

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

Official Report
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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 12, 2015

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

Happy Manitoba Day.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 23—The Boxing Amendment Act

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the minister—or the Attorney General, Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh), that Bill 23, The Boxing Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la boxe, now be read for a first time.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Motion presented.

Mr. Lemieux: This bill will serve to modernize The Boxing Act with language that's in sync with the federal Criminal Code, section 83, and support efforts already undertaken to support Manitoba's sports tourism industry. These changes will not change the current function of the act or the Manitoba Combative Sports Commission but ensure that it speaks the same consistent jurisdictional language.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Any further introduction of bills?

PETITIONS

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

Rights of Manitoba Children

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

Under this provincial government, Manitoba also has the second highest rate—or percentage of children using food banks of all Canadian provinces and the highest child poverty rate.

Mr. Speaker, we petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities to ensure the rights of all Manitoba children are respected and that the opinions of children are taken into consideration when decisions that affect them are made.

To urge the provincial government and the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities to correct the tragic systemic flaws that have failed Manitoba children in the recent past.

This petition's signed by M. Warzel, C. Okumura, A. Maciejkow and many more concerned Manitobans.

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

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

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the provincial government improve the safety at the pedestrian corridor at the intersection of PTH 206 and Cedar Avenue in Oakbank by considering such steps as highlighting pavement parkings to better indicate the location of the shoulders and crosswalk, as well as installing a lighted crosswalk structure.

This is signed by L. Kyle, L. Fast, T. Mirwaldt and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Beausejour District Hospital—Weekend and Holiday Physician Availability

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

* (13:40)

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by M. Molenski, L. Schwark, B. Otto and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Government Record—Apology Request

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

And this is the background to this petition:

Government members have been quoted as stating that, quote, Manitobans no longer trust the current government, end quote.

(2) Sadly, these same members have reportedly stated that since 2014 the government has been focused on its own narrow political interests, quote, ahead of what was once a government plan and what would be indeed the priorities of Manitoba, end quote, and the Premier is, quote, driven by his desire to hold on to his leadership rather than by the best interests of Manitoba, end quote.

(3) According to the comments from government members, their caucus is divided by, quote, fundamental differences and animosity, end quote, and that, quote, the deep divisions are not just amongst the MLAs and caucus, but they exist at the staff level as well, end quote.

(4) 'Regrettably'—regretfully, the dysfunction and infighting within the provincial government has nothing to do with addressing the facts that Manitobans are paying more and getting less. A Winnipeg family pays \$3,200 more in sales and income tax than they would in Regina but receive some of the worst results in health care and education in this country.

Government members have said in the media—
(5) Government members have said in the media that caucus dysfunction is entirely related to internal polls that indicated that they are, quote, annihilation territory, end quote, saying what, quote, our numbers are down and the status quo is not good enough anymore. Our party pollsters have told us we are now facing oblivion, end quote.

(6) Little has been done by the government members to end the infighting with the Premier, claiming retaliation is justified because of public comments such as, quote, people have civil rights, but we also have an organization to run, end quote. Government members acting on behalf of the Premier have actually—have said publicly, quote, we are not on a witch hunt, end quote, and have also said, quote, we have to look at who caused this and who are the ones that have damaged us the most, end quote.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier of Manitoba to take responsibility and apologize to the people of Manitoba for the social and economic damage created by his failed leadership and the disgraceful conduct of government members that has destabilized the provincial government and hurt Manitoba businesses and families.

And this petition has been signed by G. Maynard, G. Fuchs and G. Scull and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Government Communication and Fund Allocation

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

And the background for the petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government is diverting hundreds of thousands of tax dollars and hundreds of hours of labour away from infrastructure projects for

a self-promotional sign campaign entitled Steady Growth, Good Jobs.

(2) The signs are misleading because the actual growth—or rate of growth under this Premier is the lowest west of Quebec.

(3) Since this Premier came to power, the average weekly wage of Manitobans has risen less than in eight other provinces.

(4) Provincial government members have been quoted as saying they need a record number of signs to counter the public backlash against the PST hike and improve the government's public image and branding. This is evidenced by comments reportedly made by the member for Thompson, quote, there may even be a record number of signs, and from the member from Minto who reportedly said, quote, people will see that sign and they'll see the branding, unquote.

(5) According to documents obtained through access to information requests, the provincial government is not being upfront with Manitobans by allocating taxpayer dollars for the additional PST hike to projects other than strategic infrastructure, such as splash pads, gym storage rooms and golf courses.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to, in the interest of accuracy, amend the signs and materials by adding the words in taxes and the word fewer so that the sign will read, steady growth in taxes, fewer good jobs.

(2) To urge the Premier—to urge that the Premier admit to Manitobans that PST funds are being diverted away from strategic infrastructure projects that develop and grow Manitoba's economy in favour of self-promotional government branding and spending diverted from non-strategic infrastructure spending contrary to the stated reason for the PST increase cited by this Premier and his government.

This petition's signed by C. Tattersall, C. Johnson, A. Berry and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker: Any further petitions?

Seeing none, we'll move on to committee reports. Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Manitoba Day

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I have a ministerial statement on Manitoba Day, and here are 13 copies.

Today I am pleased to join all Manitobans in celebrating Manitoba Day, our province's 145th birthday. The Manitoba Act which created the province of Manitoba was passed by the Parliament of Canada and received royal assent on May 12th, 1870.

Manitoba Day is an opportunity to reflect on how our path into Confederation was shaped by past generations. The indigenous peoples of this region generously shared their experience and knowledge with fur traders, explorers and settlers, ensuring their survival. Manitoba became the birthplace of the Metis, a proud nation of people who championed recognition of Manitoba as a province with its own unique and diverse culture. The creation of the inclusive Metis Legislative Assembly of Manitoba—of Assiniboia led directly to Manitoba's entry into Confederation. It provided political legitimacy for negotiations with Canada and unanimously voted to ratify the Manitoba Act.

Today our province continues to welcome people from around the world. Many have come to Manitoba in search of new beginnings, opportunity and better futures. They bring with them a rich heritage of traditions, values and perspectives. Together we create a mosaic of cultures that is one of our province's greatest assets. It is through building common understanding of our shared history that we've been able to grow our communities and our province, and we continue to create the Manitoba—create Manitoba history with the appointment of Amanda Lathlin, the First Nations woman—the first woman of First Nations status to be elected to the Legislature. This is a proud moment for all Manitobans.

Today and throughout the year it is important that we celebrate our rich and diverse history and that we recognize the many ways each of us contributes to Manitoba's unique identity. When we understand our collective history, we strengthen our sense of Manitoba as a community. We appreciate where we started and what we've accomplished.

I encourage everyone to take the opportunity to celebrate Manitoba's birthday and explore our shared heritage. This is a chance to learn more about ourselves and, ultimately, our place in the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): I thank the Premier for his comments, and I'm pleased and honoured today to rise as well to mark our 145th birthday. We are a great province.

* (13:50)

On May the 2nd in 1870, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald announced that a new province, Manitoba, would enter Canada as the Confederation's fifth, and the Manitoba Act was, as was mentioned by the Premier, was passed by the Parliament and received royal assent on May 12th of that year. The act was proclaimed on July 15th of that year, and it's at that time that Manitoba formally joined Canada.

And since that time, we and those who came before us have written a remarkable history of 145 years of growth from the postage-stamp province that we once were to the keystone province today to the crossroads of the world, frankly, Mr. Speaker.

