

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 3, 2012

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.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if there's leave of the House to proceed to Bill 202, The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to proceed directly to Bill 202, standing in the name of the honourable member for Riding Mountain? *[Agreed]*

Bill 202—The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): I move, seconded by the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), that Bill 202, The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act, be now read a second time and be referred to the committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Rowat: First, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize May as Speech and Hearing Month and it's fitting that we're debating this bill today as it has a direct impact on children and Manitobans with hearing loss.

I hope that in honour of the hard work and dedication professionals in the field of speech,

hearing and language have made with regard to speech and hearing advancements, the minister today will support Bill 202 on the first—or the second day of—or third day of Speech and Hearing Month.

I'd like to thank the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) for bringing this bill forward in 2009, and together we've been working on this important issue on this side of the House, from both opposition parties. We believe we need the government to pay attention to this issue and to move this bill forward.

Today, in the Chamber, we have Andrea—Dr. Andrea Richardson-Lipon, Doctor of Audiology and co-founder of Hear for Life Manitoba, and with her she has brought several support—support from individuals who are in the field with her or just are very interested as Manitoba citizens to support this bill.

I believe that Andrea has done a significant amount of work in this area and I think her work should be recognized within the Legislature. She has provided me with an incredible amount of knowledge and background on this program. I have learned there is a great need for this program and there is a significant tie-in with the cochlear implant program that was announced last spring.

A universal, newborn hearing screening program would enhance the services and support—and the supports that could be and should be available to Manitobans. The Canadian association of speech language pathology and audiology and the Canadian Academy of Audiology both support the implementation of early hearings detection and intervention universally across Canada. They have been following what we are doing in Manitoba and are very interested in seeing the outcome from the debate today.

In addition, the Manitoba Child Care Association lists early hearing detection as a priority in their reports to Manitoba government. So what we have here, Mr. Speaker, are many agencies and associations out there that support the move toward universal hearing screening in our province and in our country.

So in discussions with the minister earlier this week, just in passing in the Chamber here, how she'd indicated that she was working on this and I am encouraged by that statement, as this has been something that I'm very passionate about and I encourage the minister to do more in not only supporting this bill but also to ensure that a uniformed program is developed in Manitoba.

It is now 2012 and we still do not have a universal hearing screening program that is universal in this province. Manitoba's experiencing incredibly long wait times to see audiologists. In order to attract more to Manitoba, we must implement a universal newborn hearings program. I have talked to individuals who have left this province because they didn't feel that we were moving as quickly or as efficiently as other provinces or other jurisdictions. So I would encourage the minister to give some further thought to that. Currently, by not screening all newborns, some are identified too late and this can hinder the positive outcomes of the cochlear implant surgery.

A colleague of mine gave me a copy of *Audiology Today*, a bulletin from the American Academy of Audiology from 2005. Even though it is seven years old, its focus is on infant hearing screening in the developing world. So, Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that has been ongoing for a good number of years and it frustrates me to know that there are some developing nations that are further along than Manitoba when it comes to newborn hearing screening.

Hearing loss is still the most common congenital sensory disorder for all babies and universal screening, Mr. Speaker, is a very quick and gentle procedure. The screening is very gentle and very quick. A newborn could be tested within hours of birth and the test only takes minutes to perform. The universal hearing screening test is so quick that it could easily be done along with the other tests Manitobans currently screen newborns for, such as PKU, congenital hyperthyroidism and congenital adrenal hyperplasia.

*(10:10)

We need a program in Manitoba that is uniform and that is available to all families no matter where they live. We hear of families that ask for the procedure to be done and the procedure isn't offered in that hospital. So they then have to be referred—either referred by a doctor to another facility or they have to get an appointment and travel great distance

to get this test done. And if it was available in the facility where the child is born, this would then take some stress off the family.

Every year, three in 1,000 babies with an—are born with an educationally significant hearing loss. The universal hearing screening program is a way to identify those children with hearing loss early and begin their rehabilitation and intervention process early.

The Healthy Child Manitoba Act commits the government now and in the future to intersectoral government collaboration, community partnerships, evidence-based decision making and increased investments in prevention and early intervention to achieve the best possible outcomes for Manitoba's children and youth. This statement is on the Manitoba Healthy Child website; so why won't this government support Bill 202 and implement a universal newborn hearing screening program continuing to invest in the prevention and early identification, just as their website indicates?

In May 2009, the Health Minister said, and I quote: "I certainly do know that we, as a nation, have quite a distance to go to catch up to Europe and catch up to the United States when it comes to universal newborn hearing screening." Mr. Speaker, if the minister already understands that we have quite a distance to go to catch up to Europe and United States with relation to universal hearing screening, why won't she support Bill 202? Supporting a universal hearing screening program in Manitoba today will be a step in the right direction for not only Manitobans to catch up, but also for Canada.

Bill 202 ensures that parents and guardians of newborns are offering the opportunity to have the infant screened for hearing loss. Mr. Speaker, as a communications-based society it is so important that we provide children and families with the supports they need in order to succeed to their full potential when it comes to hearing loss and communications disorders.

Mr. Speaker, considering the benefits of a universal hearing screening program: early detection, helping develop speech and helping to develop learning and social skills for children with hearing loss, I urge this House to consider recognizing all of the benefits of a universal hearing screening program and take the necessary steps to see this universal hearing screening program implemented here in Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I'm privileged to stand in the House today to speak to Bill 202. I thank the member for once again bringing forward her passionate concerns on the issue of universal newborn hearing screening.

I, too, welcome the guests in the gallery—*[interjection]* Oh, thank you. I welcome the guests in the gallery that have worked professionally in the field of universal hearing screening for newborns, those that have an interest in it.

Certainly, it is my belief that all members of this House, Mr. Speaker, have a deep interest in ensuring that our children are as healthy and that are on the best possible path for their futures: educationally, physically, spiritually and emotionally. And, indeed, I pay tribute to those professionals that have advocated and worked very hard in the field and to those individuals that are so passionate about this issue.

Indeed, we have had this conversation in the past and I would reiterate some points that I believe are relevant to the discussion that I have made before.

Indeed, we know, Mr. Speaker, that when we began our term in office there was no universal hearing screening anywhere in Manitoba. We know now that we are phasing in the universal hearing program, as described by the member opposite, across the province, currently in four of the existing health regions.

And we are very committed to make continuous and concrete project—or progress in going forward to having this kind of screening in all corners of our province, Mr. Speaker, because, while there may be issues back and forth across this House on which the members opposite and our side of the House may disagree and disagree passionately about, I would actually suggest that on this issue of working to expand universal newborn hearing screening, it's a subject on which we agree. Which, as I said to the member, is why we've been working diligently with our regional health authorities to expand not only universal hearing screening, but expanding screening for newborns broadly and, indeed, investments in children broadly.

Now, the member opposite made reference to the healthy child act that was passed by this Legislature a few years ago, and it is a subject of much pride not only for members of this side of the House, but, I believe, for many, many Manitobans.

Our healthy Cabinet—or Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet structure, Mr. Speaker, is one that was unique in the nation. We know that other jurisdictions, now, are endeavouring to adopt that model so that we can have a consultative, collaborative approach across departments to ensure that we're co-ordinating our resources as best as possible with a focus on the child. We know the research is endless on—the investments that we make early on for children can pay us back six, seven, eight, tenfold later on. And that's the very reason why the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet was created in the first place, to play that co-ordinating role. And it's why we come together as a collection of ministers to prioritize, to analyze, to get advice from our civil servants, to get advice from medical professionals on how we can look at finite resources that we have, and how we can really prioritize to do the best that we possibly can for our children.

We know, of course, that those individuals that are working in hearing and in speech pathology are very passionate about expanding newborn hearing screening, Mr. Speaker, and I share their passion. And we're working very hard with our regional health authorities to, indeed, ensure that we continue to provide this very specialized kind of screening.

Now, it's worthwhile to note, I believe, Mr. Speaker, that we know that babies are screened for a variety of items by our professionals—our doctors, our nurses, our midwives and so forth—as they come into this world as bundles of joy, and so we must be very clear in not insinuating that there's absolutely no screening that goes on regarding hearing or otherwise at this time. Sometimes when we get caught up in the debate about this or other things, it can be insinuating that Manitoba has no screening whatsoever. This isn't the case, but in relation to universal newborn hearing screening as described, we do have this screening existing in Manitoba, not yet in every regional health authority, but we are working incrementally to build our health human resources, and to build our capacity, in order to do that, because we do care about it. And I believe that the member understands that we do care about working on expanding and building this capacity as set out.

We're working, quite frankly, on doing more screening for newborns and not less. We're working on ensuring that we have universal screening available in a variety of areas, such as Manitoba being the first jurisdiction in Canada to measure the prevalence of alcohol use during pregnancy,

implementing questions with new mothers as part of our Families First postnatal screening. Our universal screen for alcohol was launched back in January 2003 and to date we can measure that 97 per cent of all births are being screened by public health nurses. So this was an investment that we chose to make; we chose to make it in tandem with building hearing screening, but we also believe that this is a very important investment that we're making as well.

