance since 2004.

And I know the members opposite, oh, they'd love to privatize MPI. They would love to take the almost \$600 million that have been refunded as rebates to Manitobans; they'd send it to their friends, the bondholders in New York or Toronto, just as happened when the Leader of the Opposition sat around the Cabinet table when they privatized MTS.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) is pretty angry, and I'd be angry too if I took all the money from Manitobans and then had to turn around and set up a payday loan shop that asks them to come to get their money back, Mr. Speaker.

You know, there's a lot of other things that Manitobans can't afford because of the high-tax policy of the NDP. A lot of them can't afford to go on a family vacation now. A lot of them can't afford to put their kids in sports programs. Maybe they should set up a payday loan system so that they can go and ask for money and beg them for money to go on a vacation. Maybe they can come and ask for money so they can go and put their kids in a sports program, all because the NDP took their money to begin with.

Why doesn't this government just acknowledge that what you really need is a government that's going to allow people to keep the money in their pockets and make their decisions? But they'll never be that government, but we will.

**Mr. Swan:** You know, Mr. Speaker, you wonder who could be against a low-cost program to assist more Manitobans to get snow tires, which know will reduce accidents and reduce premiums. Well, who would that be? The PC caucus.

It'd be the same group of people who opposed—who opposed—MPI giving money to police services across Manitoba to keep impaired drivers off our streets. The PC caucus who just last year—the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer), who was then the critic, stood up and opposed MPI giving money to police services to make sure that children getting on and off school buses are safe.

It is unbelievable that we have a Progressive Conservative opposition that hates MPI, that would like to privatize a corporation which is giving the best value for Manitobans year after year after year. They just don't get it.

### Annual Tax Revenues Release of Auditor General's Report

**Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West):** Interesting that we see MPI becoming a lender of last resort in this province.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the previous Finance minister asked the Auditor General to conduct an annual audit of how tax revenue is spent under the Manitoba Building and Renewal Plan. He said, we'll stand by our commitment that this money is going to what the people of Manitoba intend for us to put it towards. That's infrastructure. Our intention is you'll be able to see exactly where that money has gone to. Our intention is to be very open about where this money is going.

Mr. Speaker, the current Finance Minister now felt the need to hire the Conference Board of Canada to tell Manitobans how wonderful their PST will be for Manitoba.

When will the Auditor General release the report showing if the NDP followed through on their commitment that every dime of the PST will be spent on infrastructure?

**Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Finance):** Mr. Speaker, I think, as the member opposite knows full well, the Auditor General does not work for me, does not report to me. She reports to all of us in the Legislature.

But I will thank you for bringing up the Conference Board of Canada report. I will reference it. The Conference Board of Canada has stated that this plan—this historic investment in infrastructure in this province—will create almost 60,000 jobs in this province of Manitoba. And for every dollar that is invested into that infrastructure, \$1.16 is going to come back to us in benefits.

We also released the five-year plan which clearly shows in it where the money is coming from and where the money is going, with a transparency and accountability that I don't think the members opposite ever showed when they were raising the gas tax and cutting the highways budget.

**Mr. Helwer:** Mr. Speaker, the NDP is double billing Manitobans for similar reports, one from the Auditor General and one from the Conference Board.

Now, in the recent budget, the minister has sought to create a Lean Council for advice on reducing costs. Mr. Speaker, I guess some things are just too obvious. Don't pay for the same report twice.

When will the Auditor General's report be released?

**Ms. Howard:** Mr. Speaker, but you know one thing that was obvious when we became government? That you didn't need two regional health authorities for the city of Winnipeg. That was obvious, so we cut it down to one. And then what was obvious? That we maybe didn't need all those regional health authorities. We cut them down to five.

And then what do we do? We take the savings on administration, \$10 million, and we invested it into free cancer-care drugs for Manitobans. That was obvious.

**Mr. Helwer:** The minister spoke of the use of lean management across government to maximize value and eliminate duplication and repetitive process.

When does she plan to start? Is the Auditor General's report and the Conference Board report going to be used as an example of duplication and repetitive process?

**Ms. Howard:** Mr. Speaker, what we heard clearly from Manitobans and from people who work in the construction industry is they wanted to see a long-range plan that was going to help them prepare to get ready to do this kind of work. It was going to help us be able to talk to Manitobans about that investment.

We have, in this five-year plan, the most accountable and transparent presentation of how we're going to invest Manitoba's money into the infrastructure to grow the economy, into the kinds of priorities that they told us was important, and we have the Conference Board of Canada telling us that that makes economic sense.

I know they don't like to hear those kinds of things, Mr. Speaker, but that is what we have heard about our historic infrastructure plan, and we're proud of that plan and we're going to keep moving forward with it.

### Infrastructure Projects Surplus Revenue Expectations

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier said that if there is a delay in the construction of infrastructure, the money that was allocated for infrastructure from the PST money raised will be rolled over into next year's budget and set aside.

In the budget documents tabled yesterday, the government shows that \$71 million of the \$196 million raised through the increase in the PST fiscal year, it will not be spent on additional infrastructure.

Is it the Premier's intention that this \$71 million be rolled over into the coming year for infrastructure?

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier):** Yes.

\* (10:50)

**Mr. Gerrard:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier may say that his intent was that the \$71 million be rolled over, but his budget shows that the \$71 million was included in the PST revenue from 2013-2014 and that all of that revenue raised this year has already been spent. I table the documents.

There is no evidence in the budget that the money was set aside to be rolled over. Manitobans deserve to know what this government is doing with their money.

Why is the Premier saying it's been rolled over when his own budget shows that the money has all been spent on items other than core infrastructure?

**Mr. Selinger:** We did table a—just the day before the budget The Five-Year Plan to Build a Stronger Manitoba, and on page 12 of that plan it indicates the \$71-million lapse moved forward and included in the additional \$420 million put into the \$5.5-billion plan. If the member reads that, it indicates very clearly that money will be picked up as part of the \$420 million over and above the base amount plus the \$1.5 billion PST money.

It will be in the plan. It will be expended in the plan. It's made completely transparent in the five-year plan, which the member has.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Mr. Speaker, the fact is that what the document says is that they will somehow make up from new revenues from elsewhere the deficit from this year. But, in fact, what the Premier (Mr. Selinger) said yesterday was that he would set aside the \$71 million.

But, Mr. Speaker, the \$71 million was spent this year. Indeed, interestingly enough, the government has spent 613 more million dollars than they raised in revenue. So they've not only spent that \$71 million, they've spent \$613 million more than that last year.

I ask the Premier to please come clean. There could have been a line item setting it aside just as there was a line item elsewhere.

Why was that line item not in the budget? Why was the \$71 million spent on items other than additional infrastructure?

**Mr. Selinger:** On page 12 of The Five-Year Plan to Build a Stronger Manitoba, \$420 million is set aside over and above the base amount plus the PST. That will pick up the rollover that occurred this year. Industry asked us to do it that way. They said, give us some clear indication the money will be rolled over. We put that into the five-year plan.

As we ramp up infrastructure spending, as we let the tenders out earlier and we can mobilize the workforce and the equipment necessary, we will ramp up the plan. The money will be expended on good core infrastructure which will create good jobs for Manitobans.

#### **Infrastructure Projects Spending Announcement**

**Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park):** Our government has focused on investing in steady growth and good jobs for all Manitobans.

As we know, investing in infrastructure is a key way to stimulate economic growth and ensure good jobs for Manitoba families. Whether you live in Winnipeg or in rural areas or in the North, the upgrades to key trade routes will benefit all Manitobans.

Can the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation update the House on this government's historic investment in core infrastructure?

**Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation):** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud that yesterday when the budget was brought down in this province and with the five-year plan that was released the day before, that as of this year there will be more than a billion dollars of expenditure in core infrastructure in the province of Manitoba.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm very—also very proud that if you look at this budget—and this is for the Leader of the Opposition—I know in the 1990s when he was busy running around with scissors cutting the highway budget, the capital budget in the 1990s was \$85 million. If you look at our budget document, it's \$548 million, five times greater.

And, Mr. Speaker, it means whether you're in rural Manitoba or northern Manitoba or in the city of Winnipeg, you're going to see work on Highway 1, Highway 75, the Perimeter Highway, Highway 6, 9, 10. We're paving. We're doing work on our bridges. We're—

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

### **Maple Leaf Foods Future of Brandon Facility**

**Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland):** Yesterday I asked the Minister of Agriculture about this NDP government causing 2,200 full-time union jobs to be at risk at Maple Leaf Foods in Brandon.

It seems the minister really doesn't know what is happening at Maple Leaf Foods. First he tried to blame COOL, then the feds, and then he blamed the opposition as 'unfrenchly,' whatever that is. The real blame, however, lies with this government and their misguided policies.

Why has Maple Leaf Foods reduced from running two shifts to one and a half shifts?

**Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development):** As we realize the importance of Maple Leaf in Brandon's economy, it plays an important role in growing Manitoba's second largest city and contributing to the diversity. Workers at Maple Leaf have a good, stable job, and that's our government is focused on in the new budget and we will continue to work with Manitoba Pork, Maple Leaf and HyLife.

Yesterday the member for Midland raised the concern about Maple Leaf, but can he be a little bit more specific? Could he explain the concerns and why he is concerned that mainly to the job layoff? Can he be a little bit more 'explicive'? Thank you.