Manitobans are universally understood to be the most generous people in one of the most generous countries in the world. We regularly lead the country in charitable donations. We are giving people not only of our financial wherewithal but also of our time, and we know that Manitobans are some of the most committed and frequent volunteers in Canada.

And I would say, frankly, Mr. Speaker, speaking for myself only, I believe one of the greatest benefits that we have as elected people in this House is the chance to meet so many wonderful people in our province, so many wonderful volunteers who give back to our communities, give back to our neighbourhoods. We bear witness as we work as elected representatives of those same people of not only their past accomplishments but their future accomplishments and achievements as well, and it's an exciting thing to have the chance to be part of sharing those wonderful achievements.

We deserve to celebrate, as people today, our giving nature, our kind spirit, and I encourage Manitobans from all corners of our province to spend time with loved ones and with friends and neighbours on this coming weekend reflecting on our past, reflecting on where we are today and reflecting on where we can go in the future as we build and continue to build throughout this beautiful summer, which will be filled, I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, with warm weather, good friends and good discussions and beautiful prairie sunsets as well.

And on behalf of all members of our caucus, of the official opposition, I want to wish a very happy Manitoba Day to all Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, we are, and we should be, very proud of who we are as Manitobans. We are proud of our province, our storied history and the incredible potential that we have for the years ahead. Our storied past is steeped in First Nation, Metis and Inuit traditions, and we are today enriched by the presence of immigrants who have come here from around the world and today work, volunteer, live and play in this wonderful place we call Manitoba.

From our youth to our elders, from those who are new to our province to those who have been here for many, many years, let us ensure that all Manitobans are aware of the importance of today and indeed are celebrating our province's birthday 145 years ago on this date. It is with joy that I stand today feeling confident in our future and wishing all Manitobans well on this Manitoba Day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, merci, miigwech, ekosani.

Mr. Speaker: Are there any further members' statements?

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Seeing none, prior to oral questions I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today from the Canadian Fossil Discovery Centre, Jay Rahn, Victoria Markstrom, Ted Nelson and Eric Blaich, who are the guests of the honourable member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

NDP Leadership Convention Responsibility for Severance Packages

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): It was the NDP leadership fiasco that triggered this whole departure-tax-subsidizing-former-employees issue, Mr. Speaker, and the NDP staffers were paid to leave because of the fact that

they supported another NDP leadership candidate other than the current Premier. Manitobans did not cause this rebellion; New Democratic Party MLAs caused this rebellion.

So I would ask the Premier to give us one good reason today why the New Democratic Party should not be responsible for refunding the \$670,000 departure tax back to Manitobans.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, severance payments are a normal part of what happens in government. The member opposite himself, I believe, has been in receipt of severance payments himself, and if he's able to receive severance payments, other people should also have that opportunity when they have served the people of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, as we go forward it's very clear that the Leader of the Opposition has no interest in actually debating the issues that are of importance to Manitobans, the priorities of Manitobans. And one of those issues—and all of those—many of those issues are captured in the budget.

We've had, for example, no commitment by the Leader of the Opposition on to what his position is on expanding daycare opportunities in Manitoba. We put 900 additional places in the budget this year. We increased salaries this year and we also are increasing the number of child-care centres we're building.

What has the leader said about this? He has said absolutely nothing. Will he vote to support this, Mr. Speaker? I think not.

Mr. Pallister: Not a lot of point debating with someone who breaks their word. Integrity is the issue here. This was caused by a lack of integrity on the part of the member who makes the accusations now.

He said just a few weeks ago, and I quote now: We believe everyone should be able to exercise their civil rights as citizens to participate in an electoral leadership contest, and they will be respected. Then—end quote—then he broke his word to his own people, fired them. He made that promise as a leadership candidate, and like so many of the promises he's made as a Premier, those were promises broken. Mr. Speaker, promises made, promises broken.

The reason for the enormity of these payments is that the MLA for St. Boniface broke a promise that only a leadership candidate would make. No premier would make such a promise.

So I ask again: Give us one good reason why the New Democratic Party should not have to pay the price for that broken promise.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite was the one who broke his promise when he said he would not privatize the telephone system. That's what he said he would do. Promptly, he stayed up for many hours in the Legislature to ram that piece of legislation through, which resulted in the rates for Manitobans going from among the lowest in Canada to among the highest in Canada, which resulted in many employees losing their jobs, which resulted in a program where shareholders now in the majority live outside of the—Manitoba and the profits flow to them instead of staying in the hands of the people of Manitoba.

If the member opposite wants to talk about broken promises, perhaps he could explain to the Legislature why he broke that promise that left Manitobans worse off.

Mr. Pallister: Well, we know that Manitobans are very tired of NDP broken promises, but now even NDP staffers are tired of NDP broken promises.

The Premier went on to say, people have civil rights, but we also have an organization to run. But which organization is that, Mr. Speaker? Paying two thirds of a million dollars to departing NDP staffers is a massive waste for Manitobans. So clearly he's not talking about the organization which is the Province of Manitoba when he makes that statement. The organization that he has chosen to represent with his actions, with his words, with the broken promises is not the Province of Manitoba, nor is it Manitobans' best interests.

The organization he's chosen to represent is the New Democratic Party of Manitoba, so why would that organization not be the one that should pay back the money wrongfully taken from Manitobans?

Mr. Selinger: The member himself is in receipt of severance and now he thinks it's inappropriate. He can't have it both ways. That's a double standard.

It's very clear the member opposite doesn't want to put forward any new ideas on how to improve the province. He was on radio just recently saying that he had a whole bunch of good ideas for the future of Manitoba. Well, to see those ideas—*[interjection]* And so when he was asked what those ideas were, he told Manitobans to go to pcmanitoba.com to see those 36 ideas. Mr. Speaker, those ideas, they're not there. They're not there in the Legislature.

* (14:00)

The member receives severance for himself but doesn't want it for others. The member doesn't want to debate the budget where we've got the lowest small-business tax in the country, where we have the best job creation record in the country, where we have more people working in Manitoba with better wages, where we're building daycares and schools and roads—

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

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

Former NDP Political Staff Responsibility for Severance Packages

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, heck, Mr. Speaker, half his own caucus feels that he doesn't even listen to their ideas, so he's obviously not open to Manitobans'.

The question of severance, Mr. Speaker, is this. The severance payments—all severance payments aren't the same, of course. They're different.

The MLA for St. Boniface used Manitobans' money to bonus his former chief of staff. His former chief of staff, when he fired him, received—after less than three years of employment, his former chief of staff received a full year of salary in order to leave. A Manitoba nurse, in Nurses Week—we should maybe consider this, Mr. Speaker—on the front line of the nursing business would have to work over half a century—over half a century—to get the same treatment that he gave his former chief of staff.

Now, the MLA for St. Boniface favours the backroom over the front line. Those are not Manitoba values; those are NDP values.

Since he's only standing up for NDP values, shouldn't the NDP pay back the departure tax?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

Last night we welcomed dozens of nurses to the Manitoba Legislature, and we were able to report that we have—we now have a record number of nurses working in Manitoba, over 17,800 nurses, more than 3,400 nurses more practising in Manitoba since we came in office.

They fired 1,000 nurses. For every nurse they hired—fired, we've hired over three and a half more

nurses. There's the contrast right there. We support, hire and train nurses; they fire them. It's no wonder they don't want to debate the budget.

Mr. Pallister: Nurses would have to work for half a century to be treated as well as his former chief of staff. That's NDP fairness for you, Mr. Speaker, makes no sense at all.