Public health nurses, who play a critically important role, ask families about biological, social, demographic risk factors using the Families First screening tool for congenital anomalies, birth weight, multiple births, alcohol use, smoking during pregnancy and other issues. So, indeed, that kind of screening is going on through our public health nurses.

We're building our capacity, Mr. Speaker, to do universal newborn screening, and we're investing in technology—I'm going to get this word wrong, I always do—tandem mass spectrometry, which, of course, is done through our provincial laboratory, which will continue to screen, now, for cystic fibrosis, 43 other disorders that are being tested. So we're looking at our investments in screening for newborns holistically.

*(10:20)

This is not to say that we think that one potential challenge for a child is more important than another. We think that they're all important and are working very hard to prioritize to ensure that we are making our investments, building our capacity. Indeed, as we go forward to amalgamating our regional health authorities we are seeing an opportunity to have some additional capacity to be able to move more swiftly even with universal newborn hearing screening and, indeed, with other screening programs.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that—as I always have—I do, indeed, respect and admire her investment of time and passion in universal newborn hearing screening. I think it's very important and I think it's very worthwhile. I would note that I don't believe that legislation is required in order to move forward on universal newborn hearing screening, certainly as evidenced by the fact that we're doing it already in four regional health authorities.

It is my—I may stand to be corrected on this—but it is my understanding that universal screening for

newborn hearing is not standard practice in many provinces as of yet. And we're not aware—again I may stand to be corrected—of any province which has legislatively maintained universal newborn hearing screening. So do I think legislation is necessary in terms of the go-forward discussion and investment? Respectfully, Mr. Speaker, I do not.

I do think that putting our best efforts forward to ensure that we're not only expanding newborn hearing screening to all corners of the province, which indeed is the goal and that is what we're working on; I think that's very important. I think collectively continuing a dialogue on what are the most important things that we can invest in next in terms of doing screening for babies to help those babies, to help their parents, to help their collective families and ensuring that they're providing the best possible environment, I think that's very important, Mr. Speaker. And, quite frankly, I think that when we set aside our partisan views and we come to work together on building a program we have been very successful in Manitoba.

We know that we were successful with the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures task force on which all parties were represented, and I think we can continue in a non-partisan way to push forward with expanding universal newborn hearing screening, and that's just what I intend to do, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Morden-Winkler—or, pardon me, Lac du Bonnet.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I am pleased to have this opportunity today to speak about this bill recognizing the importance of universal hearing screening for newborn babies in Manitoba.

All parents should have the option of having their newborn screened if they so desire. It shouldn't matter where they live in Manitoba. Universal hearing screening on newborns is a quick and gentle procedure which is inexpensive as well, today approximately \$25, a small price for early intervention. A newborn could be tested within hours of birth and the test only minutes to perform.

We need a program in Manitoba that is uniform that is available to all families no matter where they live. We have the ability to do that in our province. It doesn't hurt to be the first one to get it done. We have the specialists; we have the technology to do that; we just need the will of this government to support Bill 202.

Each year, three in 1,000 babies are born with an educationally significant hearing loss. The universal hearing screening program is a way to identify those children with hearing loss early and begin the rehabilitation and intervention process early. Even babies should be screened for hearing loss because 50 per cent of babies born with hearing loss have no risk factors. Therefore, we are missing half the babies born with hearing loss and it becomes even more important to screen all newborns in Manitoba. Without early detection children are more likely to develop poor language and cognitive skills and struggle in school.

Mr. Speaker, we already know that post-secondary institutions and businesses have a concern about the level of skills young adults and children and people come to them with. This is a trickle-down effect; not only post-secondary institutions and businesses, but also high school and high school teachers and student services programs, they have concerns about the students that are coming to them with certain barriers that are putting them multiple years behind in grade levels.

This trickles down to junior high and elementary. Where does that take us, Mr. Speaker? This comes down to the parents, daycares, preschool. I hope that this government will support Bill 202.

Mr. Speaker, RHAs provide hearing and speech and language to the age of three and four years of age. School divisions then have to pick it up after that. In some cases, issues or barriers are sometimes not caught till later in school. Therefore, it takes longer to diagnose and get programming in place.

Mr. Speaker, to repeat some of my colleagues' words, The Healthy Child Manitoba Act commits the government now and in the future to intersectoral government collaboration, community partnerships, evidence-based decision making and increased investments in prevention and early intervention, to achieve the best possible outcomes for Manitobans, children and youth. This statement is on the Healthy Child Manitoba website, so why hasn't this government implemented a universal newborn hearing screening program—continuing to invest in prevention and early identification—just like their website states?

The Minister for Health just stated that they have been instituting hearing programs throughout the province in four RHAs. But, in fact, Mr. Speaker, there has not been any progress since we first brought this up a few years ago. In fact, the member

from River East brought in the Healthy Child program under the youth and child secretariat when she was the minister.

Often, Mr. Speaker, communication between the RHAs and schools do not simply happen, whether it is PHIA or FIPPA or it's just simply the wanting to duplicate services, it is just not happening.

If and when the results of these hearing tests is done, Mr. Speaker, then I know that these tests will surely save time and money, but in the long run give children—yes, children—a boost, if we can get services in place in a timely manner.

Bill 202 is an opportunity for Manitoba to become a leader, Mr. Speaker. With the implementation of the universal hearing screening program, Manitoba would be the first province to provide access in legislation to universal hearing loss screening for newborns.

In fact, in January 2012, the Canadian Paediatric Society released a report named *Are We Doing Enough?*, a status report on Canadian public policy and child and youth health. Under newborn hearing screening, they rated Manitoba as poor. The recommended actions to Manitoba were, and I quote: implement a universal newborn hearing screening and intervention program. Why won't the minister follow the recommendations of the Canadian Paediatric Society and support Bill 202, giving all parents a chance to have their newborn's hearing screened?

So in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 ensures that parents and guardians of newborn infants are offered the opportunity to have the infant screened for hearing loss. As a communications-based society, it is so important that we provide children and families with the supports they need in order to succeed to their full potential when it comes to hearing loss and communication disorders.

A universal hearing screening program in Manitoba is a step in the right direction to help families and children with hearing loss and communication disorders. It would be nice to put Manitoba on the map as the first province to legislate this.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that the government will support Bill 202 and thank you.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Speaker, I must say it's a real pleasure to stand in this House and speak about the health of newborns and not just, of

course, because that's our job and it's a great, great feeling to be back at it and talking about legislation and debating, but also because this is an issue that's a particular top of mind for me, and, as some of the members in the House may know, just a few weeks away from having our second child. And so this is, of course, very much top of mind, maybe even a little distracting for me, I got to admit. I don't know if I paid as much attention yesterday in the House as I potentially should have. But it is top of mind for me.

* (10:30)

And I was, in fact, in the hospital yesterday, just getting everything checked out, and my wife was there and we were in the maternity ward and—so it was a nice experience to be there. Everything checked out very well, but it was a nice experience to be there, to be around other expectant mothers—mothers-to-be, and to be in that atmosphere where you're surrounded by families, by parents, by grandparents and by doctors and nurses, all of which, of course, who are first and foremost concerned about the health and well-being of children, because, as I don't need to tell, I don't think—too many members in this House—I think most have families here—when you get to this, sort of, final stage, the health of the—of your child is really the only thing that's—that matters at this point.

So, it was exciting; it was kind of a rocking place. Things were happening and we were listening to all the stories and all the different things that were happening. And I do want to just acknowledge the folks there at St. Boniface Hospital for the incredible work that they did, in particular, Dorothy Lahr and the rest of the team, the nurses and doctors there at St. Boniface, and we really do have a great group of people in the maternity ward at that hospital and throughout the province as well. So I want a special thank you to those folks.

As I said, when you get to this stage, in this point in the process, it's—you start going a little bit, maybe, baby crazy. You know, I'm looking up in the gallery and I see a little one up there and it puts a big smile on my face, and, you know, starting to get excited. And so it really does give me comfort that—to know that this government is doing more screening and has made that a commitment and has made it a commitment to do more screening and not less. And, you know, this is a—certainly the direction that we're moving, and I think if you look back at the record, not just over the last number of years, but

really, over the past few decades, you know, one can really see the development of screening and how, not only the technology, but just the understanding of what makes a healthy child or what contributes to overall health, not just of the child in the beginning stages, but, of course, throughout life. And I think the member from Lac du Bonnet mentioned that as well and I appreciate his concern for this issue as well.

So this is certainly the direction that we've been moving as a government and as a province, and I'm very proud of that. I think it's also, though, important to note, Mr. Speaker, that this is a—being done in a very thorough and a very specific way, and it's not just being done willy-nilly; it's not just being done in a way where, you know, we're sort of grabbing the next thing and moving on it, you know, right away. What we're doing is we're being very thorough, making sure that we understand what the process is, what the implications are for resources, of course, because we know that resources in hospitals are not unlimited and we need to be conscious of that. So we've been very specific in making sure that we understand the technology, understand the processes and then understand how they can fit in the overall structure of the hospital and within the health regions.