**Mr. Pedersen:** Absolutely. More specific is it's this NDP government.

Yesterday the minister tried to blame Maple Leaf Foods for not accessing enough labourers; that he would stoop so low is shameful. Why does this government continue to blame everyone but themselves? Their poorly thought-out policies could cost 2,200 full-time union jobs in the Brandon region.

Will the minister and this government finally stop blaming everyone else and admit they are the reason 2,200 full-time jobs in Brandon are at risk?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** Obviously, the member opposite is not familiar with the word COOL as far as country of origin labelling.

And, obviously, I guess, when we look at the business sense, when we talk about distribution of the finished product, and Maple Leaf does rely on US market to deliver, but yet the member opposite doesn't seem to want to accept the reality, the common-sense thinking that is part of the viability of Maple Leaf.

And I want to ensure the member opposite, as Agriculture Minister I had the opportunity to meet with a lot of—the Minister of Agriculture for the federal government and also with ministers from the US side talking about the importance of moving forward with the finished product from Maple Leaf.

But yet I'm sensing the member opposite is fear mongering, and I would like him to be a little more specific. Is it got something to do with lake—is it something to do with the environmental concerns that maybe he doesn't want to choose or have a discussion about and a signed agreement that we talked about Lake Winnipeg? Thank you.

**Mr. Pedersen:** I assure the minister he'll get his chance to ask questions.

Mr. Speaker, it appears the Premier (Mr. Selinger) doesn't care, the Minister of Agriculture either has no clue or no influence as how to prevent 2,200 full-time jobs at Maple Leaf in Brandon from disappearing.

Again, to quote the minister from yesterday, and I quote, words in a little inefficient manner, end of quote, whatever that means. But that's of no comfort to the Brandon area and to those workers at Maple Leaf Foods.

When will this government stop blaming everyone else and work and actually pick up the phone and phone Maple Leaf Foods as—so they can not reduce their workforce any more?

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** I guess what the question I'm asking the member opposite: What is your policy? We—I haven't heard a lot of 'flubabussing' in talking about a number of things, but I'm asking the Agriculture critic, what is the policy towards the question he's trying to bring forward?

Manitoba government has invested \$25 million in industrial waste infrastructure and treatments of facilities in Brandon and Neepawa. Premier

Selinger stood beside Scott McClain and made an announcement of \$85 million to—

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

I regret to interrupt the honourable minister, but I want to draw attention to all honourable members and to the minister that when we're referencing members of the Assembly, it's ministers by their portfolio and, of course, the First Minister by the title appropriate. So I'm asking for the co-operation of the honourable minister.

\* (11:00)

The honourable Minister of Agriculture, to conclude his remarks.

**Mr. Kostyshyn:** My apologies, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to refer to the commentary is the Premier (Mr. Selinger) made an announcement of an expansion at the Lagimodiere, creating 350 new jobs in Winnipeg, which is part of the added value to the Maple Leaf processing plant in Brandon, but yet the members opposite are trying to fear monger the situation.

My question to the Ag critic is, what is the policy he's trying to bring forward? I would gladly entertain the question.

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

Time for oral questions has expired.

#### Point of Order

**Mr. Speaker:** On a point of order, Official Opposition House Leader.

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader):** The honourable member, the Minister of Agriculture, asked our member a question, and I think he deserves an answer. And I ask that there be extended time so he can answer the question for the Minister of Agriculture.

**Mr. Speaker:** The honourable Government House Leader, on the same point of order.

**Hon. Andrew Swan (Government House Leader):** Mr. Speaker, I believe you've noted that time for question period has expired. I'm sure we'll be happy to hear—if the member from Midland wants to clarify on Monday, we'll be excited to hear it.

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

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

While I understand honourable members are quite excited and involved in question period, and I can appreciate that, I did not hear a reference to a breach of a rule with respect to the point of order, so I therefore must respectfully rule that there is no point of order.

And I also want to remind honourable members, since we have guests in our public gallery, I'm asking honourable members to recognize the decorum in the Chamber, please, out of respect for our guests.

#### MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

**Mr. Speaker:** And since question period, as I've indicated, has expired, we're going to move on to member statements.

#### Investing in Services for Manitobans

**Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert):** Mr. Speaker, for many up North, February means celebrating the annual Trappers' Festival in The Pas. This year, I received an invitation to attend the 67th Trappers' Festival.

While in The Pas, my northern MLA colleagues and I announced investments our government is making in health care, infrastructure and housing.

First, our government is investing 15 new assisted-living units at Pineview Manor. This means more seniors will have access to safe, affordable housing. One resident, Linda Paul, told us she would have to live in a hospital without these new units. Linda now has the ability to live and contribute to the community that she loves.

At The Pas Health Complex, our government is funding improvements to the lab and hospital infrastructure. These upgrades will improve services and support quality patient care for local families. These two investments were reassuring to the people in The Pas that we are intent for looking out—after all Manitobans.

The one thing I've heard loud and clear from Manitobans is that people want investments, not cuts. This is why our government is focused on building and improving roads like the south Perimeter Highway, Highway 75, Highway 1, Highway 6 and 10, the roads to the North, that will see major investments. We are focused on improving health-care facilities, assisted-living homes and affordable universally accessible housing units. In St. Norbert, Place La Charrette opened last year with 37 new affordable and accessible housing units. We're also building new schools like the one I

canvassed for in South Pointe, which will include 114-seat child-care centre.

Mr. Speaker, my time in The Pas reminded me of an importance of having a vision for Manitoba. These were the reasons I ran for office and why I'm committed to representing the families I know and have spoken to in my constituency. Returning home I am energized and committed to building this great province and our home of St. Norbert.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### **Morden-Winkler Winter Games**

**Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight the Manitoba Winter Games currently taking place in Morden, Winkler and Stanley.

The Winter Games kicked off with an opening ceremony last Sunday. I had the pleasure of welcoming and congratulating all the athletes for making it to this level of competition. These athletes have proved to be the best in our province, and that is why they are competing at this level. The opportunity to participate in the Winter Games is giving these young athletes the opportunity to showcase their skills on the provincial stage, opening doors for potential future competition and making memories that will last a lifetime.

Morden-Stanley-Winkler will be hosting 7,500 athletes, coaches, officials and volunteers all this week, who are playing a vital role in this initiative. There's approximately 1,200 athletes from seven different sport regions in the province, ranging in the age from 10 to 18 years old, and the sporting events include: ringette, hockey, table tennis, curling, wrestling, Special Olympics curling, cross-country skiing, gymnastics, badminton and figure skating. I acknowledge the 55 young athletes, coaches and team managers from the Morden-Stanley-Winkler area who are also competing in these sports.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank especially co-chairs, Dan Giesbrecht and Megan Dias, and game's co-ordinator, Jordan Driedger, for taking on an enormous challenge that doesn't come without setbacks, like when the fire alarms all go off at the athletes village and they have to evacuate the building, or when you're trying to figure out how to serve 22,000 meals in one week to young teenagers, and we all know how teenagers eat.

But it is all coming together, and we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the 800 volunteers

who have stepped forward to become part of this wonderful event. Whether it was Deb at administration, Tash with medical services, James at the athletes village security, Steve driving VIP shuttles, Al with results, volunteers are making a difference in our community.

What a thrill for the athletes to be there to represent their regions. Best of luck and best wishes to all of them and may the games go great until tomorrow when they wrap up with the closing ceremonies.

### **I Love To Read Month**

**Mr. Jim Rondeau (Assiniboia):** Good day, Mr. Speaker. This past February schools across Winnipeg celebrated I Love To Read Month. This is the time when we recognize the endless benefits of literacy. From its ability to enhance education and creativity to the joy it brings as a pastime, reading impacts us in many ways.

This year, I was happy once again to participate in I Love To Read celebrations at many different schools, including Buchanan, Lakewood and Voyageur. As a guest reader, I hope to pass my own love of reading and literacy on to young students. At each school I begin by talking about the role of elected officials, the electoral process and the importance of voting. It is truly never too early to start to learn about these things. Then I pull out my collection of books and the students get to vote on which story we read.

As a good example, I would like to highlight Lakewood School's event on I Love to Read. Lakewood invites the entire community to drop in and read. Parents, grandparents, friends, all drop in and read together. I would like to congratulate the hundreds of people of all ages who participated in this community event that embraces reading and literacy. It was a fabulous event.

Many other schools held other theme days, events or challenges that teach the students the joy of literacy and encourages them to read every day.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all the students, MLAs, guest readers and celebrities like the staff of 106 FM and Big Daddy Tazz and others who participated, and their attention to their students in making the joys of reading important. The administration, the schools, the teachers, they spend time here, but it really gets the entire community to understand the importance of learning.



The month is very important. I Love to Read teaches us the importance of reading and the lesson that stays with their entire lives, and actually shows how we can succeed in the future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I encourage everyone to continue to participate in this important event.

#### **Andrea Gorda**

**Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain):** Today, on International Women's Day, I'm proud to rise today to recognize a talented young entrepreneur, Andrea Gorda.

Andrea owns PipCreek Farm and Studio in Inglis. While she operates a farm and photography studio and makes 'artisan' breads, her claim to fame has been the handmade soaps she crafts from natural ingredients and sells. A soap she made for Farmery beer made it all the way to the Golden Globes this year as part of the celebrity gift bags. Her soaps are also sold at Hometown Glory, a new clothing boutique in Russell, as well as at the farmer's markets and various craft sales throughout the holiday season.