Now, we understand that in order for the former staffers, those loyal to the member for Seine River (Ms. Oswald), to receive their freedom-35 payouts and go to work in Alberta, they were expected to sign a non-disclosure agreement. There's no benefit to them because, frankly, this just prohibits them from telling the truth about the MLA for St. Boniface. And this is not transparency; this is hush money.

And this does nothing to protect Manitobans. This is all about protecting the interests of the NDP. If it's about protecting the interests of the NDP, and it is, why shouldn't the NDP have to pay the costs of this protection?

I ask the Premier again: Why shouldn't the NDP pay back the departure tax?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has now acknowledged that he's received severance payments. He's also said that, in his quotes in the scrum yesterday, I'm not talking about individual staffers with you guys and I never will.

Mr. Speaker, the double standard continues. He wants to talk about individual staffers over here, but he doesn't want to talk about it in his own case. He wants to receive severance payments himself and for others that have worked in the former government that he was a part of, but he doesn't want to acknowledge that severance payments are appropriate here.

He doesn't want to debate the budget because he would then have to reflect on his own record. He does want to talk about nurses, but only nurses that are being hired in Manitoba today—17,800, 3,400 more—but he doesn't want to talk about the nurses he fired. Maybe we can now move to teachers, Mr. Speaker, where they fired 700 teachers and we've hired over 300 additional teachers to have smaller class sizes to help young people to get off to a good start.

Mr. Speaker, it's very clear the Leader of the Opposition does not want to discuss the budget.

Mr. Pallister: It's fruitless to discuss anything of significance with a person who breaks his word all

the time, Mr. Speaker, and his—he broke his word. He said to the people of Manitoba that it was okay for him to break his word because it wasn't in stone. What's the point of discussing anything with someone who breaks their word so frequently?

This fiasco is of NDP waste. Let's talk about NDP waste because that's what's caused this record seventh deficit budget, and that's what is placing front-line services that nurses provide at risk under this government's mismanagement. This fiasco was caused by an NDP rebellion. The staffers left to work for an NDP leadership candidate. Another NDP leadership candidate broke his word and fired them after he promised he wouldn't. This whole fiasco was caused by an internal crisis within the New Democratic Party. Manitobans should not have to pay any more than they are already having to pay for the NDP's gross incompetence and their dysfunction.

And I invite the Premier again to come into this millennium to speak about an issue that is currently before us, an issue that matters deeply to Manitobans who want answers, including the nurse who spoke to me—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition's time on this question has expired.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, if I heard the Leader of the Opposition correctly, he said he did not want to 'discuss' any issues of significance in this Legislature. That's very unfortunate because one of the things we heard last night from the nursing profession was that during their time in office, only one in five nurses would recommend their profession to people that were interested.

During our time in office, four out of five nurses recommend their profession to the people that are asking about it. Things have dramatically changed in this millennium, not the '90s when they were cutting nurses and laying them off. I know they want—don't want to talk about that anymore.

Let's talk about this millennium where we have a record number of nurses working in Manitoba, 3,400 more, when they fired 1,000; where we have more teachers working in Manitoba; where we have smaller class sizes. Under the Leader of the Opposition, the small-business tax rate, 9 per cent. What is it under this government in the current millennium? Zero.

We know why he doesn't want to discuss the budget in this millennium, because it's growing a more—

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

Severance Packages Government Record

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Yesterday the Premier said that the \$700,000 of severance was just business as usual, Mr. Speaker. In fact, he went on to say that this is just how things are done. Now, I've talked to a lot of people in Manitoba and none of them seem to think that this is actually usual. Most of them think it's very, very unusual.

But maybe it is usual for the NDP, because it wasn't that long ago that they gave \$100,000 to a defeated member of the NDP from Brandon to do a job in government—well, actually, we don't know what the job was, Mr. Speaker. And then he—they gave the former member in the Legislature, the NDP member Bonnie Korzeniowski, \$190,000 to become the 58th MLA of the Manitoba Legislature.

Why don't they acknowledge that the only time this is business as usual is when it's NDP business, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Mineral Resources): I'm very happy the Leader of the Opposition has brought up the issue of nurses, even though he thinks that's not significant, Mr. Speaker. But the last time I saw as many nurses in this building was when they laid off 1,000 and the galleries were full of nurses that that member and his party fired. And they have already said they're going to cut half a billion dollars out of the budget, and what's going to happen to the nurses now that have been hired? That's why they don't want to talk about the significant issues.

They want—the member—the Leader of the Opposition said he should aim higher. The only place—they'll aim at the jobs of nurses and teachers and other professionals that have been hired under this government, and they'll be fired under a Tory regime.

Mr. Goertzen: I'm not sure which question he was answering, Mr. Speaker, so I might want to remind the member that I was talking about the fact that the government gave \$100,000 to a defeated MLA to do some unknown job, then they gave another defeated NDP member \$190,000 to be the 58th MLA.

In fact, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) gave Michael Balagus, another former chief of staff, \$200,000 to go away. And after they gave Marilyn McLaren \$300,000 as a severance, they realized, well, you can't live on \$300,000, so they gave her \$50,000 to do nothing, a no-work contract.

Why doesn't the government just admit that all of this money they're doling out to their friends and their former friends and their sometimes friends is just business as usual for the NDP but for nobody else?

* (14:10)

Mr. Chomiak: You know, it's funny, Mr. Speaker, that the Leader of the Opposition today says not all severance is the same, and I wonder if the member from Steinbach has talked to his seatmate about two seats down about his severance that he received in 2008 when he retired from the House of Commons. I guess all severances aren't the same, are they? When it applies to you, it's not the same. When it applies to anyone else like most people, oh, then it is a problem.

You ought to talk about—Mr. Speaker, what members ought to talk about is the programs that we've put in place, the fact that we're building daycares, building roads, putting in place infrastructure, building schools, building hospitals.

And Manitobans know way better how the economy is and how better off they are under our government than under the—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable minister's time on this question has expired.

Mr. Goertzen: I've learned with the honourable member that the less of a point he has the more he screams, and I've never heard him scream as loud as that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, \$100,000 for Scott Smith, \$190,000 for Bonnie Korzeniowski, \$200,000 for Michael Balagus, \$500,000 for Marilyn McLaren after she got her \$300,000 severance, \$146,000 to Liam Martin, \$540,000 to the other six staff: more than \$1.2 million.

Why is it that this government is treating the taxpayers' dollars, the hard-working families of Manitoba who are out there working every day, why do they take their money and disrespect it so badly to make staff and former NDP members go away, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, it is ironic that today the Leader of the Opposition says not all severances are the same. I got severance, but that's not the same. Other people got severance, but that's not the same.

I'd like to know, you know, Mr. Speaker, the \$2.5 million that went to Connie Curran that fired 1,000 nurses, that was a waste of taxpayer money. And it's taken us a long time to build it back, but we're building back.

Mr. Speaker, members opposite are reckless in their announcements. The Leader of the Opposition is afraid to talk about the issues; he says those aren't important. They're focusing on those political issues.

We'll see how they vote on the budget, a budget that expands daycare, a budget that provides for incomes to people in rental units. They ought to put their votes where their mouth is.

Health-Care Services Heather Brenan Case

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, 68-year-old Heather Brenan died on her doorstep in January 2012 after being discharged from the Seven Oaks Hospital and sent home in a taxicab. Her daughter Dana has had to fight to find out exactly what went wrong.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to explain: Why should a daughter have to fight the system to find out the truth about how and why her mother died?