We've been, of course, increasing resources for prevention, early detection initiatives such as screening programs, but we're doing this very much on the advice of health professionals. And, you know, this is something that I, you know, like to remind people as—of as much as possible, that we're here as legislators; we're here as the folks who are debating these bills. But we're not the experts. We're not the ones who are deciding, you know, what is the best process or what isn't, and so I think it's important that we don't use—have any kind of political judgment on this, and this is really something that we come together on and that we work together a—you know, as a government, as a House here in terms of debate to decide what is best and to then advocate for that.

I'm certainly no expert, again, on the processes. I know that in our case, when we had our first child, which wasn't that long ago so it's all very fresh in my mind still, the process to—for screening, from my point of view, was very thorough. And I know that there's a very clear process where if there's any kind of problems detected or suspected even, Mr. Speaker, that the—there's a series of referral processes. So, if the child does not—if there's a

potential for a problem, then that child would be referred to the next step and will be looked at more thoroughly and assessed, and then, of course, the proper steps taken when needed.

I also want to note, as was mentioned by the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), with regard to this practice not being standard in other provinces. And I do take the point from the member from Lac du Bonnet, and it's always nice to be on the forefront of this type of legislation, but just as a note, or just as a—something to add to the debate is the fact that it isn't—it's not standard practice in many provinces, and no other province, again, as far as I know, hasn't actually legislated this as a standard.

We're very thorough with children. Again, you know, from my point of view, I thought the care was very well done for my first—my daughter. But, you know, it's a—we've got a whole team of people, really, who come around when a child is born. It's not just doctors; it's not just the nurses in the hospital who do a great job, but it's also our excellent midwife program, which has been an absolute success—just from folks in my neighbourhood who have been just overjoyed with the service that they have received, and the information that they get from these experts who are able to give, maybe not such a high level, sort of, set of advice, but really on the ground, one on one, take the time, be able to explain to new mothers exactly what the issues are.

And, you know, and this is all very, very close to my experience, so—I know other members it's been a while since they've gone through this kind of process, but I can tell you this is very much something that I've been dealing with on a day-to-day basis. And it's very—it's—I think it's been a great program. So when all of these services come together, it's really something to see, and it's really something to see. We've been very lucky; our daughter's in great health, and hopefully the next one will go just as well. But it's very interesting to see all of these health professionals and experts and community contacts come together to really support a child in Manitoba.

It's also, I think, important to note or to put on the record, Mr. Speaker, that there was no universal hearing program anywhere in Manitoba when we took office. And, again, as part of the process of increasing screening and being more thorough in looking after the health of infants, that we have actually instituted this in four health regions. So this is happening. It is something that has become more

of a standard, but it just hasn't become a universal program yet.

And I think, you know, again, I take the point from the members opposite that, you know, we want to continue this. There's no question about that. We want to make sure we continue this. But it is important to respect the resources that are available, not to jump out too far ahead, and to make sure that we thoroughly make sure that we've got this program, we understand it, and we know just exactly how we can implement it.

So with those few words, Mr. Speaker, I—as I said, I appreciate the opportunity to be a part of this debate, and looking forward to the next few weeks, and so if members see me running out the door real quick, you'll know why, and hopefully not today, but maybe in the next few weeks. And it's certainly an exciting time, and I appreciate the interest of all members in this House to be concerned about newborns, to be concerned about the health of our children, and to understand just how important the health of newborns is, to the overall health of children into adulthood and then, of course, of our overall community.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to newborn hearing screening, I am very pleased that the MLA for Riding Mountain is continuing the efforts that I began, now about four years ago, with the first introduction of a universal newborn hearing screening bill, I think, in 2008—yes.

* (10:40)

I'm going to speak particularly about the—where the expert view is on this as a pediatrician, and I would refer to a presentation by Dr. Hema Patel, who is a pediatrician who's an expert in this area from the Montréal Children's Hospital and who came and presented to pediatricians here in Manitoba. And one of the things that she emphasized in her presentation is that detecting and helping a child with a hearing deficiency when that child is a newborn, detecting it, her or him, and then helping that child, that this is actually a neurological emergency. And let me explain why I say that and why Dr. Patel said that.

Mr. Speaker, it's long been recognized that it's a neurological emergency to detect and treat early on a child with strabismus, which is an eye condition, and we recognize this because this is a condition which can be treated effectively early on, and when it's

treated effectively early on it corrects the vision problem. And not only that, if it is not detected and treated early on the child may have a permanent vision problem because the pathways in the brain don't develop normally, because there's a critical period in the first few years of life.

Mr. Speaker, there is also, when it comes to hearing, a critical period in the first few years of life where the pathways for hearing, for language development, for speech, for attachment, for other behavioural processes which are so important early on develop. And when you have a child who has a hearing deficiency and that hearing deficiency is not detected and is not helped early on, you can have a permanent problem in the brain of that person. And that permanent problem results, you know, in problems in the development of language, problems in the development of speaking, problems in the development of behavioural development, problems in the development of social development, problems in a variety of areas of learning. And that learning problem in school can then become a problem as an adult in social relationships and in employment. And so we have, as we have in the areas of eye problems, we have in the areas of hearing deficiency a neurological emergency that these children be detected early and helped early.

You know, I would think that the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) would be standing up because he knows how important it is to have a society that works, to have decreased social and justice problems, to have all children have the ability to learn and to learn well and not to have problems in school.

Certainly, the problem here is that if this hearing deficiency is not detected until age five or six, we may have a child who has a permanent speech problem, has a permanent learning problem and permanent, lifelong issues that result, and all that could have been corrected. All those issues could have been detected if that child had been screened for the hearing problems early on and the child had then been helped.

Now, knowing that this has happened, the government in Manitoba is in fact presiding over a situation where children are falling through the cracks. We know that without universal newborn hearing screening, approximately half the children with hearing problems are not detected as newborns. Approximately half the children are missed. These are children which under this government is failing. This is—these are children who are falling through the

cracks in Manitoba because there is not a universal newborn hearing screening program. We need to get the word out that every mother and father, when they have a child, need to make sure they have asked, requested and received newborn hearing screening. This is vital and this is, at the moment, the only way around the stubborn refusal of this government to implement universal newborn hearing screening.

It is either a stubborn refusal which is negligence, or it is a stubborn refusal which is incompetence. It's hard to tell which, but certainly this government has had a long awareness of this issue, and their failure to implement the detection and help for children who have a neurological emergency is terrible.

There is no other way of putting this. This is a neurological emergency which this government is neglecting, or through incompetence is not addressing. It is time, Mr. Speaker, that that's changed, and I would hope that every member here will ensure we have a vote today and that we vote in support of having universal newborn hearing screening in Manitoba as fast as it can possibly be done.

Hon. Kevin Chief (Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities): I just want to say it's a privilege and an honour to be able to stand today to talk on Bill 202. I do you want to recognize, of course, our guests in the gallery.

I know that anything to do with newborns is, of course, vitally important to all Manitobans. And I know members across, as well as my colleague—I think his wife is due any day, so clearly, you know, these are top priorities for—very meaningful priorities for us in the Chamber here.

For myself, as well, Mr. Speaker, I have a son who's a—19 months old, and so, you know, these—being able to speak on these very important matters, I think, are some of the most important matters that we discuss here in the Chamber. So I just want to say that it's an honour to be able to stand up.

I know that our government is doing a—is doing more screening now, Mr. Speaker, not less, and this is the direction that we're moving in as we develop more capacity. Universal hearing screening is important to all Manitobans and is a goal for our government and regional health authorities. We have a record of increasing resources for prevention and early detection initiatives such as screening programs.

And I know that the member across talked about The Healthy Child Manitoba Act which, of course, is very important to me in my new portfolio in Children and Youth Opportunities. And I do got to commend, you know, both members across as well as our government on the work we've done with Healthy Child Manitoba. We, of course, have the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet which brings 10 different departments together to put a priority on children and young people in the province of Manitoba. And we do discuss and talk about the importance of screening, early detection.

One of the programs I'd like to mention is, of course, our Healthy Baby Program that we provide prenatal benefit support for 4,500 low-income pregnant women across the province of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. And I know, when you represent an area like Point Douglas, where you do, on a day-to-day basis work with some of our vulnerable family and children, how important that program is. You know, I know that it touches tens of thousands of pregnant mothers and we understand how important it is in terms of screening, not waiting necessarily for the child to arrive, but starting by providing support to parents even before they become parents. And I know that, you know, the meaningful ways we've been able to do that, you know, when we're able to touch these parents, these pregnant mothers, we provide them with networks of support in their community. We help with their emotional well-being. Of course, the prenatal benefit supports them with nutrition and those types of aspects.

*(10:50)

I do want to say, on a personal note, in terms of our Families First program, Mr. Speaker, it's a home visiting program, also touches, of course, tens of thousands of families throughout Manitoba.