Running a home business has been perfect for Andrea, as she suffers from a medical condition called ataxia, which describes a lack of muscle co-ordination during voluntary movements such as walking or picking up objects. Ataxia can affect a person's body movements, speech, eye movements and ability to swallow. Andrea's condition can be unpredictable, and the entrepreneurial path she has chosen offers an opportunity to support her family that has more flexibility than traditional forms of employment.

She recently entered the Just Watch Me! video contest, which was based around videos telling inspiring success stories of entrepreneurs with disabilities. The video contest was run by the Community Futures Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program. The EDP, as it's known, helps people with disabilities or ongoing health conditions start businesses in rural Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Their video contents-contest was open to people with self-identified disabilities or ongoing health concerns operating a business in a Community Futures region in Manitoba or Saskatchewan. The contest opened on December 3rd in recognition of International Day of Persons with Disabilities. In the seasoned entrepreneurial category, Andrea won the third place prize of \$500. She will also receive

business mentoring services as well as a digital camera provided by prize sponsors.

Andrea is an inspiration for all young women and men who—across our province who live daily with physical disabilities. In spite of her diagnosis, she has succeeded in creating a unique home business that I feel honoured to have part of my constituency.

\* (11:10)

On behalf of all members of the Manitoba Legislature, I would like to congratulate Andrea Gorda for winning the third-place award in Just Watch Me! Video Contest and wish her continued success in her business endeavours. Congratulations, Andrea, and keep up the great work. Thank you.

#### **Constituents' Concerns**

**Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris):** Mr. Speaker, despite being an elected MLA for only several weeks, my past life as a staff person has ensured that I'm well aware of the vital importance of constituency work. It is your efforts assisting constituents that sometimes offer you the most fulfillment as a member of the Legislative Assembly.

Constituents' concerns are often very personal. They're often very local, and I'm sure even those MLAs who have been here for many years can attest, they can be very diverse. Constituents can often be bewildered by the very bureaucracy established to serve them. For this very reason, Mr. Speaker, I rise today.

As just days after winning the historically delayed Morris by-election, I received a pile of handwritten correspondence from constituents. I do not need to note for the more seasoned MLAs in this Chamber that we often put—the weight we often put on personal correspondence as opposed to generic form letters. Once these letters had gotten past the formal niceties of congratulating me on my electoral success, their message was consistent and clear. Allow me to share but a few excerpts, and I quote: We have a problem, the snowplows have been destroying our hills. We don't like the cranes destroying the blocks and hills. Please bring the fort back. The tractors have ruined the snowbanks and hills. And, finally, none of the kids have enjoyed their forts and hills being destroyed. Mr. Speaker, clearly in LaSalle and in no doubt communities throughout the constituency of Morris, we have children being denied the simple wintertime pleasure of childhood, specifically, building of snow forts.

And so I listened attentively yesterday to the government's budget for a snow fort strategy, but, unfortunately, like snow falling on a winter day, only silence was heard. This is not a time for finger pointing, Mr. Speaker, but a call for action. We must, collectively, as so eloquently one of these young persons wrote, quote, put a stop to this nonsense immediately.

And for those MLAs who'd be quick to dismiss the pleas of those who are under 10 years old, I would note two important details. Mr. Speaker, they will all be future voters and, secondly, they are most serious, as the frowny faces that accompany their signatures attest.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, to the children of Kim's daycare and to all the children in the Morris constituency, I want them to know that their concerns have been heard, and when it comes to their snow forts, you have a friend here at the Manitoba Legislature. Thank you.

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

#### BUDGET DEBATE

##### (Second Day of Debate)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. We'll now proceed to orders of the day and to resume debate of the adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Ms. Howard), standing in the name of the Leader of the Official Opposition, who has unlimited time.

**Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition):** I want to say again, a welcome to everyone. We're glad, all of us glad, to be back here in the service of the people of Manitoba, I'm sure, and it's also I think an exceptional accomplishment for our caucus to recognize that we are back earlier because of their efforts. And I applaud them in those efforts.

I also wanted to congratulate the newest members of our Legislature, the new members for Arthur-Virden and for Morris, and welcome them here and say that I'm sure that we'll all be rewarded for their presence here and that, most of all, their constituents will be as well.

This is a government that's the last of the socialist governments in the country now, and as it wavers near extinction it is, I think, wise to reflect.

This is a government that has governed since 1999, as they're fond of reminding us, and they have governed badly, Mr. Speaker. There is no doubt of that. They are without a doubt the worst provincial government in the country of Canada. They have, however, been the recipients of the perfect storm of opportunity to do better.

Record increases in transfers from other provinces via Ottawa, solid revenue growth, record-low debt service charges, the trifecta that should have meant a stronger Manitoba, should have meant a more financially secure payoff for Manitobans, and it did not materialize under this government. Instead, through a combination of through-the-roof spending and new borrowing, the NDP squandered that opportunity.

Since the former Finance minister succeeded Gary Doer, the previous premier, the NDP have added to the mix new taxes, new fees and additional debt. And they are living up to the honorific the spendP. They were re-elected in October of 2011, Mr. Speaker. We admit that. But they were—they gained a mandate which was a counterfeit mandate, because what they did was they ran on promises which they have broken—promises of no new taxes, for example—and then weeks later expanding the taxes and fees on everything from haircuts and home insurances to car registration and benefits packages by the largest amount in a quarter of a century. Last year they added an additional 1 per cent to the PST, moving at 60 per cent above the rate of our better-governed neighbours to the west and to the south. And, to do this, they ignored the referendum requirements in Manitoba's taxpayer protection act, taking away the right of Manitobans to vote. Makes you wonder how they can call themselves democrats.

The effect of these measures has been predictable. Taking \$1,600 per household off the kitchen table of working Manitobans and retirees has reduced their discretionary incomes. And particularly hard hit have been middle and lower income families. What are the results of the government's decisions last year and the year before? Food bank usage is up by a record amount. We lead the nation particularly in food bank usage by children. Cross-border shopping is up. Business associations, chambers of commerce across the province have indicated in particular that along the western and southern borders of Manitoba, people are starting to use local businesses for convenience but they're travelling across the border for major purchases.

Inflation is up. Manitoba had the highest average annual provincial inflation rate in the country in 2013, and that hurt seniors and it hurts people living on fixed incomes. And that rate, Mr. Speaker, was more than double the average rate across Canada. Out-migration is up. Since 2009, 75,000 people in total have left Manitoba. The net out-migration is 55,500 people.

Job creation is down. In January of 2014, there were almost 7,000 fewer people working in this province compared to one year before. Wage growth is stagnant. StatsCan reports that Manitobans—and I know what the government thinks about StatsCan, but they should pay attention—StatsCan reports that Manitobans had an average of 36 cents a week more in their pockets than they did a year ago. A zero per cent increase in Manitoba's non-farm average weekly wages—zero per cent. And that in a year when Manitobans were experiencing massive tax hikes.

Small business confidence is almost non-existent. Recent surveys from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business ranked this Premier (Mr. Selinger) dead last. In fact, the government received the worst ratings in almost every category in which small business was surveyed.

A record number of announcements by the government, a new-found focus on infrastructure is their method of response. But it has them in a bit of a box. First of all, the only department of government that's been underspent since this Premier came into power is Infrastructure, by a whopping 27 per cent. In other words, of every \$4 this government has promised to spend on roads, water and sewer, bridges, less than \$3 were actually invested.

Where did all the other money go, Mr. Speaker? This government spent it elsewhere; didn't save it, put it aside in a rainy-day fund, it didn't reduce our debt, didn't certainly reduce taxes or fees. What it did was it spent it on things it thought were more important than infrastructure, and now it tries to tell Manitobans that a higher PST is a great thing for them. And they promise to change their ways. Manitobans are naturally doubtful.

Now, the reality of this box, and the Infrastructure Minister probably understands this, is that the NDP's ideological animosity to the private sector means that there aren't any 3P partnerships on the horizon and they're left with one dance partner. And that dance partner—that dance partner—is a federal Conservative government; the federal

government which introduced the largest infrastructure investment program in the history of the country, is their dance partner. Yet—yet—they continue to bash the federal government at every opportunity. They continue to work to defeat the relationship they should be building with their partners, or potential partners, at the federal level.

\* (11:20)

Thomas Mulcair hugging is in evidence. They bring out the federal NDP leader, and he congratulates them, and they congratulate him. And he says that he's going to do for Canada what they're doing to Manitobans. And look what happens in the by-elections when he makes that statement. I think there's probably some reluctance on the part of Thomas Mulcair to continue the relationship, based on his first experience with the results.

So, the new provincial Finance Minister's first duties following last fall's Cabinet shuffle were to attend the national finance ministers' get-together with a tin cup, and complain and whine and say that there were inadequate federal transfers and inadequate equalization programs.

And here's the reality, Mr. Speaker: Manitobans will receive the highest per capita federal funding in 2014 and '15 west of New Brunswick, twice the amount Saskatchewan will get. And from '99 to 2009, the total transfers to Manitoba went up 61 per cent, but it's never enough for the spend. Major transfers will total, in 2014-15—by the government's own numbers—major transfers will total \$3.4 billion and it's still not enough.

We have to see the spectacle. Manitobans have to watch the spectacle of this government embarrassing, whining to the rest of the country with a tin cup and saying we need more. Equalization is up by almost 9 per cent since 2005-06; the Canada Health Transfer since 2005-06, up by 47 per cent—not enough. And the Canada Social Transfer is up almost 36 per cent since 2005-06—still not enough, never enough.