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

Manitobans expect and deserve that they and their loved ones will receive the highest quality care at our health facilities.

And I can assure all Manitobans, including the member opposite, that the WRHA will fully participate in the independent judicial inquest. We want the answers on what could have been done differently in the case of Ms. Brenan and to help make sure that patients are being discharged appropriately and safely.

We will need—we need to make sure that patients are being discharged appropriately and safely, and the onus is on medical professionals to make sure that they are ready to be discharged.

We look forward to the outcomes of this inquest so that we can learn what to do better the next time.

Mrs. Driedger: The onus is also on this government showing some leadership on some of these issues around health care.

Mr. Speaker, Dana couldn't afford a lawyer to help her in her quest for the truth, and the government refused to fund one for her. So, in order to hire a lawyer, she was forced to cash in her RRSPs, dip into her savings and draw money from a line of credit on her house.

Yet this NDP government was quick to find \$670,000 to pay off political staff who were fired after the NDP family feud.

Can this Minister of Health please explain the warped priorities of this NDP government?

Ms. Blady: I'd like to assure Manitobans that our priority is the health and well-being of all patients. And as I mentioned, the RHA will participate fully in the independent judicial inquest.

Our priorities are about investing in health care. Not only is the new checklist that the WRHA working—has developed with the discharge guidelines meant to enhance the process for safe discharges, including implementation of a regional discharge checklist, but we have also rebuilt and expanded the ERs at Health Sciences Centre, Children's Hospital, Concordia, St. Boniface, Victoria and Seven Oaks, and we're currently undertaking a redevelopment and expansion of the Grace ER.

This is what we're doing to invest in the safe health care of all Manitobans.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, it's too bad they also invented taxicab medicine. That has not helped patients.

So, Mr. Speaker, hush money to keep fired political staff quiet, no money to help find the truth about how the health-care system failed a patient who then died.

Mr. Speaker, will the NDP party MLAs pay back the \$670,000 and redirect it into what really matters: front-line health care?

Ms. Blady: I can assure all Manitobans that the priority of this budget is on health-care investment. It's not about cutting half a billion dollars out of the budget as members opposite have suggested.

So we'll keep doing the work that we do to make sure that nurses, doctors, patients, everyone involved

in the health-care system is getting the best that they can and doing the best that they can.

Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry Recommendations Social Worker Requirements

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, Judge Hughes' recommendation No. 26 from the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry is very clear: a bachelor of social work or equivalent as recognized by the college of social workers be required by all agencies that deliver services under the act.

Judge Hughes has been publicly critical of this minister's move to avoid this regulation.

Is the minister, then, rejecting this recommendation from the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Family Services): Commissioner Hughes provided us with 62 recommendations that we've accepted. We have worked with the agencies and the authorities and many other community groups to develop an implementation plan. We worked with AMR on an implementation plan.

We are implementing those recommendations. I have frequent conversations with Commissioner Hughes as we evaluate our progress.

I can tell the House today that we have made significant progress on 23 of those recommendations and we continue to work towards the implementation of the others.

Mr. Wishart: Mr. Speaker, when the minister had a memo sent changing the social worker designation from 478 of her employees, she also told them to quit using the title of social worker.

She had said publicly that this move is always—was always about protection of title. All along Manitobans thought CFS was about protection of children at risk.

How will this action by the minister do anything to make the children in the care of CFS safer?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I ask the member opposite, will he be supporting this budget that will invest in families and in communities that will ensure the safety of Manitoba children? I ask him that.

What I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, is every day we work with our agencies and our authorities to provide the necessary support to families. We're providing it through prevention services as well as intervention when that is necessary.

We put the safety of children as our No. 1 priority, and we will continue to do that with our very many investments.

Mr. Wishart: It's very tough to support a budget that put us No. 1 in Canada in children in poverty.

Yesterday in her response to the questions, the minister acknowledged the 62 recommendations from the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry but said that they had only made progress on 23 of them. Does that progress include the dismissal of recommendation No. 26, social workers requirement?

Is the minister really committed to the Phoenix Sinclair recommendations, or is she just avoiding the issues?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I can assure the member opposite and all members in this House today that we take the recommendations from Commissioner Hughes extremely—we find them to be extremely important to the development as we move forward to strengthen the system.

There are front-line workers every day that are sacrificing their own time to provide the support for families and making significant progress. We will continue to provide that support to Manitoba families through all our multiple interventions from prevention to intervention options for them.

We have made those commitments. We will continue to make those commitments. I will constantly be in contact with Commissioner Hughes as we evaluate our progress and as we move forward to implement the 62 recommendations.

* (14:20)

Expenditure Growth Targets Government Record

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, the minister is clear she respects Commissioner Hughes; the issue, though, is that Commissioner Hughes does not respect her progress on this file.

Mr. Speaker, in the 2014 budget the then-Finance minister stated that the NDP government needed to control the growth of government. In fact, they said it was a key priority. They said, on page 13, that they would explore ways to make sure that public spending remains under control.

I guess the question I'd really like to ask is, how's it working out for you?

But maybe we could start by saying: When it comes to exploring ways to make sure that public spending remains under control, would the Finance Minister agree that a good starting point would be the \$670,000 paid to staff members?

Hon. Greg Dewar (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the—this government has taken action to reduce the size of government. We've merged health authorities. We've merged the two Crown corporations into one. We've reduced the footprint of government by 140,000 square feet. We said we'd reduce the size of our workforce; we have.

We're focusing now on growing our economy, Mr. Speaker. We're posed to lead the nation in economic growth.

Members opposite, they want to kill jobs. They want to kill that growth. We're going to stop them.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, in the 2014 budget the then-Finance minister stated that they would keep expenditure growth at 2.2 per cent, enabling declining deficits with a return to balance in 2016-17.

So it's one year later. What do we know? We know they have not enabled declining deficits; deficits are up. We know that they will not return to balance in 2016-17, and they're no longer even setting targets.

In fact, what this budget does is make clear that the government will fail on their fundamental progress—or their promise to meet that 2.2 per cent expenditure growth target. Core growth this year, core spending, is up twice that amount.

Will the Finance Minister just admit that their failure to meet their expenditure growth targets is just another broken promise to Manitobans in a long line of broken promises to Manitobans?

Mr. Dewar: I'll admit none of that, Mr. Speaker.

Again, as I said, we're focusing on growing the economy. The Conference Board of Canada said that Manitoba will lead the nation in 2014–2015-2016. We're focusing on providing front-line services, protecting our health care. We've increased the support to education at the rate of the growth of the economy for 16 consecutive years. That's a record that we're proud of.

Mr. Speaker, their record across the way is firing 1,000 nurses. We reject that. Their plan across the

way is to stop our plan to create 7,000–70,000 jobs in the province, Mr. Speaker. We reject that.

Mr. Friesen: Today the opposition party will reject a \$422-million deficit without progress. Today the opposition party will reject a skyrocketing debt. Today the opposition party will not support raiding the rainy day fund. Today the opposition party will reject a failure to provide tax relief to Manitoba families.

They point to forecasts, but their record is clear: ninth in growth, ninth in jobs.

Mr. Speaker, will the Finance Minister admit this is pay more, get less; this is front-line services at risk; and will he admit that Manitobans just don't believe him anymore?

Mr. Dewar: I reject everything the member just put on the record, Mr. Speaker, and he'll have a chance to talk about that later on in the—in this afternoon as we proceed with the support of our budget.