When my son was born and, of course, you know—and it goes directly into the idea of hearing—this hearing and screening act. When my son was born, we were at St. Boniface Hospital and we, my wife and I, were pretty eager after he was born to get out of the hospital and get home. And so we were very proud to get home, but the reality was when we got home as brand new parents we realized that we weren't—we didn't feel prepared for this new little guy we had. And so we were—we had all these questions. And I do got to say, you know, our confidence was low and we were wondering what was going to happen. And I know—so we started, of course, looking on the Internet and reading.

And fortunately for us, a couple days later, a public health nurse came by, as part of the screening process, as part of providing support. And when the nurse came by, I can say that we had a list of questions. Now, of course, she had a lot of questions for us and was able to gather a lot of information. You know, I live in Winnipeg's North End, and a lot of the questions were very relevant to the area that we, that my wife and I, lived in. But I do got to say that, you know, when she was there we were able to ask a lot of questions, and she was able to provide a lot of information for us. And I think, more importantly, she was actually be able to connect us. And now, you know, I'm somebody who's very entrenched in the community and understand where different things are, but being able to have that one-on-one contact, I got to say, you know, really built our confidence as parents.

And I know that other members across the aisle, of course, and here in our party, as well, you know, we understand how important this is. And it's not just important to us as parents, but I know that when we were able to tell my wife's parents and our—my son's grandparents how important that was. So we do recognize the importance of screening and how important that is, Mr. Speaker.

We also recognize that it's understanding that universal screening for newborn hearing is not yet a standard practice in many provinces. And we're not aware of any province which has legislatively mandated universal newborn screening, but it's still a priority for us, Mr. Speaker. In Manitoba, it's important to note that all newborns are fully assessed by physicians, midwives and nurses following births and during subsequent well-being visits, which I just mentioned, in all parts of the province. If any concerns about screening are identified, follow-up and referral concerns are pursued. There is, at the time, no new universal hearing screening program anywhere in Manitoba. There was none when we took office; it is now being phased in as an additional support—front-line health professionals and families—currently being offered in four health regions.

You know, one of the other things I'd like to mention is the work that we do with our parent-child coalitions. We have 25 throughout the province of Manitoba, and I know that people from Healthy Child Manitoba office now are visiting and sharing. And basically what that is, Mr. Speaker, is, you know, people with a lot of experience, with a set of expertise, come in and look at how families can be supported throughout Manitoba. So we've been able

to have early childhood educators, we've been able to use people from school divisions, of course, regional health authorities, and they all come together and look at the different resources and services and find ways in which we can strategically use them to support some of our most vulnerable families. And that's parents that currently have children, but that's also future parents as well.

And I got to say one of the great things that we do, and we put investments in—and, once again, we've been sharing it all throughout the province—is the work we do with our research and our evaluation on our data collection capacity. So we can actually target areas where there's vulnerabilities. We can target areas where there's—where we know that we are doing some things. And I know members across have been able to attend some of the parent-child coalitions throughout the province of Manitoba.

I do want to mention that Manitoba does have a long history of innovation and international respect in the conduct of its newborn screening using an approach that supports health professionals, patients and families, Mr. Speaker. Manitoba early hearing detection program provides that specialized screening, including assessment and is being phased across the province and is currently provided to all newborns in Brandon, Assiniboine, Burntwood and North Eastman, the RHAs, Mr. Speaker.

I do look forward to hearing more on this topic from all members on The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act. Once again, as I said, it's something that's vitally important to me, having a 19-month-old son and, you know, I do have to say that it is a privilege to be able to stand up and talk about these types of things. I will be very proudly be able to go home this evening and tell my wife that the business that we've actually talked about here today was, in my opinion, extremely, extremely meaningful. And I know that sometimes I go home and, you know, as a new member trying to figure out exactly what's going on and trying to explain it to her, I don't know sometimes if she fully appreciates some of the stuff we talk about.

But I know being able to talk about this very important bill, I know that she'll be knowing that I worked very hard here today, Mr. Speaker, so thank you, and I do look forward to hearing from other members of the Chamber.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs): There's many of

us who wish to talk about this it's amazing, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to put a few words on the record as Minister of Healthy Living. I know that the member for Burrows (Ms. Wight) is also excited about bringing some words to this important discussion, and I think it's nice to be able to talk about young children. And it's also important to talk about our commitment to young people. And I find it passing strange that the members opposite are actually putting forward a bill and I'd actually like to commend the member from River Heights because he's been consistent on this. He's been consistently pushing that we continue to expand screening, and I believe that we're listening to him by now, expanding it for all infants in four RHAs. I think we continue to listen to the experts.

But the one difference I have with the members opposite, the Conservatives, is that they're inconsistent. When they were in government, there were no universal screening programs, there were no universal investments in having people go out and talk to parents, et cetera. So like the Healthy Baby program, the home visitor program, where we actually have experts who go into the community and talk to the parents as the—as my colleague the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities (Mr. Chief) has mentioned. He was a recipient of a home visitor program, where experts go into the house, they look at the child, they diagnose any issues, they work and answer questions. That's a very, very positive program, and I think that that's where we've invested. And I actually agree with the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), where we continue need to expand testing. We need to continue to expand services, especially to young Manitobans. So I actually agreed with the Liberal Leader on this.

I think that we need to continue to move forward on all of the early investments, which means screening for hearing, screening for any other issues that might be on the health front, might be talking about supporting parents in the community and supporting parents when they need it, and giving parents the linkages that they need to the health-care system, family services and other supports that are found in the community through the Triple P, et cetera.

So I think that we need to make sure that we continue to make investments in this area. I think that the four health regions that are now dealing with that, which are Brandon, Assiniboine, Burntwood

and North Eastman have moved forward on this and they're doing it, a universal screaming—'screening,' sorry. The specialized screening services are also available for WRHA, Churchill, Norman, Parkland, Interlake, South Eastman and Central RHA, based upon the expert advice of health-care professionals, nurses and doctors in the field, and I think that's important.

Now, it is also interesting to note that that's expanded since the NDP party got in party-in government, and it's neat because when you talk about a universal—

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, on a point of order.

* (11:00)

Point of Order

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, there is just a very short period of time and I would hope that the member would—for Assiniboia would sit down so there could be a vote.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

It's rather telling; here we are in the first opportunity for private members' business, and there's certain members of this House who would wish to shut down members who wish to speak about something I think is a very serious and important issue.

And I think it's important to point out that thanks to games being played by opposition members, we've lost three days of debate in this House. Had members of the opposition not played games, this wouldn't be our first private members' day. We've lost opportunities to debate.

So again, I have more colleagues of mine who wish to put important facts on the record, and, Mr. Speaker, they're entitled to do so. There is no point of order.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Morris, on the same point of—the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on the same point of order.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker. I think that the member from River Heights was simply saying this is a very important issue, and perhaps we should put it to a

vote here rather than stall the bill out so nothing gets done with it; that's simply what's being said here.

The Acting Government House Leader is incorrect in saying that it's been stalled here, Mr. Speaker. They're the ones that have stalled it with their political maneuvering and making politics out of things that shouldn't be political in nature.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable member for River Heights, I hear what the honourable member has indicated, but as is the long-standing practice of this House, when there are members of the House that still wish to add their comments to the debate under way at the time, we usually allow for those members to have that opportunity.

And I do note for the House that the honourable Minister of Healthy Living (Mr. Rondeau) was still—had some six minutes remaining, I believe, at least in allowable time for his comments. And there appears to have been another member of the House who was also interested in adding comments to this debate.

It is a long practice of this House to allow all honourable members the opportunity to add their comments, so I must rule that there is no point of order in this matter.

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 11 a.m., I'm interrupting the Minister of Healthy Living with the understanding that when this matter is again before the House, the honourable Minister of Healthy Living will have six minutes remaining.

RESOLUTIONS

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 11 a.m., it's time for a private member's resolution.

And we have a resolution before us from the honourable member for Agassiz (Mr. Briese) dealing with the downloading of provincial responsibilities.

House Business

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Official Opposition House Leader): Just on House business, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: On House business, before we proceed with the resolution.

Mrs. Taillieu: Yes, Mr. Speaker, in accordance with rule 3 9, I would like to announce that the private members' resolution that will be considered next Thursday is the resolution on establishment of a

stroke unit in Manitoba, sponsored by the honourable member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger).

Mr. Speaker: It has been announced that, in accordance with rule 31(9), that the private members' resolution that will be considered next Thursday is a resolution on the establishment of a stroke unit in Manitoba, sponsored by the honourable member for Charleswood.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Now we'll return to the private members' resolution, the downloading of provincial responsibilities.

Res. 1—Downloading of Provincial Responsibilities

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): I move, seconded by the member for Riding Mountain (Mrs. Rowat):

WHEREAS the provincial government from time to time mandates new public responsibilities; and

WHEREAS the provincial government routinely requires compliance and enforcement activities for these new responsibilities to be conducted by local governments; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has also downloaded certain responsibilities for which it was once responsible onto local governments; and

WHEREAS local governments may not necessarily have the required technical and financial resources to readily fulfill these duties, therefore forcing them to incur additional costs in order to meet these added responsibilities; and

WHEREAS the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, AMM, has passed numerous resolutions stating the high costs involved with fulfilling these new responsibilities places an undue burden on local taxpayers; and

WHEREAS the federal and provincial governments created clear lines of jurisdiction through discussion and active dialogue that is codified in the Constitution.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to enter into meaningful discussions with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities and other stakeholders to more clearly delineate the jurisdictional boundaries between the two levels of government; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to consider providing sufficient financial and technical resources to local governments to help them implement any new obligations the provincial government mandates of them.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Agassiz.