Explain—the other thing that the Finance Minister had to do, of course, was to go in front of a national audience and explain that Stats Canada can't count in Manitoba, but they can count everywhere else, accurately.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this beggar-thy-neighbour, tin-cup approach means that Manitoba's NDP is simply getting in the habit of biting the hand that's

fed them and increasingly will, and that is embarrassing.

But none of this is new and the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) knows that. The NDP provincial dynasty, as they love to call it, rests on the foundation of falsehoods. They say they are protectors of social services, yet we lag the nation in health care. Manitobans wait the longest in the country to receive treatment after seeing a specialist. In fact, just this past month, Manitobans were waiting an average of 17 weeks to receive an MRI. Manitobans are waiting almost two hours longer to receive emergent and urgent care than the average Canadian.

And in education, recent results demonstrate Manitoba's scores have dropped from the middle of the pack among the provinces in 2006 to near the bottom to 2009. Our students scored eighth in math, they scored ninth in reading and science. We weren't last, though, Mr. Speaker, and I know the government takes some comfort in that, but they should aim higher. Even worse, Manitoba's scores continue to drop every three years to the point our students are below the global average in math this time. Like too many in elected office, I am—I fear that this government equates spending other people's money with caring, but unfortunately they have little concern with results. Since they've come into office, they've actually spent 2.3 times the amount that they needed to spend to match our provincial population and inflation growth.

And now, Mr. Speaker, they announce this week they're going to offer a course on financial literacy—this government. Financial illiteracy might be more appropriate, but the fact of the matter is dollars and nonsense is not something new to this government. Now, this is a provincial government that has taken our debt to over \$30 billion for the first time in our history, and now they're going to offer courses on the dangers of high debt. Interesting. They're going to offer courses that are going to educate our children on learning the limits of borrowing. I hope they review the material in the courses. There's actually a unit on the effects of higher interest rates. Perhaps they'd like to consider that, given that our debt-service charges are about the same now as they were when interest rates were twice as high, or more. These are all lessons this government's failed to learn. I'm glad that these lessons are going to be going to our children, because it's less likely, if they study well, that they'll ever support a government that manages as badly as this government has.

We have also a unit on risk versus reward, and I think it's important to understand that concept, and I think it's very important in the context of Manitoba Hydro and its future. We have a debate about Manitoba Hydro that should be taking place here, but it's been delegated. It's been delegated to NDP political appointees to have that debate. They've been asked to have that debate with their ears covered and their eyes closed. They've been asked to have that debate in the absence of facts, pertinent facts, important facts. The most important debate we'll have, only we won't have it because this government has decided to politicize Manitoba Hydro and its future.

The biggest dollar investment in the history of our province and it's going to be decided by a half dozen political appointees of the NDP. Not by experts, not by people who know about the industry, but in the next eight to 10 weeks we're going to see a government-prescribed politicization of Manitoba Hydro and a decision made on the largest investment in the history of Manitoba. That's just wrong, Mr. Speaker. It'll triple the debt of Manitoba Hydro; it's guaranteed to push the rates upward; it's going to hurt Manitobans. And all we're asking is that the government let the debate happen among informed Manitobans and allow the real owners of Manitoba Hydro to have a say in this debate. That is the right way to do things.

We will wear this decision. History will report how this decision was made, history will acknowledge how this decision was made, and the decision will have ramifications for not only ourselves as we age but for our children and our grandchildren for generations to come. This is the most important decision, dollars- and cents-wise, that any of us will ever be part of making, and six NDP political appointees or so will get to decide. That's not right.

Now, let's talk about risk. Quebec has a hydroelectric program, perhaps the minister's heard of it. If he hasn't, he can google it. Now, the fact of the matter is Quebec's government had the brains to go and commission an independent report to do an analysis for them of their hydroelectric business, and this is what the report said: Quebec is awash in surplus power as US shale surge steals markets. Quebec has a big energy problem and it's shaping into a potential mess, so much so in fact that a government-mandated commission—this is reported last Friday, National Post, if you'd like to read it—studied Quebec's energy situation and recommended

this week that the government consider putting on ice all new power production investments, including the last two phases of the \$6.5 billion La Romaine hydroelectric project in the remote North. That project ironically is about the same size as the Keeyask project proposed by this government.

But it goes further, and if the member would listen rather than barking from his seat, he might gain from this. The commission's conclusions will almost certainly—almost certainly—it said in the article, force a rethink of how the Province makes and sells electricity.

Now, it also goes on to say—[interjection] for the minister of—the Attorney General (Mr. Swan) continues to bark from his seat—but they also—it says—it may, it says, also—

**An Honourable Member:** He's an angry man.

**Mr. Pallister:** You're an angry man, the Attorney General.

He may also hold lessons for other provinces moving forward with their own power generation plant. If Quebec's electricity business model is broken, what about those about hydro producers in Manitoba?

The man who did the report is a renowned international expert on hydroelectricity, and the business field in which he has expertise is one in which none of the members opposite have any. And the reality is they should listen to his words because he goes on to say if the government leaders and hydro officials had taken better stock of the situation, they would never have approved groundbreaking at La Romaine in the first place.

He estimates Quebec will have surplus power until 2028. This government's down to saying we're going to freeze in the dark if we don't build right now. But we have possession of an expert report which says not. It says we could have until 2033, using reasonable projections to—before we would need additional power production. So they're rushing the decision, and heaven knows why. Perhaps because they don't want Manitobans to be involved in the debate, I'm not sure.

But here is what the report says: What has become much more obvious in the past few months is that this project is, in fact, a white elephant. That's what the Quebec report says, Mr. Speaker. By—and it goes on to say by blindly subsidizing useless projects, the premier and her government are

impoverishing Quebec families and dwindling economic development. That's a pretty good report to read. I hope the members opposite have read it or consider reading it in the future; it might be educational for them.

\* (11:30)

Now, the Public Utilities Board commissioned a report, as well, on Manitoba Hydro. They asked a world-renowned firm in Boston, Massachusetts, to do an analysis of Hydro's projects and to make recommendation. They asked this firm, the PUB, to investigate and report back on what they thought should be done, in terms of the government's proposal and here's some of what of they said. And I invite the members opposite, the backbenchers who are perhaps in danger of getting snowed by some of their front-bench colleagues on this issue, should read up on this and ask some questions because years to come they're going to be answering some of those questions from Manitobans who wonder why things went so horribly wrong.

Here's what La Capra Associates said: On page 1, they said the government is overstating the benefits of their proposal. That was one page 1. On page 1, they said that the government's analysis makes clear that the economic case for the NDP plan is marginal. They said—marginal, they said; that means, for members opposite, close to the lowest limits of acceptability.

On page 2, they said the government has not established the need for expanded transmission to the United States, so the Americanization strategy the government's embarking on is not supported by these world-renowned experts, but is supported by these non-experts opposite.

On page 4—[interjection] No, La Capra and associates wrote this. The question from the member—yeah, yeah, and I invite you to read it. Take the time to read it. It's a \$20-billion decision. It's worth reading a report. You can do it in an hour. I urge the member to take the time to read the report.

On page 5, it says the forecast the government is using—it says of the forecast the government is using there is, quote, there is material probability that the year of need is as late as 2033 and that the government's forecasts are, quote, very conservative.

On page 8, it says—[interjection] This will all go down on the record—if the minister thinks I'm making it up, he can cite it any day he wants. I'm reading him quotes out of Capra and associates, and the reality is,

he very likely, Mr. Speaker, and Manitobans should note this, has not read this report. This is the same man, of course, who tried to shut down Assiniboia Downs.

On page 8, it says the pricing premiums used by the government are not well documented. It says there is no proof that Manitoba Hydro can sell its hydro on a long-term basis to the United States.

On page 9, it says the government comparisons are too, quote, too limited in scope for a decision of this magnitude.

There you go, Mr. Speaker. There's the information. The NDP can't say we haven't put it on record. They can't say they didn't hear. They can't say they didn't have the opportunity to read the La Capra report and they can't say they weren't told about the information from the Quebec report. Now, on the record, we know that the information on how dangerous their decision-making process is is on that record.

On page 15, they say the comparison methodology the government's advanced in its proposal is, quote, out of date, quote, misleading. It says on page 14 of that report that the cost of alternative energy sources are quote, significantly overstated. It also says, that on page 15, quote, they did not include demand side management in any of their alternative plans, meaning they are working on the assumption that Manitobans will continue to use power at exactly the same rate that they are now, despite the reality that power use has declined over a number of years.

They also say, on page 25, that there are a number of alternative plans that are lower cost over 20 years, 35 years and 50 years. They say several plans are more economic than the government proposed plan. They go on to say that a slightly lower view of expert prices would mean even more alternatives were less costly than the one the government is proposing.

On page 12, they say, quote, the government proposal is not the lowest cost through the next 50 years, even from the provincial perspective. Let's understand what that means. Even taking into account the fact that the government derives revenue from Manitoba Hydro, in the form of water rental fees which it charges Manitoba Hydro, capital taxes which it applies to Manitoba Hydro and a provincial guarantee for borrowing which it charges Manitoba Hydro, which is 1 per cent of all dollars Manitoba

Hydro has to lever, even taking those into account—and those fees would be massive, massive for the provincial government's coffers—the plan does not work. Government wins, Manitoba Hydro ratepayers lose. Government coffers are filled, Manitoba ratepayers pay more. Government gets the sure thing, Manitoba Hydro users and owners, all of us, all Manitobans, take all the risks.