We came into office, we were spending 13 cents on the dollar to service our debt. Now it's down to 5.6 cents, Mr. Speaker. Every year you're seeing declining deficits, the deficit becoming a smaller share of our economy.

Under the members opposite, the debt servicing costs, again, were 13 cents, the net-debt-to-GDP ratio was in the 30s, Mr. Speaker. We've lowered that.

We have a tremendous record on growing the economy. We're going to continue that.

PCL Constructors Selkirk Health Centre Contract

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, Manitobans have been concerned for some time about the contracting policies of this government, and for good reason. The \$100-million STARS contract was not tendered. The Property Registry was privatized without accepting public bids.

And now we learn that, based on its low bid, PCL Constructors was initially awarded the contract for the new health centre in Selkirk, but the government cancelled that contract and awarded it to a firm which was not even one of the original three bidders on the tender.

I ask the Premier: Why did this government first award and then cancel the contract for the new Selkirk health centre with PCL Constructors?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I'm very pleased that the hospital in Selkirk is going ahead. This is going to be a major—this is going to be an important facility to serve the people not only of Selkirk but to serve the people of the Interlake.

And, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the specifics, information will be provided to the member on that, but I understand that legal advice was received and proper procedures were followed based on that legal advice.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, proper procedures were not followed to start with. There were many delays in the construction of the new Selkirk health centre, which was set to begin in 2011 but which actually began three years later. We know that the dispute between the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority and PCL was a situation which one government civil servant referred to as an ugly file—was settled out of court.

Just like the STARS contract and the sale of the Property Registry, Manitobans want to know the extra cost of today's NDP government's unfair business practices.

I ask the Premier: What was the additional cost to Manitobans because of the questionable tendering process used with the new Selkirk health centre?

Mr. Selinger: I answered the member's question. Decisions were made based on the best legal advice that we received with respect to that facility.

I'm pleased that hospital is being built, Mr. Speaker. There's a real contrast. They promised a hospital 10 times in Brandon, Manitoba; it never got started. It's now built and functioning. The Selkirk hospital will be built and function. Yesterday I was in the constituency of Midland in Notre Dame de Lourdes where we're building a small, new, tertiary-care hospital in Notre Dame de Lourdes. That facility has been tendered; it will be built.

We're building QuickCare clinics, we're building ACCESS centres, we're hiring nurses, we're hiring doctors, and what will the members opposite do in the face of all that progress? They'll vote against the budget, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the Premier dismisses my concerns, and yet it was such a serious matter that PCL launched a lawsuit against the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority alleging that it had cancelled the tender on false and misleading grounds, a lawsuit that the

Interlake-Eastern RHA denies ever happened, according to this FIPPA.

And yet I ask the Premier: What is the Interlake-Eastern RHA, under today's NDP, trying to hide by denying the lawsuit when we have evidence that the lawsuit was initiated? And I table that evidence, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Selinger: I'm reviewing the information here and it confirms that we received legal advice on how to proceed with this matter, and that legal advice was followed, and we now have a hospital being constructed in Selkirk.

We didn't make any excuses with that. We found a way to move forward, to ensure the people of the Interlake, the people of Selkirk, have that critical-care facility built so they will get the health care that they need.

And the members opposite, whether they're the opposition or the member from River Heights, they will look for excuses to vote against those facilities. We'll find reasons to get them built.

Northern Manitoba Communities Tourism Development Fund

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): Mr. Speaker, I'm very excited to be asking my first question in the House as MLA for The Pas on our day, Manitoba Day.

Tourism in Manitoba is a \$1.5-billion industry supporting good jobs in my constituency and across the province. In The Pas, we have incredible celebrations like northern trappers' festival and Opaskwayak Indian Days, which is celebrating its 50th year anniversary this year.

Can the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection tell the House about the exciting new tourism development fund launched yesterday targeted at northern, rural and indigenous communities?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection): Thank you very much to the MLA for The Pas for the question.

I was really pleased to announce a new tourism development fund for northern and rural and Aboriginal communities, \$15,000 grants—up to \$15,000 grants, and part of the Budget 2015, and this is truly important for the tourism industry.

* (14:30)

Throughout our budgets of years gone by we've supported the Museum for Human Rights, Journey to Churchill exhibit at the Assiniboine Zoo and the RBC Convention Centre. All of these, the opposition have voted against.

And I know, Mr. Speaker, that Oscar Lathlin, the Honourable Oscar Lathlin, would have been proud—proud—of his daughter raising these questions. He was such a champion of tourism for the North. And thank you very much for the question.

Altona Health Centre Suspension of Services

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Yesterday I asked the Minister of Health why the Altona operating room was closed, and it was clear by her response that she didn't have a clue.

Today I will ask again: Why is the Altona OR closed?

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

In discussing rural health care, we have to talk about investments. And I would like to thank the nurses that came out from a variety of areas across the province last night. And some of them were from Winkler, and some of them were from a variety of places, and they really appreciated the support. And the nurses in Altona did phenomenal work.

And, yes, I can assure the member that while there is a suspension that is occurring, it will be rectified by the fall or sooner. And that I can let folks in Altona know that the acute patient, in-service and emergency departments are available and that folks in Altona, in needing to travel for surgery, will—surgeries will be moved to Carman.

I can assure members and Manitobans that—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The honourable minister's time on this question has expired.

Mr. Graydon: That's small comfort to Altona to know that they have to go to Carman, Madam Minister.

Would the minister quit running down the hallway like the Premier (Mr. Selinger), just stop and answer the question: Why is the nursing shortage causing closure of the operating room in Altona? Is it because of NDP mismanagement, wasteful spending or just sheer incompetence on her behalf?

Ms. Blady: I can assure all Manitobans, especially rural Manitobans, that we are committed to their health care.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, we opened our first rural QuickCare clinics in Steinbach and Selkirk. We've added and expanded surgical services in rural areas, including cataract surgery in Swan River, Minnedosa and Portage and hip and knee surgery in Morden-Winkler. We have new or renovated hospitals in Brandon, Swan River, Thompson, The Pas, Beausejour, Pinawa, Gimli, Morden-Winkler, Ste. Anne, Steinbach, Shoal Lake, with new ones on the way in Selkirk and, again, as the Premier mentioned, in Notre Dame.

We know that the nursing staff, the nurses that we met last night, were excited to be working here in Manitoba and will be excited to work in Altona.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, 23 ERs closed, now the hospital closed in Altona. Yes, Manitobans expect and deserve safe health care, but they're not getting it from this minister.

The minister and the Premier of the province had no problems spending \$670,000 of hush money to former political staffers to keep them quiet and so they could leave the province.

Does the Minister of Health believe political staffers' hush money should be—should come before investing in the vital front-line services of—for people of Manitoba?

Ms. Blady: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member and all Manitobans that we are investing in health care, we are making investments in front-line services and that nurses and front-line providers agree with us.

In fact, I will quote Sandi Mowat, the president of the Manitoba Nurses Union: This government's focus on recruiting and training more nurses has been critical in making our nursing workforce stronger.

But what I'm most proud of is the work we have done to make the places where our nurses work healthier. In the 1990s, only one in five Manitoba nurses would recommend their profession. Today, four in five nurses would recommend being a nurse in Manitoba. Nurses stand with us.

Eating Disorders Access to Resources

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): Hundreds of Manitobans are unable to get treatment for eating disorders when they need it. It's unacceptable for those in danger of serious and lasting physical harm or even death to be denied care.