WHEREAS the—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, municipalities supply many of the front-line services to their residents. The growing demands and costs of these services is putting more pressure on municipal budgets at the same time as the provincial NDP government continues their assault on municipal coffers.

A number of years ago when I served on the executive of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities I recall the Premier (Mr. Selinger), who was then the minister of Finance, visiting our offices in Portage la Prairie on a so-called prebudget consultation. I recall the then-minister of Finance talking about what a wonderful source of revenue municipalities had with property tax. He wished he had access to property tax revenue. Well, Mr. Speaker, I should have paid more attention to what he was saying. As we all now know, the Premier never saw a tax revenue source he didn't like, and that was the beginning of an all-out raid on municipal revenues by this Premier, the former minister of Finance, that continues to this day.

Mr. Speaker, I've often heard the Premier refer to front-line services and I always wonder if he ever thinks of the front-line services provided by municipalities. Services such as infrastructure, roads, bridges, water and sewer, library and recreation facilities, a growing number of health-care services, museums, daycares, nursing schools, police and fire protection, waste disposal, transit, flood fighting, land use planning services, drainage and water management, building code enforcement, tax assessment and social assistance services are all services for which the municipalities are billed by the province. The list goes on and on. Municipalities now have a growing reliance on the property tax for education funding.

Mr. Speaker, municipalities are expected to provide those front-line services on a very small

portion of the overall tax revenue in this province. And they do it well, despite the continuous download combined with a flat-out raid on municipal revenues by this NDP government.

We've seen it again in this budget. For the third time in a decade, the NDP have extended the provincial sales tax they charge to municipalities. In 2002 the government expanded the PST to engineering and architectural services. In 2004 the government expanded the PST to legal and accounting services that municipalities are required to access. And this year, municipalities are forced to pay an extra two and a half cents in gas tax at a huge expense to them, and I might add—I missed a line in here—but in 2012 they added provincial sales tax to the insurance premiums in municipalities. Municipalities outside of the city of Winnipeg in this province carry about \$11 million worth of insurance. So that's a huge grab on municipal coffers, putting the sales tax onto those premiums.

Furthermore, this budget cut water-related infrastructure by \$52 million. That alone is three times the increase of the so-called 1 per cent equivalent that the NDP like to tout as their contribution to municipalities. By not covering the full amount of education cost increases, the NDP are downloading more education costs onto municipalities. Add in a host of legislation, regulation changes, user fees and permits, and you see why municipalities are struggling to provide services.

The previous federal government recognized some of the problems and removed the GST from municipal goods and services. The present federal government took it a step further by directing some of their fuel tax straight to municipalities. These are steps in the right direction, but, unfortunately, our provincial NDP government turned a blind eye to those initiatives and instead raised the PST to municipalities three times in the last decade in their desperation to feed their out-of-control spending habits.

Mr. Speaker, members opposite are going to rise to speak to this resolution. They're going to blow wind about their infrastructure commitments. They're going to loudly proclaim their 1 per cent equivalent commitment to municipalities. It's all smoke and mirrors, misdirection, and misleading to the people of Manitoba.

*(11:10)

The capital infrastructure budget in real dollars has dropped in their term in office. Their 1 per cent equivalent changed nothing and their assault on property taxes continues. It is shameful, it's dishonest, and the mayors and reeves and councillors in this province realize that.

The Association of Manitoba Municipalities has long called for review of the roles and responsibilities of different levels of government. Gary Doer agreed with that position. He agreed, but he did nothing. The member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) is a director of the AMM, agreed with that position, and I wonder why he's not advising his colleagues on position today.

You know, the education tax alone on property—as long as the Province doesn't fund the full increases of education, that there's only one place for those extra costs to go and that's back onto property taxes. And that—every time there's an increase on education tax, on property tax—or education costs and property tax it curtails the municipalities' chance—ability to provide the services they have to provide to their residents.

It started a long time ago on the education tax file. I remember back when Jean Friesen was the minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and, at that time, they decided they were going to remove education tax—or property tax from universities, which included education tax. But they removed it without putting anything in the pot to replace it. So all it did was take the tax from there, move it on to other properties—if you don't fund it all, it just creates shifts. And we raised our concerns at that time, but they fell on deaf ears.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I want to remind the members opposite that many municipalities in Manitoba have reached their legislative borrowing capacity, and I would suggest that they have also reached their property taxation capacity. However, this government continues to download more and more costs onto them. This is unsustainable and essentially a tax on tax. The NDP without consultation have raised the PST to municipalities three times in 10 years, another tax on tax. These actions simply add to the infrastructure deficit in this province, and instead of addressing the growing problems the NDP play their word games that no one believes.

This resolution asks that the government recognize how the lines of responsibility have blurred and overlapped, and enter into a meaningful

consultation to address these issues, a consultation that includes openness and transparency. This resolution also asks the province to provide funding and technical expertise when they mandate extra duties to municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, this is a resolution that lays the necessary groundwork for a stronger relationship between provincial and municipal governments. This resolution is a step toward improving relationships between the two levels of government. It's a step to start to add some of the infrastructure shortfalls that are out there, the No. 1 issue that the municipalities have. With proper consultation, proper working between the two levels of government, we can overcome some of those problems.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all the members on the other side of the House to forgo their political biases on this particular resolution, support this resolution. It's important to the municipalities of this province and it's important to the people in this province. Thank you very much.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Local Government): I thank the member from Agassiz for introducing the resolution to the Chamber, as it allows me to spend some time talking about municipalities and how municipalities are responding to the new realities of elected office and how this government is assisting them.

Thus far, I believe the comments that I've heard so far, it's easy to conclude that this resolution doesn't reflect accurately the current reality out there. And I will make some points with regard to some of the points that the member opposite from Agassiz has made this morning.

I believe this information will assure the member opposite that his concerns do not accurately capture what is currently happening in our municipalities and does not reflect accurately the collegial and positive relationship the Manitoba government has with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities and many of the 197 municipalities that we have in this province.

Going back to the days of Jean Friesen and the other ministers previous to myself have worked closely with a great deal of respect and, also, through consultation and listening to many of the recommendations that AMM has made. And I believe that many of the—many of our policies do reflect the advice that they've given us. I understand

how the member from Agassiz might not be up to date with all the provincial—that all the provincial government has accomplishing with regard to the 197 municipalities in Manitoba.

These are a lot of municipalities, as we know. Many of them, many municipalities are around 300 people within those municipalities, relatively small, and yet I know how hard it is to know everything that is happening out there, and I know the member was with AMM many, many, many, many years ago so I can understand how he may have overlooked many of the things that we are currently doing.

Also, members of this government view things a little bit differently than members of the opposition. You see, as government, we respect other levels of government as being duly elected, mature levels of government, but we do not believe municipal governments exist in isolation to the provincial government or the federal government. We share the same citizens, and we all want our communities to be viable and sustainable places to live, work, and play. Therefore, we work collaboratively in a partnership with other levels of government. And this has been our mantra and this is what we do. Each and every minister, every department in this government, does so as well. And we encourage the municipalities to do so amongst themselves, as well, to work with their neighbours, to take a look at best practices in how they can improve the everyday, every day for their citizens.

And this is just not rhetoric, Mr. Speaker, it's happening. The member from Agassiz was in West St. Paul not too long ago with the municipalities of the Capital Region. Together they formed the Manitoba Capital Region partnership. They are interested in pooling together their resources, and have a co-ordinated approach to growth and sustainability. And the Province is happy to help; that is why we have committed \$250,000 to fund a multimodal transportation plan. We are pulling together the municipalities' experts as well as ours to identify key transportation routes and needed infrastructure so that we may co-ordinate and focus our efforts collectively—collectively—working in partnership, and I hope the member from Agassiz is listening to this, because if you were to listen just to what he had said, you'd think there was no collaboration, there was no partnership, and no agreements going on whatsoever in the province of Manitoba, and that's absolutely incorrect.

This, by far, not only—is not only the only example, Mr. Speaker. Co-operation is happening all over the province. Municipalities are coming together to deliver some of the best quality potable water in Manitoba as well as dealing with used water at the other end. We are seeing municipalities coming together to deliver library services. We are seeing municipalities sharing financial advisors as well as other administrative and expert support. This is happening because we live in the year 2012 with its corresponding knowledge, its corresponding technology, and with that citizens' expectations have risen tremendously.

They want their governments to do more, do it efficiently with their tax dollars, and do it in a transparent, public manner; and we agree. But this does not fall on the shoulders of municipalities alone. It's a shared, heightened expectations that our citizens have.