On page 29 it says, quote: At least half the positive benefits of development plans are captured by the Province and not Manitoba Hydro ratepayers. So I encourage the government to read that, and I hope they do, because the reality is they've forced this issue since this Premier was the Hydro Minister. And he politicized Manitoba Hydro and told the head of PUB to locate that bipole line on the west side. Right since then, if not before, this government's done nothing but act like it's the owner of Manitoba Hydro. And it is not the owner of Manitoba Hydro according to the PC Party of Manitoba and according to Manitobans.

I want to speak a little bit about trust, because trust is important and always is essential in relationship building. And it's important to understand with this Rallygate issue—this issue of blaming a civil servant for wrongdoing when such was not the case—it's important to understand—and this is especially true for the Premier (Mr. Selinger)—to understand that plausible deniability is only plausible if it's plausible, and this isn't plausible.

The sequence of events is this: An assistant deputy minister, out of his office are sent hundreds of invitations to civil servants to attend a political protest rally; a partisan act if there ever was one. When questions are asked by a former member of our caucus, the minister denies it in the House and the Premier repeats those talking points, developed by one of his 192 communications staff, I'm sure. Then denials all around from—subsequently made by other members of the Cabinet. They knew; they did nothing—they did nothing—they said, until—well, they knew later, and then they still did nothing.

The cruelest lies are often told in silence, and a falsely accused assistant deputy minister being investigated by an Ombudsman's office for something he did not do smacks of unfairness. Now, we know that the accusations were made by the NDP front bench. They are the ones who placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of this civil servant and then waited a year and a half to admit at—only at the

point of the release of the Ombudsman's report to acknowledge that they were responsible for the wrongdoing.

Now, who were they protecting through that whole time period do you suppose? Was it Manitobans? Was it civil servants? Manitoba seniors perhaps? No. Was it integrity? Was it trust? Was it honesty? Was it any of those things? Who were they protecting? They were covering up for themselves; a cover-up—simple cover-up.

So I have to ask the members opposite to consider this—and consider this—and I ask the member opposite from Wolseley to consider this: If he was a minister—which is highly unlikely, but is possible, I suppose, in the fullness of time—if he was a minister and he was in charge of a department and there was a protest, he did something, he decided to outlaw something, say, hairbands—we'll just do a hypothetical here—let's do a hypothetical. And they decided to outlaw hairbands and there was a protest organized and it was held against his decision—a protest organized in front of the Leg. here with, I don't know, a couple of hundred people. A couple of hundred people came to it and he learned—or he didn't learn, it was alleged that a civil servant in his department had actually helped to orchestrate the attendance at that rally. Let's just suppose that that happened.

Say there was a forced-amalgamation protest out in front of the Legislature and a bunch of people came. And the Rural Development Minister knew about it and he heard there was a civil servant who'd organized it.

Let's suppose there was a rally about Assiniboia Downs and people in support of Assiniboia Downs came to the Legislature and then it was alleged—it was alleged—that a senior civil servant in that department had actually helped organize attendees to come to that rally. How would the current minister, who used to be in charge of that department—how would he feel?

Let's take a look at this—let's take a look at this. Let me ask these members opposite, if there was—say, they were the Finance Minister—say, they were the Finance Minister—and a rally was organized out in front of the Leg. here for the PST hike. Should it matter if it was for it or against it? Should it make any difference? Should it matter at all, Mr. Speaker? I ask you rhetorically, should it matter at all? I don't think it should matter.

\* (11:40)

If a civil servant was alleged to have organized a rally to privatize MPI, as this member so frequently alludes to, would—let me ask him and let me ask every backbencher on that side of the House this question: Would the ministers in charge of those departments see that as a problem? Would the minister see that as a problem?

Let's give the Attorney General (Mr. Swan) a chance to stand up and say what he'd like. Does he see it as a problem? Would he see it as a problem, the Justice Minister for our province? It was an emotional time. Maybe people just showed up. Maybe we should forgive everybody because it's an emotional time.

Look, would the ministers see this as a problem? That's a question only they can answer. But I ask them, would they investigate? Would the Justice Minister, if they organized a rally against something he was advancing, would it—and his civil servant, senior civil servant in his department, was alleged to have done it, alleged to have been involved in organizing the rally, would he see it as a problem? Would he investigate? If he found out, if the information came to him, that a senior civil servant in his department had participated in organizing a rally against something that he was advancing in his department, what would he have done? What would he have done? How would he have behaved?

And, most importantly, Mr. Speaker, here is the question every member on the other side of the House has to ask themselves: If this happened, if they learned that the department they were in charge of was initiating an action which was being protested against by Manitobans and that the protest had been orchestrated by a senior civil servant in their department, how long would they wait to investigate? How long would they wait to get the facts? Would they wait a year and a half? Would they wait six months? Would they wait six weeks? Six minutes? Possibly they wouldn't wait. Should it be any different in this case? Should it be any different?

This is a cover-up of unbelievable proportions. This is absolutely an affront to the trust that civil servants in this province place—should be able to place in a government. It's an affront to trust. It's an affront to trust. The disrespect of this action knows—it is indecipherable and the member—the Attorney General doesn't grasp the indecipherable wrongness of this. The reality of this is—this is a bad

government, Mr. Speaker, that has violated the trust of Manitobans again and again and again.

It promised in the last election to balance the books. Yesterday, they would be balanced. That's what they said just two years ago. That didn't happen. We're talking about half a billion dollars of additional hole being dug by that government opposite.

They promised not to raise fees. They promised not to raise taxes. They promised to take the load off seniors on their tax. They didn't do any of those things, Mr. Speaker, and now they want to make more promises and they want to be trusted so badly that all they're down to is pointing fingers at other people, the feds, Filmon, floods and us, because they can't look in the mirror and say they've been responsible or governed well because if they did that, they'd be lying to themselves.

Manitoba's prosperity report, *Are We There Yet?*, answers the question statistically. No, not even close, and I encourage the members to read it, because what it says is that we've got a government that is bottom of the barrel. Average weekly earnings—now, I should explain the survey was done from all provinces Ontario to the west. It does not include Atlantic Canada, but it says, among those provinces we are closest to in this country, that we are bottom of the barrel in average weekly earnings, last; labour force growth, last; holding the line on personal taxes, last; net earner provincial migration, last; basic personal exemption, lowest; payroll tax, worst; educational attainment, bottom of the barrel; gross domestic product, lowest; research and development, lowest.

That's not a great record, Mr. Speaker—quite the opposite. And as this government looks within itself to try to continue to find people to blame, perhaps, just for once, it should take a look in the mirror. There's a great contrast here.

We've been forced, as a political party, to launch a lawsuit against the government to protect the interests of Manitobans. We don't like to have to do that, Mr. Speaker. Manitobans don't like that we have to do that, either. And while the NDP fight for themselves, we will defend Manitobans. And while they fight for higher taxes, we will fight for lower taxes. And while they fight for lower wages, we'll fight for higher, fairer wages. And while they fight for more job-killing red tape, we will fight for more jobs. And when they eliminate the voting rights of Manitobans, as they are going to court to try to do,

we will fight for more power and more rights and more freedoms for the people of this great province. And make no mistake, this is a great province, something upon which we can all agree.

Mr. Speaker, we have for 15 years led the country in charitable giving. That's something to be tremendously proud of and I hope that that can continue despite the tax inroads the government has made on Manitoba's households. We lead the country in volunteerism, too, and that's something to be proud of. And I'm so proud and we're all proud, and we've alluded to it before, of the performance of our athletes and the preparation and the work that went into the work that those athletes did to participate in the Olympic Games. And I'd like to, if I may, I'd just like to take a second and read some of the names into the record. Other members have done it, but I think it's worth repeating, an accomplishment of this level. And if I can find them, I will certainly do that. I need some help. I need you to find me those Olympic athletes' names.

I wanted to mention, if I could, the U of M women's volleyball team that captured the national championship last week, and I think that's a tremendous accomplishment. And we are a volleyball-strong province. And I also wanted to—*[interjection]*—yes. I wanted to mention—that's a mission staff, but I want the gold medalists and so on, as well. It's another page.

I wanted to mention a couple of things in Fort Whyte that I think are worth mentioning, and there's so many things. Each of us has great people in our constituency who have done wonderful things. But the 10th Linden Woods Fall Classic I wanted to mention. In 2004, had a group of people in my constituency that started what would become a fall tradition. It's the Fall Classic. It's a 10-K race, a 5-K fun race and a 4-K family walk that takes them through beautiful Linden Woods neighbourhood and the parks and so on. I just wanted to offer my congratulations to them on that. It was held last year on October 6th.

Also, I wanted to mention the Whyte Ridge Community Centre has a thing called Light Ridge, a Christmas light competition. I'd encourage members to take a look. It's incredible. This year lots of nominations, and Tom White won the competition; I should mention Tom's name. Linden Christian School sponsored a trip to Guatemala. They did some wonderful missionary work there involving themselves in a project to help the construction of a



school, moving 4,000 bricks. That's pretty hard work, but it was fulfilling work for the group.