A brave survivor, Jenny Kostuik, said, and I quote: Once I made the difficult decision to seek help, I found that there are hardly any resources. It's difficult to access information to these resources, there is extremely long wait-lists, and the cost is outrageous. It makes the decision to get treatment even less likely, and it's quite exhausting.

Mr. Speaker, is this, as the Minister of Children and Youth said, identifying and supporting critical services and workplace needs? I think not. Shame on this government.

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Health): I'm not sure if there was a question in there, Mr. Speaker, but I can tell Manitobans, especially those that suffer from eating disorders and that require mental health supports, that this is a budget that supports them and supports their needs and that I know my colleague the Minister for Children and Youth Opportunities is behind that kind of process, as is the Minister of Healthy Living and myself.

We are investing in Manitobans, investing in front-line health providers and investing in the services that folks in need require at those urgent times, including those with eating disorders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

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

Manitoba Day

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): It gives me great honour to stand today to celebrate Manitoba Day, our great province's 145th birthday.

A hundred and forty-five years ago, on May 12th, The Manitoba Act was passed by the Parliament of Canada and received royal assent. On July 15th of that year, the act was proclaimed and Manitoba joined the Canadian Confederation as its fifth province. On May 12th, 1966, Manitoba's

official flag was dedicated and furled for the first time.

To me, nothing quite defines Manitoba like our participation as local volunteers, and what better time to recognize our volunteers than Manitoba Day. So, this morning, St. Paul celebrated the first annual MLA's volunteer reception and each volunteer was presented with a crocus lapel pin centred within a Manitoba tartan ribbon.

The gathering started off with recognizing and presenting Manitoba flags to the Oakbank and Dugald beautification committees, who for years have done extraordinary work keeping their communities looking clean, beautiful and well-maintained. The Springfield ADHOC committee get their members and their name from Anola, Dugald, Hazelridge, Oakbank and Cooks Creek. They were also recognized and thanked, as well as a large group of community volunteers who have gone above and beyond.

Bernie Litkovich and the Springfield Citizens on Patrol Program were instrumental in advocating for the safety of our school children at the crosswalk at Cedar and Main in Oakbank. Bernie and the COPP volunteers were presented with copies of Hansard from the Manitoba Legislature where every day you'll hear me read a petition to this exact issue.

Finally, I had the privilege of recognizing Murray Gillespie who is a firm believer in demonstrating a song-strong sense of community. Murray has always been one to pitch in and help get any job done, and he is a worthy recipient of the 2015 award for volunteer of the year for eastern Manitoba.

To all volunteers in our province, thank you for what you do, and please know how much our communities appreciate you. Happy Manitoba Day, and thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Manitoba Organization for Victim Assistance

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, losing a loved one is always an incredibly difficult time; losing a loved one to murder is a devastating experience that is difficult for the average person to understand. MOVA, the Manitoba Organization for Victim Assistance, knows this. Some of their members have joined us here in the gallery today.

MOVA understands that when you're coping from—with this kind of tragedy, those with a shared

experience can be great support throughout the healing process.

The volunteers and members of MOVA are guided through their motto Victims Helping Victims. MOVA members are always available for those who need someone to lean on.

Beyond supporting the families of homicide victims, MOVA also works to increase public awareness around victims' rights. They work with the provincial and federal governments to enhance and expand legislation that help victims of crime.

At the end of April, during the National Victims of Crime Awareness Week, MOVA held a walk in honour of those loved ones taken too soon. About 100 people marched from The Forks to our Legislative Building where they gathered for a short program. Many carried signs with the name, birth date and the death date of the loved ones that they lost.

During the program, I spoke to the crowd about my own experience. In 2008, my friend Shannon Scromeda was taken by domestic violence. Her death left a hole in all of our lives, in her family and friends' lives. Shannon was a loving mother and a caring friend who is missed by many.

Losing a loved one to murder is a traumatic experience. It is great that MOVA is available to support and guide families and their friends as they navigate the justice system and cope with their losses. Thank you to the Manitoba Organization for Victim Assistance for being here today and all the great work you do.

In the gallery we are joined by Karen Wiebe, Lloyd Wiebe, Stuart Davis and Darlene Rempel-Fillion.

Thank you.

Suzy the Mosasaur

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): It seems like there is always something spectacular going on at the Canadian Fossil Discovery Centre in Morden. I was pleased to be in attendance at a special event on March the 16th to officially unveil Suzy the Mosasaur, the second edition to the Mosasaur Hall.

Suzy is another *Tylosaurus peminensis* discovered in a field in 1977, not far away from the world's largest and most celebrated mosasaur, Bruce.

* (14:40)

Mr. Speaker, Suzy is another *Tylosaurus peminensis* discovered in a field in 1977, not far away from the world's largest and most celebrated mosasaur, Bruce. Suzy comes in at nine metres long and is considered to be in much better condition than Bruce. Suzy's addition to the exhibit will enable researchers to glean greater knowledge of the life and natural habitat of mosasaurs and stun visitors at her sheer size and exceptional condition and a replica of Suzy's skull is on display here at the Legislature today just beside of the grand stairway.

But there's more. In April at the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada Post launched its new 3D-dino-series stamps, and Bruce received a national honour as the inspiration for one of those stamps. Pete Cantelon was on hand for that event and indicated that the mosasaur stamp speaks volumes about the importance of paleontology and the CFDC to the country, the province and the city of Morden. Those stamps are on sale now, Mr. Speaker, and I would show you one if the rules of the Legislature didn't expressively prohibit the use of exhibits.

There's more: the new Travel Manitoba guide is now out, and who's on the front cover but Bruce and Suzy, the mosasaurs. And there's more, I don't even have time to explain that in the new Canadian Geographic magazine CFDC has a six-page tourism spread.

I am pleased to have in the gallery this afternoon executive director Pete Cantelon, new field and collection manager Victoria Markstrom, board member Ted Nelson, and field technician Jay Rahn.

I congratulate the CFDC on their successes. I am confident of many more successes to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Further—oh, sorry. The honourable Minister of Health.

Ian MacLean

Hon. Sharon Blady (Minister of Health): In Kirkfield Park we are lucky enough to have an amazing volunteer, Ian MacLean, living in our constituency. Ian MacLean lives in our constituency, and it's important to acknowledge the dedication of people like Ian who give so much of themselves in helping young children to discover a world full of adventure. Ian has been volunteering for Scouts Canada for almost 50 years.

It was by chance that Ian got involved with Scouts Canada at the age of 17 when he overheard a phone conversation his friend's mother was having. He learned that they were short scout leaders, and because they didn't have enough leaders a group of young children wouldn't be able to go on their camping trip. This is when Ian stepped up and offered to take them, beginning his lifelong commitment to Scouts Canada.

By the time he was 18 years old, Ian was already the district commissioner for the scout group in Fort Rouge. Since then, he has assisted scout groups in Fort Rouge, Charleswood and Kirkfield Park.

Recently, Ian has received several awards for his dedication to volunteering, and in October 2014 he received the Silver Acorn for his distinguished service to Scouts Canada. This year he received the Caring Canadian Award, which recognizes people who give their time to help others.

Ian continues to volunteer for Scouts Canada as a group commissioner, scout leader, adventurer and rover adviser. He continues to give his time because he enjoys the opportunity to watch the children grow into confident and caring people.

Without people like Ian, young people would miss the chance to explore the outdoors and discover the best in themselves and in others.