We willingly subscribe to the new PSAB requirements for our budget statements. We accept this as the new standard, and municipalities should, and have, as well. We have public disclosure of ministerial expenses, Mr. Speaker. It's important that all politicians allow public disclosure of public dollars. It allows the citizens to be active in deciding what is acceptable expenses, as this is often a matter of public policy.

We are aware of the necessity to respect high standards of environmental protection and stewardship, so why wouldn't we expect the same from our municipalities? Their citizens do, and we do as well. But again, we work with municipalities and provide them with much, much merited assistance, thus increasing the standards from which government operates. I give you another concrete example of this. The Community Planning Assistance Program provides financial support for preparation, adoption and review of development plans as required by The Planning Act and the provincial planning regulation. We recently enhanced the community planning assistance. This provides—and to provide increased assistance to planning districts and municipalities to undertake comprehensive reviews of the development plans, prepare drinking water management plans, waste water management plans, additional studies that may be required by the Province.

* (11:20)

Mr. Speaker, in the 1990s, there was such a hodgepodge, patchwork quilt of development going

all over the province, no attention to detail with respect to many, many, many different septic fields taking place on many of our rivers and streams that go into Lake Winnipeg. And our provincial land use policies are to address this, working in co-operation with municipalities to respect our environment and our lakes which, of course, we want to have for many, many decades and centuries into the future for our children and grandchildren, and so on.

Mr. Speaker, there are many other areas which the provincial government is assisting and working closely with our municipalities, and we understand that there are sensitivities around this with regard to the opposition. They know that we're working collaboratively and co-operatively with AMM. We listen to them and we listen to the suggestions. We may disagree on a number of issues, but we are working in a respectful manner.

Now, I know members opposite—and the member was on AMM and on the board previously. Maybe deep down his wish would—he'd like to see us in a huge fight with AMM all the time and, of course, this may assist on what he is saying. But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, not from this side. We are working in a collaborative, respectful way, as I mentioned, and we will continue to do so.

We have worked with AMM to look at areas of government activity that could be overviewed by AMM to identify potential areas of duplication, for example, areas that process can be streamlined. That's improving the capacity of municipalities to accomplish what they need to accomplish, and similarly for the province of Manitoba.

Our deputy minister and others in my department are working with AMM to take a look at what we can do to make things work better, and that will continue. I also want to note that Manitoba municipalities have not been faced with significant downloading of responsibilities that has occurred elsewhere, like Ontario where housing is a municipal responsibility. In fact, in Manitoba several services have been uploaded to the Province, including short-term income assistance in all municipalities outside of Winnipeg, Ombudsman services, cost of use of water bombers for fire suppression in municipalities, Mr. Speaker. The Province also recently assumed responsibility for public health inspections in Winnipeg.

So we're working very closely with municipalities, and I just want to touch on a couple of other areas than the financial end, Mr. Speaker,

where we've directly made a commitment to municipalities.

The member opposite mentioned about how the 1 per cent of PST that we as a government have made a commitment to municipalities. Mr. Speaker, this is something they asked for, the mayor of Winnipeg asked for, and we delivered.

Unlike the opposition, they wanted us to increase the provincial sales tax by one additional point, to 8 per cent, to give that additional 8 per cent to municipalities, which would have meant they would have received 2 points of PST. Mr. Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) and others on this side said, no, we are not going to increase the PST to give an additional PST to municipalities.

So with regard to where the province of Manitoba provides general assistance—or generous assistance to the city so that they can achieve public service delivery commitments: transit, \$40 million, through a 50-50 partnership; roads and bridges, \$42 million. Mr. Speaker, since 2007 we invested \$220 million: waste water, \$8.8 million, our one third share; convention centre, operating funds of \$85.5 million; public—or police and public safety, another \$4.2 million, including support for 10 new police officers and 10 safety cadets; firefighters, 20 full-time firefighters at Sage Creek.

Mr. Speaker, what I heard from the member opposite—and they've continually voted against all of our initiatives, and I have to say, therefore, it's easy to conclude that this resolution the member brings forward does not reflect, accurately, the current reality in this province of Manitoba, where the provincial government—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

The honourable minister's time has expired.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): It's a pleasure for me to rise today to put some comments on the record with regard to the member for Agassiz (Mr. Briese) and his resolution—private member's resolution, which speaks to the downloading of provincial responsibilities onto municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, I think I've mentioned in prior statements that I represent 25 municipalities in my constituency. That's a significant number of communities who have significant challenges, individual needs, and I can probably speak fairly confidently that the first issue raised by all 25 of those municipalities is infrastructure deficit.

They are so concerned with the services and the supports that this government, this provincial government, is off-loading onto these communities, and the communities are extremely concerned on how they will be able to meet the needs of their ratepayers because this government has continually off-loaded responsibilities and services.

We've seen some push-back. We've seen some municipalities in my constituency who have said, no, we will not take care of your provincial roads anymore because you are not providing enough dollars to make sure those roads are taken care of. So some municipalities have backed away and said, you know, we cannot do this anymore. We cannot pay extra to continue to provide a service which the Province is responsible for.

We also see situations where there—where at one time, I believe, just a few years ago, 47 lagoons without licences in this province, Mr. Speaker, and that's a significant number and that should be a major red flag for this government.

Water Services Board is—my understanding, they get something like 12 or 15 million dollars a year to work through these water issues, and that is a drop in the bucket, Mr. Speaker, when you have in excess of 40 lagoons in the province without licences.

So I don't know how this government is thinking that they're going to be able to address the needs of the boil-water advisories and deal with communities—like, I have one in my community that had an engineer report done several years ago but it's become obsolete. So again, there's a cost addition to this municipality—an extra cost to this municipality because they have to redo the environmental requirement before they can even access funding, which they see there is no funding to receive, Mr. Speaker.

So this community—and this community is looking at all options. They would consider joining with other municipalities, you know, looking at alternative sources or resources and working with—but they don't get any leadership—there's nobody within government that's saying, you know what, that's not a bad idea. What can we do to support you? What can we do to bring that thought together, Mr. Speaker? And I think that many municipalities are feeling that they're being shut out.

And we saw that at the last AMM meeting, Mr. Speaker. We had municipalities within my

constituency asking for meetings with regard to specifically highways. Highway 45, we asked for a meeting. The communities asked for a meeting on that and they didn't receive it.

What happened since that point, when there was no meeting offered, so obviously there's no interest on discussing that road with this government—there was a fire. Glanbia is a company, a flax seed processing company, that provides a great service and employs 60 people within my constituency, within this community.

Highway 45, it does not have RTAC rating so 60 per cent of the time that road is not to be used by heavy trucks, Mr. Speaker, but the community has worked so hard—the municipality has worked so hard with Glanbia and were able to overcome that challenge.

By not agreeing—this government—agreeing to at least have a discussion with regard to 60 people having their jobs in jeopardy has now made it even a bigger problem because this plant has burnt down. It has to be rebuilt and because this government failed to take the municipality's concern seriously, we may lose that industry. We may lose that industry, may lose those jobs to another province, Mr. Speaker, and I think that what this government has to realize is there are a number of communities that rely on quality roads to maintain their labour market and their employment market. And I think that this is just an example of how this government has failed communities.

* (11:30)

An issue that, I think, several communities within Manitoba have been talking about is a rural Manitoba airport capital assistance program or a rural airport program, and I think that this is an issue that I know the government is aware of. It is an issue that has been brought to my attention from several—by several communities, and the communities have indicated that, you know, we need to be looking at the maintenance of these facilities. Rural air—public airports are here and, in most cases, at little to no cost to the province. Unlike the road infrastructure, rural runways are simpler and cheaper to maintain than roads. But what we have seen is a government that has actually cooled the funding for maintenance to these airports in 2004. This was a program we bought in as government, and they took that program and took that funding away from municipalities, Mr. Speaker.

So what we're seeing now is airport infrastructures will be deteriorating without capital improvements at any point soon unless this government does listen to the municipalities who have been raising this issue. And the municipalities go from Swan River all the way to the US border, Mr. Speaker. So it's not a little area that has a concern. It is a area that covers a vast part of the province. Many of these airports have run out their life expectancy. Twenty years for an asphalt runway is beyond its life expectancy and renovating the airport will require more financial resources than local communities can afford, and several communities are very concerned they're going to lose that service.

So we have some very serious issues that this province has ignored over a number of years, and they've off-loaded a lot of those responsibilities onto the Province. So I find it rather hypocritical when the Premier (Mr. Selinger) stands in his chair—or stands by his chair and slams the federal government because he feels that they're not being treated fairly. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the pot is calling the kettle black. I think he has to understand that what he is doing is hurting Manitobans, and I can't believe that he would not look at this issue.

I have a community, Rapid City, that their water is turning sour, they—their water source, and they need assistance and support from this government. They've been out there. They've tested the water, but they haven't come forward and shown their support. They're studying it, and you know what? When municipalities in my communities hear the government saying, we're going to study it, then you know that you're being put on the back burner. So what I would like to see is this government actually take some responsibility and show that they actually do care about some of these communities. Because I believe that communities like Rapid City, if they don't partner with other municipalities in the area like RM of Odanah and Minnedosa, that they could lose out on providing a much needed service in their community, which is water, Mr. Speaker.