Fort Whyte, of course, FortWhyte Alive has a number of great events, and I encourage members who haven't had the opportunity—if anyone here hasn't—to take advantage of that facility. And I wanted to mention the Hypothermic Half Marathon. If you can believe this, if anybody remembers, a couple of weeks ago, February 23rd, Sunday, wasn't a great day in Manitoba weather-wise. Yet, they were able to clear the course and they had 710 runners for that half marathon competition, and it was tremendous, unbelievable work. There's a lot of great events in Fort Whyte, and I congratulate and thank the people who are involved in supporting them and hope that everyone who participates now and in the future enjoys and finds the experiences fulfilling.

In respect of the Olympic athletes: Bailey Bram in women's ice hockey as an alternate; Dawn McEwen and Jennifer Jones and Jill Officer, Kaitlyn Lawes, all in curling; Jocelyne Larocque, women's ice hockey; Jonathan Toews in men's. And I want to mention an old curling buddy of mine, Ryan Fry, who I beat to win the provincial mixed championship. But Ryan has gone on a lot further than I ever will in curling, and we're all really proud of Ryan Fry and his team, his great team from northwestern Ontario.

I should also mention the Paralympic athletes, Dennis Thiessen. And a number of other athletes, who, although they didn't medal: Brittany Schussler, Megan Imrie, Paige Lawrence and Rudi Swiegers who are—we'll claim them. They're Saskatchewan born, but unlike many other Manitobans, they've come this way from Saskatchewan, and we like that.

I also want to mention some of the coaches, as well: Janet Arnott, who was involved in the curling; Patricia Hole was involved in figure skating; and there were officials, mission staff, many consultants involved, all Manitobans. It was just a tremendously entertaining thing, apart from the advertisements between events, a very interesting event to see and to enjoy. And I think all of us find it uplifting when we see people striving for excellence. Unfortunately, we don't see a lot of that here.

\* (11:50)

Now, I've always liked to build, Mr. Speaker. I've always enjoyed it. I've had the chance to build some pretty good sports teams. I've had the chance to

build some pretty good small businesses. I've had the chance to work with organizational—in organizational capacities as a volunteer for my community as a coach, as a political person, too, and I love it. I love to be part of a group of people who are dedicated to a cause, and focus on that cause for the betterment of all, not just for the betterment of those who are working on the team but for the betterment of all.

And I know some things about building, and I know one thing, Mr. Speaker, you've got to get the foundation right, and our province's foundation has been eroding away; this last number of years it's accelerated. And that's dangerous for our future building. And we don't know how deep that hole is but we have to stop digging deeper. And our party will do that.

And I know another thing about building, Mr. Speaker, and that is this: You have to have your right tools and you have to have those tools in your right hands. You have to have the right people on your team. And the first thing you have to do is make sure that you fight within yourself and you eliminate the presence of credit-grabbing behaviour on an organization or you will not win.

Blame placers and credit grabbers bring an organization down. They defeat its purpose, they defeat the ability of that organization to achieve victory and to help the people it needs to help. And if there are people in your organization who want to ribbon cut and be on the front of every paper and get in front of the ribbon that they're cutting, then that's dangerous. *[interjection]*

And as—and I urge these members opposite not to run around with scissors.

I don't come from a wealthy background, but we had a lot of benefits growing up. And one of them was parents who loved and cared for us. And I've—I enjoyed, as a kid, the little country fairs our mom would take us to sometimes. And one of them was in the little community in the riding of the member from Agassiz, MacGregor. And MacGregor fair was pretty cool. They had a petting zoo—well, I should mention the member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan); I'm remiss in not mentioning her because I know she's been at the MacGregor fair many times, coming from that area.

It was a wonderful fair, the community volunteers that ran that thing were second to none, they had great ball tournaments, they had rides, it was just great.

And when I was nine years old, Mom took me and my younger brother, who's seven at the time, and my sister, who was about four and a half, over to the MacGregor fair. It was a highlight for us. And they had races too. So this is good, they had races for the six-year-old boys, then the six-year-old girls and up the line.

And then they come to nine-year-old boys, and they call us up, and I go up. And the man running the race takes one look at me—and I think maybe the Attorney General (Mr. Swan) can understand what I'm going to say now—he took one look at me and he said, it's not your turn, boy, he said.

Well, I was a big boy and I could understand his feeling. But I was taught not to talk back to adults, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, I was taught to stand up for what was right. And I was nine, so I stayed in my place. And the parents who were waiting for their kids to race were getting agitated and wanted me to move and give up, but I don't give up too easily when I believe I'm right, and I think most members understand that. And the fact of the matter is I was nine.

So they—finally, my mom came through the crowd with my sister in her arms and my brother in tow, and she said, can I help? And the gentleman said, well, this boy won't move; it's not his turn. She said, well, isn't this the nine-year-old boys race? He said, yes, it is. She said, well, he's nine. And he said, how do you know? She said, I gave birth to him nine years and a week ago, she says, something like that. And he said, well, I guess I'll have to take your word for it but you have to start three steps back.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't mind. I—honestly, I don't mind. I never minded. I like a challenge, I love a challenge, I embrace it. I feel like many people in this caucus, I embrace a challenge, and I love fighting for what's right. And I don't mind running harder than everybody else, I don't mind, but, when you put my province three steps behind our other great Canadian provinces, you've done wrong. And that's what's being done.

Manitobans, we have a vision for the future of this province, and we believe this province should be governed with the same values that Manitobans have. And Manitobans are hard-working and this is a hard-working political party, and we will not accept unearned subsidies like a vote tax. We will not do that.

Manitobans have to balance their books; we'll balance their books, too. And Manitobans have foresight, and that's the discipline required to support those who need help in the years to come. And you can't do that by buying favour today with ribbon cuttings and vote buying. You can't do that.

Manitobans are capable, honest people, and that's the kind of people I am proud to be surrounded by today. And I believe that Manitobans, too, are compassionate and focused and caring and giving, and that's the kind of government they deserve and that's the kind of government we'll provide them with. But most of all, Mr. Speaker, Manitobans are honest and they deserve an honest government too.

Thank you very much.

So I move, Mr. Speaker, that the motion be amended by deleting all of words after House—

**An Honourable Member:** Second it.

**Mr. Pallister:** Oh, I'm sorry—and seconded by the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson),

THAT the motion be amended by the deleting all of the words after "House" and substituting:

therefore regrets that this budget neglects the priorities of Manitobans by:

- (a) failing to repeal the massive tax and fee increases imposed in Budget 2012 and Budget 2013 including the PST hike the provincial government previously referred to as "ridiculous" and promised never to impose; and
- (b) disrespecting Manitobans by refusing to hold the legally required referendum before increasing the PST and going to court in 2014 to permanently remove the rights of Manitobans to vote on major tax increases; and
- (c) breaking the promise to eliminate the structural deficit of nearly \$400 million created by years of government mismanagement and overspending despite record federal transfers, historically low interest rates and record government revenues; and
- (d) failing to address the growing threat to services Manitobans count on such as health and social supports which are severely

impacted by the more than \$32-billion provincial debt, a debt which was created by overspending even with record federal transfers, historically low interest rates and record government revenues; and

- (e) breaking the promise to seniors by failing to provide promised tax relief; and
- (f) neglecting vulnerable Manitobans by ignoring repeated calls from the official opposition and anti-poverty coalitions to immediately raise the Employment and Income Assistance rental allowance rates to 75 per cent of median market rents; and
- (g) failing to relieve the income tax burden for low-income families; and
- (h) ignoring repeated calls from the official opposition and independent experts to review the provincial government's \$25-billion Manitoba Hydro expansion gamble which has already resulted in dramatic hydro rate increases for Manitoba families and will continue to impose dramatic hydro rate increases for generations to come; and
- (i) failing to encourage business confidence by stifling economic growth through excessive red tape and worsening the already uncompetitive tax environment by raising the PST; and
- (j) continuing the provincial government's isolationist trade policies by failing to act on the repeated calls of the official opposition, leading employers and industry groups to join the New West Partnership.

As a consequence, the provincial government has therefore lost the confidence of this House and the people of Manitoba.

***Motion presented.***

**Mr. Speaker:** The amendment is in order.

\* (12:00)

**Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation):** I want to put on the record that not only do I oppose the Leader of the Opposition's motion, I fully support a progressive, forward-thinking, dynamic budget document that is going to grow this province with the kind of steady growth we've seen over the last decade, Mr. Speaker, and take it to the next level.

But I must admit, Mr. Speaker, I have rarely seen a speech like the one just given by the Leader of the Opposition.

You know, it's actually good that the Leader of the Opposition moved an amendment at the end that actually referenced the budget because I've rarely seen a speech by a Leader of the Opposition—and we've seen quite a few of them from Tory leaders of the opposition over the last number of years—on the budget where the Leader of the Opposition barely even mentioned the budget itself.

Now, we heard a lot of the stories that the Leader of the Opposition likes to tell, both personal and I would say some of the fictional, political stories that he's known for. We heard about Hydro—I mean, let's put on the record, we know he's opposed to developing our Hydro potential in this province, and in every single way, and he doesn't need any outside source to validate that. He'd made up his mind right from the start. And what does he want to do? What he wants to do is go back to the Tory policies which are not only to build Hydro—they don't want to build Hydro development. They would burn fossil fuel. I mean—when—you know, the code word here, when they talk about their other options, are—what—clean coal? You know, that ultimate oxymoron. That's what they're doing in Saskatchewan.