So I'd like to give my congratulations to Ian MacLean for his years of dedication and service to our children. Scouts Canada and Kirkfield Park wouldn't be the same without you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Aron Rempel

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to address the Assembly giving credit where credit is due, by honouring Plum Coulee's 2015 Citizen of the Year, awarded to a long-time resident of Plum Coulee whose family's roots date back over 134 years.

Presented annually by the Plum Coulee Community Foundation, this award recognizes a committed and selfless volunteer who gives countless hours helping those in need.

This year, Mr. Aron Rempel is the deserving recipient of the award. Mr. Rempel is a farmer and a businessman who, despite his 81 years young, continues to serve numerous charitable organizations with an unwavering determinism.

The list is by no means complete, but a few examples of those organizations lucky enough to benefit from Mr. Rempel's contributions are the MS Society, where Mr. Rempel was instrumental in establishing the southern Manitoba chapter; Red Cross; CancerCare Manitoba; Canadian Food Grains Bank; Plum Coulee Fire Department for 15 years; Plum Coulee Kinsmen Club; and was the secretary to the credit committee for the credit union for 15 years.

There is no disputing that this list is impressive, and it is no surprise to those who know Mr. Rempel that he was extremely humbled by the recognition. Further to that point, I would be remiss not to mention the fact that his wife, Mary, joins him in many of his volunteer endeavours.

Mr. Speaker, just as it was the foundation's pleasure to honour Mr. Rempel with the Citizen of the Year award, it is my pleasure to inform all honourable members of this House. I would ask that all honourable members join me in a round of applause for Mr. Rempel.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: That concludes members' statements.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BUDGET DEBATE

(Eighth Day of Debate)

Mr. Speaker: We'll now move on to orders of the day, government business.

And to resume the adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar), and the amendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable member for Lakeside, who has 25 minutes remaining.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I'm glad to carry on where I left off yesterday, Mr. Speaker. I was about to thank the great people of Lakeside for the opportunity to be able to serve them since 2003. Also, I want to be able to thank my family for the time that I take away from them in order to serve as my position as the MLA for Lakeside, of which I—sometimes been told I take it way too serious. But, as we all know, we put a lot of time and effort into providing information to our constituents and, of course, dealing with those issues that come forward from time to time, so I'm certainly pleased to stand in

my spot to represent those people that elected me to do so.

On this great day, Manitoba Day—145 years old—as we heard from the First Minister of the province and, of course, the Leader of the Opposition on their comments, and the leader of the Liberal Party as well. We know that Manitoba has a long ways to go and a great province that we live in—so many opportunities that we can invest in.

When we look at what's happened in the last couple of days in question period, in particular with the \$670,000 bonus package that I started to talk about a bit yesterday, and that's hush money that's been paid out to those employees that said they would be safe if they were allowed to campaign on either member's leadership race. As they went forward, we found out that that's not true, unfortunately. Now had one of the other candidates been successful, Manitobans would be ahead by \$670,000 that could've went a long ways towards other initiatives. As the leader had talked about on our side of the House, a nurse that worked half a century would be able to have that equivalent of a pension plan, which is what the Leader of the NDP party paid his chief of staff—\$145,000. That's a lot of money for any individual that worked for two and a half years.

When we look at what else could've been done with that money, we also have \$650,000 for a promotional ad for steady jobs, steady growth and good jobs campaign. Now, what government would have to campaign on that issue that—to go out and spend \$650,000 telling everybody what a great job they've done, when actually they have not created any new jobs other than \$650,000 that has gone that could've went again to front-line services. Another million dollars for spin doctors, 192 communicators, Mr. Speaker, that this government has in order to spin whatever they want to try and spin in order to make Manitobans feel they're getting a better bang for their buck. Instead, they just reach a little deeper—just a little bit deeper into Manitoba's pockets and say, we can spend this money better than what you can.

Also we saw what this government wants to do with the vote tax. They went out to every Manitoban and said they want a million dollars of their hard-earned money so they can pay themselves a subsidy based on the number of votes that—received. So now what do we see? That's another million dollars taken off Manitoba's table and put onto the

Cabinet table so this government will be able to spend however they so choose.

* (14:50)

What we've seen is a continuation of what happened in 2011 when every member—every member—on that side of the House went door to door and said they would not raise taxes. What did we see? Mr. Speaker, 2012, they had the highest rate increase in taxation that this province had ever seen. No wonder the rebel five stood up and said, this is not what we campaigned on. I don't blame them. I would not be there either. This is not something that Manitobans, or anybody on that side of the House, should be happy with. First of all, they increased taxes to home insurance, driver's licence fees. The list goes on and on.

What makes it even worse, as we see what this government has taken this province to, we've had seven years, seven deficits since this government has been in power the last seven years. Budget 2015 projects a deficit of \$422 million, up \$357 million from the projection in the 2014 budget, by the way, a budget of which, in 2011, this government had promised to balance. They changed that again as time goes on. They found out that, well, during the leadership race, two of the candidates said it'd be 2018 all along. The First Minister of this province said, no, we're on schedule; we're going to be able to make this thing go ahead and work. Well, two of them are right, and the current Premier (Mr. Selinger) of this province has now listened to the other two and said, yes, they're right, it is 2018, and I guess we'll have to go from there.

We will also see the debt skyrocket to \$36 billion, up \$3 billion from last year. And that's not counting—that's not counting—Manitoba Hydro. We've seen this government that has took their own advice in order to try and grow the economy by forcing Bipole III down the west side rather than the east side that was recommended by Manitoba Hydro executives. We have yet to find anyone to come forward to say that the west side was the side that Manitoba Hydro, in fact, wanted them to go on. It was this government that wanted them to go on the west side.

Well, what we also saw, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, was that the Public Utilities Board went ahead and approved Bipole III without the things that Manitobans really cared about the most, and that was the fact that they wanted to go down the east side, and those transmission lines that are being built now,

a lot of the forest has been cleared out. I've been up there several times in the last four to five months, and I can tell you that the trees that they've taken out is nothing compared to what they've taken out on the east side for the east-side road. There's a ton of trees that have been bushed—pushed up, burned, instead of being hauled to one of the pulp mills and made into a different product, whether it be a sisal board or whatever type of board they want to make it into. They burned it. So much for the clean environment.

What Manitobans are seeing is they're paying far less—they're paying much more. In fact, the—Manitoba Hydro just asked for another increase so that they increase it by another 3.45 per cent. The PUB said, no, this is not the case, and they're not going to allow it. But what we've seen, since the last election, Manitoba Hydro has hiked electric bills no less than five times and will, before then, ask for another increase from this government in order to make Manitoba Hydro profitable. According to Manitoba's own Hydro numbers, all electrical bills of Manitobans will double by 2033. Other experts predict rates could as much as triple.

With the potentially doubling rates, which is no fault of the Hydro workers—which do good work and they should be recognized worldwide, which they are; they've got some excellent work going on in other countries of which we know is very important and Manitoba Hydro has that knowledge in order to do it. It's just too bad this government does not want to listen to them, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker.

The transmission line from Minnesota—from Manitoba to Minnesota and Wisconsin, what we've seen is a clear example of what this campaign—this NDP campaigned on in the last election. They said that it would be paid for by the customer—by the customer—not Manitobans. They would not be on the hook for one red cent of that cost.