So I believe that this government is in a huge debt, \$27.6 billion. They talk about spending wisely and as a priority. What I've laid out for you this morning is a government that has not made my communities and a lot of communities throughout this province a priority. And I challenge them to not vote in favour of this resolution because I believe that it clearly lays out the shortcomings of this provincial government, and I'm very disappointed in

the services that they've been providing for Manitobans over the last 12 years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I'm very honoured to be here today. First of all, being Ag Minister, that is a true, true honour to be here today as Ag Minister, and I look forward to a number of years of being the representative in Ag.

As—I am very proud to say 39 years of my life has been directly linked to agriculture, and I'm very proud to say I know what it's like being first-hand to experience the BFC, which is a real devastating situation for our cattle producers. And I want to ensure you that learning from that particular circumstance, as the federal government and as the provincial government is looking towards first line of insurance—so don't have a re-occurrence of the problem that we've seen.

And first of all, I'd like to say that in my numerous conversations with the news media, I strongly believe in farm families and I strongly believe in young farmers continuing on the tradition. So, with that being said, I truly am going to be quite indulged in pertaining to that subject of keeping the family farms intact and young farmers intact as well.

But, first of all, I'd like to speak to the issue brought forward by the MLA from Agassiz. Obviously, we've gone through some pretty tough cycles, and I would like to indicate the municipal experience that I've been involved in for the last 20 years. I think it's very comfortable to say that we attain a strong communication link with people of all factions—business but also the federal government.

In a recent announcement in the federal Treasury department, when we talk about downloading, unfortunately, part of the equation is that, we, as a provincial government, are now faced with certain amount of downloading that we have to adjust in our situation. And if I may use one example, PFRA pastures, community pastures, as members opposite have brought it to my attention, and I—and so have a number of the cattle producers in our area, it really, truly becomes a challenge to deal with a number of those issues.

And I want to assure you that my department and—in consultation with the Ottawa department, we will move forward to make it a feasible situation for the cattle producers, who just recently recovered from the BSE. And let's move forward to making our

cattle industry more viable. But also, let's maintain the cattle numbers we have as we move forward to Growing Forward, the program, as we talk about processing our raw product, is definitely a necessity. And I think this is why we need to retain our cattle numbers, to make it viable for the young farmers and the young family farms.

I also want to indicate, as well, the crop insurance that our government provides. It is without any doubt the No. 1 crop insurance base uptake by any agriculture industry in the province of Manitoba. We presently have in excess of 90 per cent of land that's in crop insurance, and probably 87 per cent of eligible farmers are in crop insurance. So, with that being said, that just reinforces the importance of ag insurance in our industry, and that is a dedication that our government has put forward to realize how important agriculture is in our province, and we will sustain that for years to come.

I would like to bring up a few other situations where I've been involved in my past, prior to this job. Conservation district—and, as you know, the province of Manitoba is a strong supporter in conservation districts. With that being said, we're well aware of the 2011 flood, or the 2007 flood, as well. And what we have, a situation where conservation district is a true, true relationship of partnerships, such as surface water management. We've got a federal, provincial, municipal and landowner understanding, but what it is more used for—it's an educational tool of the great importance of surface water management. And let us not say that we've truly experienced it last year—the flood. And I think the time has come that we have to reinforce the conservation district to surface water management, not only within the province of Manitoba, but we have to start doing dialogue with Saskatchewan and Alberta. So we have to deal on a larger watershed basis for the betterment of all people in the province of Manitoba first.

Earlier mentioned was the fact of drinking water, and I truly understand that we need to provide additional financial incentives. In our government, in our latest budget [*inaudible*] the planning has been put forward towards clean drinking water.

As I look through my notes here, Mr. Chair, one example is co-operation is happening all over. Municipalities are coming together to deliver some of the best potable water in Manitoba. As well as dealing with use of water at the other end, we see municipalities coming together to deliver library services. We're seeing municipalities sharing

financial advisors, as well as other administrative and expert support. Citizens want governments to do more, do it efficiently with more tax dollars and to be transparent and public. And I'm proud to say we are definitely going to be more transparent, not saying we haven't been.

* (11:40)

The main message today, Mr. Speaker, we share the same citizens; we all are—we all want our communities to be viable and sustainable and places to live and work and play. Therefore, we work collaboratively and in partnership with other levels of government.

Earlier the minister had indicated Glanbia was one of the concerns. I want to ensure the minister opposite that we are definitely in consultation; it is definitely a priority to the Province of Manitoba. And I want to—and state the benchmark of that thought being Glanbia of one of them in the province of Manitoba. We need to support the agriculture industry in the sense that we believe in finishing products that are traditionally grown in here. The raw products are grown here; we need to go with processing, such as Peak of the Market is a prime example.

As we move forward, and I have to honestly say we've had some positive discussions with Mr. Ritz, and I want to ensure you that as Ag Minister, we will continue to work on that basis. I understand as the applaud took place that we know that there is co-operation from the other side of the floor as we move forward to processing.

But I do want to remind members opposite that we traditionally still need our labour force to work at the various processing plants. As we know, Neepawa—the hog processing plant—60 per cent of the labour force is immigrant workers, and we need to maintain that strong movement towards immigrant workers to support our processing in the province of Manitoba.

As we move forward, that is the incentive and that's where we need the co-operation, much like the conservation districts. We need to maintain the partnerships that exist between the federal, provincial and the municipal governments, and I do want to relate to the fact I've been in all three sides, and I really look forward to that happening.

In closing, Mr. Chair, I would like to—Mr. Speaker, I would like to enforce the fact that we

do have obstructions in our transition of growing forward, and I look forward to being part of the fruitful discussions with our problems.

So in closing, I want to assure you, under the NDP government, Manitoba financial support available to municipal has become the most generous across Canada. The budget of 2012 included \$375 million in funding available to Manitoba municipalities, an increase of almost 9 per cent or \$31 million, no less, if I would say so.

We've heard numerous times that we are building a successful province of Manitoba. Over the past decade, Manitoba NDP has invested over \$118 million in recreational facilities across the province. Not only did that allow the NDP to meet its to—\$60-million commitment to recreation made in 2007 as the election called for, but actually exceeded it by more than \$71 million being committed between 2008 and 2011.

Since 1999, we've made unprecedented investments in policing as we talked about the rural and the urban centres. And I want to respond by saying 261 police officers funded by the Province will be added: a hundred new police officers on the streets again in this term; 30 additional police officers with the federal funding redirected; police helicopters, 1.3 per year; police candidates—50 this year—funding is split 50-50 with the City. We're spending over \$126 million—

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

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege to speak to the bill that's been put—private member's resolution that's been put before us here today, as well. Find a pen that writes—there we go.

I want to say that the member has brought forward a very clear bill—a resolution here today, downloading of provincial responsibilities. It's been brought forward by a former president of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities and no one knows more the responsibilities of that organization and the activity and interaction between it and the provincial government.

So I want to say that the—you know, of all of the member in our caucus, and many of us are from rural areas, those from the urban areas of the—here in the city as well, and other cities, Mr. Speaker, it comes with a—we don't bring a resolution like this forward

lightly. This is a very serious situation and as the member from Agassiz has pointed out very well, and very articulately seconded by the member from Riding Mountain, as well—my colleagues have spoken at length in regards to the downloading of responsibilities and costs on the municipalities in the province of Manitoba.

And I certainly wanted to welcome the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn) into this debate because, of course, he has experience in the agricultural area, as well, and—but, you know, one of the things that he forgot in his presentation today is that he used to be the former president of the vet board in Manitoba, and they just cut \$180,000 out of the vet board's budget. So, Mr. Speaker, I think he feels, personally, some of the ramifications that are impacting from his own area in regards to how it impacts Manitoba farmers. I wanted to, also, add that in regards to the beef insurance plan that's coming, it's nice to see that Manitoba's come lately to that game, because it's certainly been led by the Alberta government, in regards to the Alberta beef producers, itself, and the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, the beef producers of Alberta. That program has been trial run; it's been accepted, and looked at, by the federal government, we understand. And so, I'm pleased to see that the Manitoba government is now buying into it, in a Johnny-come-lately fashion.

I, certainly, say that it's not his fault that he has to be faced, and left, with some of the situations that he's faced with as the Agriculture Minister. Because, Mr. Speaker, some of these programs and the red tape that were brought in to harm farmers in Manitoba, in rural areas, which costs municipalities—and I'll get to that—were brought in by his predecessors, both his own predecessor from Swan River, Rosann Wowchuk, and now the Finance Minister, the member from Dauphin. They brought in a lot of things that impacted negatively Manitoba: the beef cattle tax that we still haven't seen a slaughter plant on in this province; not to mention the moratorium on hogs in this province, brought in by the now Finance Minister when he was Agriculture Minister and Conservation Minister; not to mention sewage ejectors that the member—the Finance Minister brought in when he was Conservation minister, dumping tens to twenty thousand dollars on each homeowner in a rural area for having to have a field put in.