How about natural gas? That's the option they want to talk about. And one thing I'm proud of with this government is we're committed to developing our Hydro potential to meet the needs of Manitobans. We'll use the export markets to pay for them and I want to say to the Leader of the Opposition, we've been there and done that with Tory governments wanting to jam the brakes on Hydro development. They did it with Limestone; they did it with Conawapa. We will fight any attempt by the Conservatives to shut down our Hydro development because, Mr. Speaker, it's the right thing to do.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what I was also struck by with the Leader of the Opposition's presentation—I, actually, I think we got some window on what it's like at a Tory caucus meeting because I, you know, I've rarely seen a political leader spend so much time lecturing not only us on this side of the House but his own members. I was struck by the way yesterday, right after the budget, the Leader of the Opposition had—I think it was a clipboard in his hand and he was—he had every one of the Conservative MLAs lined up—he was giving them directions. Kind of

reminded me of the Swedish hockey coach in the third period because, you know what, what struck me about it, is the Leader of the Opposition still doesn't get what Manitobans want. They don't want fictional stories. What they want is they want real alternatives and it strikes me that not only can he not debate the budget, I don't think he put forward a single thing he would do differently. Not a single thing. Well, I wonder why.

Well, let's start with the reality of what the budget does, and I want to put on the record that we have spent a considerable amount of time with our caucus and our government listening to Manitobans. And let's be frank, there are some Manitobans that agreed and some that didn't agree with the additional 1 cent on the dollar. But every single Manitoban we talked to said if you're going to raise that kind of revenue, spend it on core infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, we got the message. This budget does exactly that and I'm very proud that in this year we will exceed \$1 billion of 'expenditure' in core infrastructure because of our budget.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I refer members opposite to page 12 of The Five-Year Plan to Build a Stronger Manitoba, Manitoba's core infrastructure priorities—by the way, on the next page it says steady growth, good jobs. For members opposite, by the way, they may not have seen one of these when they were in government. But this is a paving machine, and there'll be a quite a few of these active over the summer and next summer and the following summer while—actually it's a five-year plan, so five summers. And I want to say to members opposite, page 12 outlines the financial commitment and page 13 is showing you what you're going to get. Because we are going to pave a lot out of this: highways in Manitoba, the city streets here in Winnipeg. Because Manitobans said they wanted investment in core infrastructure, we're going to deliver.

Now, members opposite I know will—I'm sure they'll get on board in some way, shape or form. I thought the member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer) was the most obvious last year. I'll never forget going into the budget where he got up and he said we want action in Brandon on Victoria Avenue. In the budget we said there'll be action on Victoria Avenue. We delivered on Victoria Avenue in Brandon. What did he do? Eight days later he voted against it, Mr. Speaker; eight days, he voted against it. Well, I would note that in this document we have action on the Daly Overpass clearly identified. What will he do? I'm sure he will vote against it.

And I look around at other members opposite. I wonder if any one of them will stand up to vote for the \$320 million we're going to be investing over the next five years on Highway 1 east and Highway 1 west. Will one of them—the member for Portage, for example, a lot of that work is in and around Portage; will they vote for it? Why, Mr. Speaker, I get the feeling that they, some of them might even sort of think about it.

But with the Leader of the Opposition and the PCs we know one thing: when it comes to infrastructure, you want talk, you get it from them in question period because they get up one part of question period and they say oh, we want this, we want that, we want the other. But when it comes to the walk, the delivery, it's the NDP that delivers in terms of infrastructure.

Now, I also want to put on the record with the Leader of the Opposition that I know he's a bit sensitive about scissors. He even 'referenced' it in his speech, Mr. Speaker. Now, I must say that I find it rather interesting, a lot of Manitobans are talking about his penchant for cutting. Now, I'm not sure he's really a scissors kind of guy. In my book—and I would say the Leader of the Opposition hasn't really changed a lot. I think he's more of chainsaw kind of guy when it comes to government.

Because, you know, when they were in government in the 1990s and he was a Cabinet minister—I'll start with infrastructure, and I know they don't like this, Mr. Speaker. And if they want to look at what a real budget looks like they'll look on page—and I have it right in front of me—104. They will look at the highway infrastructure, the capital. This is, you know, I'm talking about the highway capital. We've increased it this year to \$548 million. What was it? This is a real budget. What was it when they were in government? When the Leader of the Opposition was a Cabinet minister they dropped it to as low as \$85 million. Now, let me tell you what they did. They got—they raised the gas tax, by the way. They then cut the expenditures on highways. Not only that, when they got federal money they cut it further.

If you consider that we are now at \$548 million, and that's going to continue to actually grow over the next number of years, what it means is we are now already five times greater than the Conservatives ever were in terms of highways and it's only going to continue to grow.

\* (12:10)

Now, what does that mean, Mr. Speaker? I again would point members to the plan, because the plan itself is very clear, because members opposite, I think, perhaps haven't been listening to what Manitobans were saying.

I want to talk, by the way—what Manitobans—and I'll start with the president of Manitoba Heavy Construction Association, Chris Lorenc. Now I'll tell you what the Heavy Construction Association has said: They've said, invest in infrastructure—good point. They've said, make sure it's transparent—good point. They said, give us the tenders early on—good point. They said, have a long-term plan—good point. And they also said, if there's any lapse in any given year, roll it over.

So what do we do with our five-year plan? We delivered all on five of the points, and I can tell you the president of the Heavy Construction Association not only said he supports the plan, not only supports the one-cent-on-the-dollar, he said it's the only plan of its kind in Canada. We are the model in terms of infrastructure. This is the president of the Heavy Construction Association, not the president of the NDP or the MFL—the president of the Heavy Construction Association.

And I want to tell you that we've had support for many of the announcements from many stakeholders: the CAA, the Manitoba Trucking Association. I could run through the list of some of the regional announcements of local representatives.

How about the mayor of Winnipeg? The mayor of Winnipeg stood with the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and our Minister responsible for the City of Winnipeg just a couple of days ago, and we announced the most significant investment that we've seen probably in the history of this city for regional and local roads and bridges in the city of Winnipeg. What did the mayor of Winnipeg say? He endorsed it, not only in terms of the announcement. He said that this government is on the right track when it comes to infrastructure for the city of Winnipeg. I hope the members opposite are keeping tabs of this because, you know, what you see is a pattern. We took the time to listen to Manitobans on infrastructure, and many of the validators and the validation we're getting now is because, Mr. Speaker, we are doing exactly what they said. They wanted a long-term plan; they wanted guarantees that it's going to be delivered; and we are going to do that.

I want to put on the record, by the way, with the president of the Heavy Construction Association at

the press conference where we announced the five-year plan, the question came up on whether the industry could deliver. Well, I've got to tell you, I asked that question to the president of the Heavy Construction Association at the infrastructure—in fact, the first meeting—the round table that we held. The Minister for Jobs and the Economy was part of it; our Finance was—the minister was part of it; and we met with key stakeholders. And, at the time, I said to the president of the Heavy Construction Association—I asked him the question: Mr. Lorenc, can you deliver? Can the industry deliver? What was his answer then? What was his answer when we were—released this five-year plan? We can and we will deliver.

So we are now working in partnership—for the Leader of the Opposition—with the private sector that is going to deliver it. And I want to put on the record: we are going to deliver on the most ambitious, historic investment at Manitoba infrastructure we have seen in decades in this province.

Now, you know, I want to also address how you finance it, because, you know, let's be very upfront here with the Leader of the Opposition. He's also been very clear right from day one that he would cut core expenditures. I mean, we're—when, you know—we don't have to make anything up with the Leader of the Opposition. You know, I mean, I—you know, a lot of his comments to—pretty 'fanciful', but he—I do give him some credit. He has a penchant for putting on the record exactly what he believes. I know he likes to lecture people about it, but he's put on the record he would cut core expenditures in government. He did that last year. We know what that would mean. It would immediately mean impacts in terms of layoffs of teachers, doctors, nurses. If it sounds familiar—basically what happened in the 1990s when he was the Cabinet minister.

But what's interesting about infrastructure—I want to put on the record that, over the last number of days, he's said, well, we might invest on the infrastructure, although, at times, he's kind of suggested he would cut some of the projects. But then he—oh, just take it out of general revenue. Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to put on the record, I and every single one of caucus fully supports investment in infrastructure, but it should never come at the expense of what families rely on, the services like health care, education, the kind of social programs that are important in this province, because the agenda the Leader of the Opposition is putting forward would result in not only less expenditure on

infrastructure, it would result in further cuts to basic services because there's no other way you can finance it.

You know, if you want to build roads and bridges, you need the engineers, and we have a terrific engineering committee in this province. You need the people that can construct it and the people that can work on it, and we've got some of the best in the business. But you also need the finances, and that's what we've put in place.

I look at members opposite because, you know, he's also put on the record where he wants to go in terms of basic services. The members opposite not realize that when you talk about two-tiered health care in this province, when you look at the fact that this was really what they were looking at in the 1990s when they moved to privatize home care—you must remember there was a major—there was a strike. It was major opposition at the time.

You know, the Connie Curran report, which basically mapped out that strategy. I mean, Connie Curran now, I think, you know, as our Minister of Health (Ms. Selby) has pointed out you can see her actually on, you know, on the HGTV, you know, showing off her mansion in California, partly paid for by the taxpayers of Manitoba. But the reality, Mr. Speaker, is they have not changed a bit. The Leader of the Opposition clings to that idea that somehow if you privatize or somehow if you have a two-tiered system that somehow it's going to benefit Manitobans. But we all know in this province that that approach failed in the 1990s.