Thank goodness that Mr. Blaikie, when he came in as the Conservation minister, listened to my colleagues who had made presentations to him, and

changed that particular forced cost that the government was going to put on rural landowners, and changed it to allow ejectors to be—to stay in places where they were presently at in regards to the sale of homes on, particularly on, the five land classes that they allowed them on.

I want to say that as my colleague from Agassiz has probably got more experience than anyone in the province in regards to bringing forth and speaking to a particular resolution like this, I just want to say that it's very clear that there's been a number of areas of financial unloading and unloading of rules and regulations. And each time you do that, it impacts on the taxpayer and the landowner in those municipalities. And it puts a lot of pressure on rural municipalities, Mr. Speaker, because they—that's where they get their tax base from; they have to go to the local taxpayers to get the taxes to run the municipality. And so, they know that if there's taxes being unloaded on those local tax—landowners, like the 3-cent-litre increase in gas tax on purple fuel, that impacts directly on that municipality's ability to collect more tax to run their operations. And so—so they disproportionately hurt rural people by increasing the purple tax 3 cents when all of the—as well as the—those same rural people have to pay the two and a half cent a litre at the pumps for all of the tax on gasoline that they have to pay now with this government's increased taxation. Which they said they wouldn't do, and they've already increased it—\$184 million in taxes as well as the hundred and fourteen—the whole four—\$114 million in fees and charges that they've increased as well.

Mr. Speaker, I've been at a number of association of Manitoba municipal meetings throughout my career as a politician in this House, dating back to 1999, and I've never seen such a plethora of regulations and numerous resolution—of regulations forced on municipalities and, therefore, they're fighting back by passing resolutions outlining the high costs involved in running their entities and asking all the time for more relief from the provincial government in regards to the red tape that they've been hoisted upon them in a number of different areas. I'll get to a few of them in a minute.

*(11:50)

But I think, as well, that a lot of the municipalities today are faced with a maximum level of borrowing. There's such a shortfall of infrastructure in the province that my colleague from Riding Mountain mentioned the 40 lagoons that need

to be replaced in Manitoba, Mr. Speaker. There's water services needed in many areas to get rid of the huge amount of boil-water orders that we have in the province still.

All of these things are—make it difficult for municipalities to continue to meet the needs of the local citizens and what they expect for the quality of life that is enjoyed by many others in our society across Canada, Mr. Speaker, just in an attempt to keep up.

So when—particularly speaking for my own area of the province, when an opportunity comes along like the oil industry, which is bringing a lot of young people back into the region today and helping all of Manitoba with the hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue that are coming from that one industry out of the southwest, then it's incumbent upon them as municipalities to try to meet the needs of things like expansions of industrial parks, expansion of residential areas in their communities, that they haven't had to face for, some of them, in cases of decades, Mr. Speaker.

And so this is an area where the Province, I urge them to continue to work with those municipalities because it—because in the long run, Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out in my question in question period yesterday, it's the provincial government that will gain the most out of the taxes that they will be able to collect out of these industries and off of the individuals who quite happily want to live in those rural areas and continue to develop it. So I really appreciate if the government would continue to look at some of those areas.

I mentioned the PST on gases, the PST on municipal insurance premiums. They've off-loaded onto PST onto labour, engineering, architects and accounting fees over the past years, Mr. Speaker. And now they've raised it on the gas taxes that hurts municipalities, I've mentioned. It also is in the area of closing planning offices throughout the province. The education tax on property could be alleviated right now. They're still—could be eliminated. Right now, they're still collecting and forcing the municipalities to pay administration costs on those. There are a whole host of areas.

And another one is, I would urge, as I mentioned to the deputy minister of Highways yesterday in regards to a development process in Virden, you know, looking back at things that were put in place in the late '90s, and I think the member of local—the

Local Government minister will certainly be aware from his years in Transportation that there's an overpass that was on the books to be built in Virden, and it's impeding right now the building of a really large business in that area, Mr. Speaker. It needs to come off the books. I've requested it, but the department has said that it's there so we're going to keep it there and it's going to continue and go forward, and I urge the minister to—of Local Government to work with the minister of Highways to try and alleviate that concern so that business can go ahead and it's not being impeded.

And I also have talked to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn) in regards to Fred Neil's case, the Cell Farms, the dairy farmer, the only dairy farmer forced to evacuate from the flood. And, Mr. Speaker, I will close by saying I urge him to try and find, with his department—and I know they're working on it—a very clear way to include Mr. Neil in those flood programs because being he's a dairy farmer, he doesn't fit perfectly into the square peg.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Honourable member's time has expired.

Mr. Drew Caldwell (Brandon East): I very much appreciate putting some words on the record following my honourable friend from Arthur-Virden.

I also want to make mention, Mr. Speaker, given that the resolution is proposed by my honourable friend from Ste. Rose, that, indeed, we did serve together on the Association of Manitoba Municipalities board of directors—*[interjection]*—Agassiz, I'm sorry; it used to be Ste. Rose—was a—we did serve together on the board of directors of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities a number of years ago. At that time, as I recall, the member was a little bit more liberal and a little bit more thoughtful in his political understanding of the province. I'm afraid he's taken a hard, extreme lurch to the right since his election here. And frankly, you know, while I enjoy listening to the speaker, most of what he puts on the record is utter nonsense and it continues with this particular resolution.

As my colleagues have said, Manitoba has the most generous provincial-municipal tax-sharing and grant program in the country of Canada. We're very proud, Mr. Speaker, to be a government that believes in supporting our municipal partners at the highest level in this country.

It's worth noting, given, you know, reality is something that the member from Agassiz has lost

faith in or has lost familiarity with, the reality is that Manitoba provides the most generous municipal support of any province in the country. And the reality is, Mr. Speaker, that members opposite, for 13 consecutive budgets have voted against providing municipalities with the highest degree of support in this country.

So there is a word for that sort of behaviour. I don't know if it's parliamentary to use it, so I won't. But there is a word for saying one thing and doing another, Mr. Speaker, that is well known to all who speak the English language, if not to the member from Agassiz.

Mr. Speaker, our record in the province, as I said, is very clear. We support our municipalities at a level higher than any other jurisdiction in Canada.

I'm going to speak more specifically to my own constituency. We've had colleagues speak in—to global issues and agricultural issues. But I'm going to speak to Brandon, where I'm very proud and very encouraged by the support that my home community has seen from this government over the last—at least three mandates completed and fourth under way—the highest level of investment in the city of Brandon, in the history of that community, Mr. Speaker, has taken place under this government and I'm very proud of that as the member for Brandon East.

And I won't speak to my other colleagues over there, but, yes, indeed, my job is to encourage investment as expeditiously as possible in my community, without fear of favour; I'm proud to do that along with my predecessor, Len Evans, who served as the member for Brandon East for 30 years, who I've been honoured to consider my mentor and good friend. And I work as hard as I can to follow the lead of Mr. Evans and his work.

There hasn't been an MLA that has delivered more for the city of Brandon than the NDP MLAs and there has not been any government in the history of this province that has supported Brandon more than New Democratic Party governments, and I'm very, very proud of that.

And any time I can move projects forward that are going to benefit my community: whether it's Assiniboine Community College; Brandon University; the Brandon Regional Health Centre; the twinning of 1st Street; the twinning of 18th Street; the construction of bridges; the rebuilding of Richmond Avenue; the rebuilding of 1st Street; the provision of affordable housing units, of which there

are some 700—over 700 that have been created in our time; the provision of affordable housing; the support for Renaissance Brandon and downtown revitalization; the support of TIFs from McKenzie seed building; the installation of Manitoba's first MRI unit outside of the city of Winnipeg; the development of the CancerCare Manitoba treatment centre in Brandon; the investment that's been made in Brandon, every single penny which has been opposed by members opposite, Mr. Speaker, every single penny they've opposed.

They voted against supporting Brandon. They've voted against supporting Steinbach. They even vote against supporting Winkler. In this session here they voted to abandon the most successful immigration program in Canada. The members opposite they don't stand up for Brandon, they don't stand up for Winkler, they don't stand up for Steinbach, they don't stand up for Manitoba. They don't stand for anything, Mr. Speaker, except rhetorical excesses and mean-spirited, petty personal politics.

* (12:00)

We know what the members opposite stand for; they stand for nothing in this House, Mr. Speaker. They get up in this House on a regular basis and seek to undermine programs that would benefit the people of Manitoba. And that's a consistent—consistent—feature of members opposite and it's reflected in their electoral success in this province over the last decade. And, dare I say, it will be reflected in their electoral success moving forward as well.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud, as I say, to be part of a government that provides more municipal support than any other province in Canada. I think it's shameful that members opposite vote against that support day in and day out with every budget. They vote against this province. They vote 'against' their interest in their own communities. They'll swagger around the coffee shops. To coin a phrase of my former colleague—Gary Doer used to use it—they'll swagger around the coffee shops like they own the place.

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

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Brandon East will have three minutes remaining.

The hour being 12 noon, this House is recessed and stands recessed until 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 3, 2012

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