One of the things I'm proud of it's not only that we reject that but since we have come into government we've added 3,000 nurses, 500 doctors, and that comes after a decade where they cut more than 1,000 nurses and cut the number of doctors—

**An Honourable Member:** Thirty-five hundred actually, 3,500 nurses.

**Mr. Ashton:** —3,500 nurses. See the number is growing even as I speak, Mr. Speaker. And I can tell you this is because we got the message from Manitobans in 1999 and in 2003 and 2007, 2011, the elections. They've said, protect health care, protect education, and they particularly said, don't privatize it, don't privatize.

Well, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about something else that's also not in the Leader of the Opposition's speech. You know, I just love when he gets up with this, you know, style of lecturing people, and, you

know, a lot of times I note that the Leader of the Opposition's speeches are essentially mostly about the Leader of the Opposition. I do believe again the Leader of the Opposition hasn't changed. I do believe it's not about me; it's about we. It's about all of us. And what is particularly noticeable, by the way, is he still hasn't apologized for anything he did in the 1990s, not one thing.

Now, let's take the privatization issue. Do you think anybody really trusts that the Leader of the Opposition wouldn't privatize Hydro? I mean, look at it, you see the strategy already. They're going after Manitoba Hydro. They're going after the policies of Manitoba Hydro. They're going after every dimension they can think of, the bipole. They're going after Manitoba Hydro. Have you ever heard the Leader of the Opposition say—you know what, we—he ran actually on a platform of not privatizing MTS. Do you think he would now, all these years later, say, well, maybe that was the wrong thing to do? Do you think he might apologize for it? Do you think he might say I'm sorry for what happened?

Actually, you know, he likes to quote song lyrics. I can tell you he must listen to Sorry Seems to Be the Hardest Word on a regular basis, because I've never heard him apologize for anything. Did he say it was wrong to privatize home care? Did he say it was, you know, Connie Curran was a mistake? Did he say, by the way, and he was the Emergency Measures minister—I know he quit before the 1997 flood—did he say that it was wrong to ignore emergency measures, not to invest in expanding the floodway to build dikes? Did he say any of that?

Have you ever heard the Leader of the Opposition ever once admit to being wrong? Not—I haven't, Mr. Speaker. In fact, a lot of times I notice he'll say something, and then when there are about 30 seconds he's denying he even said it.

And I mean there's a pattern. I mean, I noticed even here, not only did he not apologize—I mean, where was the apology, by the way, for—I mean, he was into this hypothetical situation he gets into. I mean, they were putting out letters talking about Cabinet minister's family members getting preferential treatment. And when we said, well, what is it? He said it was a fantasy; it was hypothetical. You know, when you're in politics, you can't be hypothetical; it's got to be real.

\* (12:20)

And you know when you do something like the Leader of the Opposition did in the '90s, that was clearly wrong, you know, why don't you admit to it. Well, the reason why, by the way, is because the Leader of the Opposition is on record of saying—I think his wording about the Filmon government is the best government—finest government ever. And I'll tell you about the Leader of the Opposition, hyperbole is something that he's an expert at. You know, I find it quite entertaining at times if it wasn't serious business, you know, some of the issues in the province. But you notice that he, himself, says how proud he is of the Filmon government.

So, when we run ads, when we talk about running with scissors, when we validate everything in it, it's all fact checked and fact proofed. What's interesting is the best validator we have is the Leader of the Opposition. Have you noticed they haven't put out a statement or an ad saying, oh, no, no, that's not where I stand, or, oh, well, that was then and this is now, and I've changed my view?

Have you ever heard of—in fact, the two-tiered health-care system? Where did that come from? He was on CJOB. He was asked directly by Richard Cloutier. This is like, not in the 1990s, not even in the early 2000s; it was in, I think, what, 2012-2013.

Because one of the first things that the Leader of the Opposition did, is when he got to be leader, put his stamp on his caucus and his party. And you notice I say, his—his. And I know not everyone necessarily agreed with that. I often wonder what happened to the former MLA for Morris, and I know there's some interesting dynamics. I watch how—you know, like I said, I mean, the first time I've seen a speech in the Legislature where the Leader of the Opposition seems to be lecturing his own caucus more than actually talking to the House.

But anyway, quite apart from the dynamics, not an apology, nothing. This is all on the record and he's proud of it. He is proud of saying he believes in two-tiered health care.

**An Honourable Member:** Fire some more nurses to balance the budget.

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, and my colleague, former minister of Health, who knows what it's like to build a health-care system, is saying, that he would—if he was in, he'd be firing more nurses, firing more teachers.

Because, you know what? Nothing has changed. The Leader of the Opposition hasn't changed, he's

not going to change, he will never change, and if he goes to the people of Manitoba in two years and says that he wants change for the province, we've been there before. I've always said, Mr. Speaker, and I put it on the record again, when it comes to the '90s in this province, we've been there, we've done that, and Manitobans don't ever want to go back to those days, the days of health-care cuts, education cuts, and, you know, I could run through the list.

And I've got to put on the record, by the way, that one of the things I'm very proud in this budget, is what we're doing for some of the people that have the least in this province, with the rent assist program. And I—when I visit in my—the communities—I represent eight communities—I know how much of a real difference that \$50 and \$60 and \$70 is going to make in making ends meet.

And by the way, I want to put on the record, if anybody believes that the P in PC stands for poverty reduction, they got to go back to the 1990s, because I want to put on the record, by the way, the kind of things that the Leader of the Opposition did and what he called the best government in history. They didn't add a single thing to make it easier for people living on social assistance, you know, people on modest means who are working. They clawed back funding from the feds, they cut welfare rates.

The other day I was reminded of how mean that government was when I talked to a woman that, actually, I met during the 1990s when she was involved with Foster Parents Association, they cut the funding 100 per cent. What did they do with the friendship centres? They cut every cent of the operating budget of the friendship centres. And I could run through the list.

So, when you hear, for example, that our Finance Minister is talking about a lean government, let's not forget, when it comes to the Conservatives, it's not about being lean; they had a mean government in the 1990s. And, believe you me, they ever get the chance to form government again, I think the Leader of the Opposition would probably put Gary Filmon to shame, because I—you know, we all know that the Leader of the Opposition—again, one thing hasn't changed, he—no one has a higher opinion of the Leader of the Opposition than the Leader of the Opposition does. And I—you know, it's fine. I mean, everybody brings a certain kind of character, a certain kind of approach to the House. I've felt, Mr. Speaker, that I don't have to lecture people, and I don't have to tell stories about my

character. I figure you prove your character by what you do in this life. And I'm very proud to be MLA for my communities, to be fighting for them. I'm not going to lecture anyone about whether, you know, what my character is. I'm going to try every day to prove it through actions. And, again, that's something the Leader of the Opposition might want to learn.

So where are we at in this province? Well, you know, I must give the Conservatives some credit. And I know they're probably taking notes, here. Well, and—member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) is—I mean, today must have been a real challenge. I mean, they came into question period and they did basically—I'm trying to think how many questions were actually on the budget—there was one or two sets of questions? I think, in the Leader of the Opposition's speech, there was maybe about five minutes of it that actually talked about the budget. And three of that was when the Speaker read the motion. The rest of the time, he talked about anything but the budget.

And then it struck me. Then I realized this is a budget that is pretty difficult for them to oppose. Now, why, Mr. Speaker? Why? Infrastructure. I mean, they know that the moment they speak against the—what's here in terms of infrastructure, they get zero credibility. None of them. None of them has any credibility if they're going to stand up and criticize us for—oh, what do they call it, a spending problem. Yes, spending. I call it investment in infrastructure.

What's interesting is, when they ran through a lot of the initiatives in there, did you notice that not a word from Leader of the Opposition about the initiatives here in terms of education? You know, the skills agenda. The investments in our education system. And I'm proud of the fact we've got the largest commitment to education anywhere in Canada right here, Mr. Speaker. Not a word. So they didn't say anything about that.

Health care? Well, you know, Tories asking questions on health care. I tell you, the toughest job

when you're a Conservative, I'd say, outside of being environment critic, is probably being the Health critic, because, you know what, I mean, on the environment side, I think the federal Conservatives, right now, 4 per cent of Canadians think that they're doing the best job on the environment. That's actually less than the number of people that think that Elvis is still alive. I suspect, Mr. Speaker, in this Legislature, I think the Tories are probably running around 4 per cent.

You know, I loved that exchange with our Agriculture Minister earlier when, you know, when the Ag critic gets up and says, your policies. Of course, he doesn't say what policies, Mr. Speaker, because we all know, outside of the fear mongering that the, you know, the Agriculture critic for the opposition wants to gut the legislation that they voted against and probably turn back the clock on the legislation they voted for, the Lake Winnipeg. We know Tories on the environment.

But I love Tories on health care. The toughest job is being health-care critic, because every day you stand up and ask a question about health care, it reminds Manitobans of, first of all, the difference our government has made and, second of all, what the real choice is. So I do—but nothing in their questions, nothing in their speech.

So what is the strategy? Well, I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, right now, the Leader of the Opposition is in his office drafting up the next round of it, and I mentioned earlier, you know, one thing that we know about Leader of the Opposition is it's all about him and his strategies. I suspect he thinks he's just going to sit back and rely on—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Ashton) will have two minutes remaining.

The hour being 12:30 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Friday, March 7, 2014**

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