What did they do after they got elected? They said, no, no, no, Manitobans—and I asked this chair, the chair of Manitoba Hydro, about this in committee, and what did he say? He said, no, no, no, that's not true. The government was wrong. The government was wrong. They, the customers of Manitoba, the hydro—hard-working people of Manitoba will be paying for the cost of that transmission line. So what did this government do? They gave that line to Minnesota. They give it to them and they're going to have the jobs that are created out of it. We will not even be able to maintain that line going forward. What we will see is

Manitobans on the hook to pay for the cost of that transmission line, also the Riel station.

And, by the way, that line has not been confirmed about where it's going to go. We have communities that are being split. We have Hydro customers that have bought property with the idea of building a new home on it. Now they find out there's a transmission line going through their property. And, unfortunately, what we've seen by this government is the lack of consultation once again. And it's unfortunate that we see that this government is doing the bully tactic once again and not putting Manitobans first, but last, unfortunately.

In 2006, export revenue was at \$827 million. Last year, exports totalled 400—the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) should listen to these numbers because they're pretty important going forward. If I was him, I would want to make sure that he pays attention; 2006—\$827 million. Last year, exports totalled \$439 million. With the cost of Keeyask and Bipole III, we're looking at \$34 billion. And what has this government received out of that? They receive a 1 per cent borrowing rate, of which they're going to charge Manitoba Hydro, which is owned by Manitobans. Manitobans are going to be on the hook for this once again. Once again this government is going to every Manitobans' pocket, seeing how much more they can get. I don't think there's any even lint left in those pockets. If it was and they could tax it, they'd figure out a way to do that, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate. What we've seen from this government is nothing but a tax and grab and spend as quick as they possibly can.

NDP waste: they closed a bunch of Hydro offices around the province, saying they're going to save a bunch of money. Well, I was up in Strathclair and Shoal Lake a couple of weeks ago, and I went by Shoal Lake, and guess what I saw? A beautiful Hydro building closed up. And then guess what happened, Mr. Speaker. They sent two Hydro workers up to allow Manitoba telephone in, to go in and do some repairs, not for one day but two days, two days on a building that's empty. Does that make any logic? Not at all—not at all. Maybe the NDP sees that as a way of rewarding some of their friends; maybe they got something that they want to try and help out with, but upgrading a phone system in a building that is closed.

Now the CDC there has reached out to this government, and they have yet to get a response, about why Manitoba Hydro will not even accept a

proposal for another business to go into that office and create a job. What a novelty—what a novelty. Create a job in a building that's sitting empty? Unbelievable, Mr. Speaker.

When I met with them also, they went on to say that the jobs that have been lost in that community, that money is gone forever. As we know from time in this office and anybody in business would be able to figure out, money usually turns seven times. So there's four employees—four employees there—I know that's hard for them to understand—that's about \$280,000. So that's about a million dollars a year—a million dollars a year—that's out of that economy. And they talk about growing the economy—I think not. I don't think they understand the reality of really what closing offices in rural Manitoba has on the overall rural development and continuation from that on.

* (15:00)

In regards to the municipal government, and I know the member from Brandon East wants to talk about the great things that's happened with municipal government. Again, in 2011, they didn't mention anything about forced amalgamation with the municipalities. We have seen one big boondoggle about one municipality after the other that has brought these municipalities to where their community values have suffered—have suffered greatly.

And I asked the member from Brandon East if he'd like to go for a little road trip one day. I'd be glad to take him up to Siglunes and Eriksdale and talk to those folks—talk to those folks—about the amalgamation. I can tell you they're not happy—they're not happy—and they know that this government threw them under the bus as a result of their heavy-handed governance, and they will pay the price. I'll guarantee you that.

Mr. Speaker, communities that have been forced to amalgamate have accepted debt from those municipalities as well, and we're all for amalgamation for those that want to do it, not to be forced—not to be forced. We've seen amalgamations happen quite well as a result of two municipalities wanting to form one municipality. We've seen it in the RM of Gimli and the town, and it's a very successful model that could have been used for those that wanted to move forward.

I met with the mayor of Riverton—the mayor of Riverton—and what did he tell me? He said he was ready to retire. He thought that that would be a great

way for order to be able to reach out to the municipalities surrounding them and look at a merger that might work. What did we find out? That wasn't the case at all. They never had that opportunity. They did not have that opportunity; no, they did not. They did not have that opportunity, and I invite the member from Gimli to go up and talk to him. I know—[interjection] Talk to him—[interjection] Yes, well, maybe you do, but you're maybe not getting the whole story. Maybe he's intimidated, but we will not be intimidated.

Mr. Speaker, also what we saw was another increase in trying to stop development in rural Manitoba with regards to the planned development in many of those municipalities. What we've seen was another \$100,000 that's been brought forward by this government in order to stop development in rural Manitoba, and we can see that going forward this will be a major problem for us. Increased fees for—a 2 per cent fee for increase for those seeking to use Manitoba Food Development Centre, new application fees for licence suspension for the appeal board, increased application fees at Residential Tenancies, new fees for credit guarantors, new fees for veterinary diagnostic services, increase to cottage-lot fees—and the member from Morris has talked about that in his comments yesterday. That's another backdoor tax on hard-working Manitobans, and what we've seen from this government is mismanage it from time to time to time, and Manitobans are going to be on the hook for it.

Increase in registration fees for those who provide international education, increases to material fees for independent-study students, increased registration fees for Manitoba-affiliated international schools, increases to tobacco taxes, increases to capital taxes on chartered financial institutes. All the above areas in—Manitobans are now paying more and getting less.

As we get ready to move forward, Mr. Speaker, in regards to voting on this budget—and I know that the First Minister has said time and time again that we don't want to talk about the budget. We'll be glad to talk about the budget. What we should have seen from this government is true leadership, that when it brought this House back in early March—they always talk about the budget having to be the first thing. It's the last thing that we need to talk about. We can talk about bills. We've got 20-some bills on the Order Paper. They want us to do that in three days. That's not going to happen. That's not going to happen.

I don't know why this government did not show leadership in bringing the House back early. We'd be happy to debate these issues, and I guarantee the First Minister will be debating these issues. If we're given the opportunity, we'll be here 'til October or September or whenever that we feel the time's right in order to be able to get through these bills. I don't know if members opposite are prepared to do that, but we're certainly prepared to do that. We're happy to discuss any of these bills that they have brought us forward. In a decent time we'd be able to debate these bills where it's—where all Manitobans will have that opportunity.

What we've seen with this government, as well, is raiding the Manitoba Hydro fund as well. Manitoba Hydro is owned by Manitobans who want to see it continue to be owned by Manitobans. And, unfortunately, we also seen what this government wants to do with the Clean Environment Commission in order to raise those water tables on Lake Winnipeg. Again, this is a revenue item for the Province. There's no doubt about that, but what we're going to see is increased revenue for Manitoba Hydro to generate for this Province to add in to their general revenues.

Before I conclude, I do want come back to agriculture in which I've talked about this a number of times, Mr. Speaker, and that's the education tax rebate. Again, in 2011, this government went out to every door in Manitoba and they said to every Manitoban that they would eliminate the education tax off all farmland, nothing farther from the truth, nothing farther the truth.

What do they do? Come in back in 2012, in their budget and they said, no, no, we really didn't mean that. We also decided that if you don't apply whether or not you're in a rain or a drought, a flood system or not a flood system, if you don't apply and you can't pay for it, too bad for you. March 31st is the drop deadline of which a farmer can apply for a rebate.

Now I know I was up in the Arborg area, the Bifrost and, of course, my member from Arthur-Virden in his area last year, we seen total devastation of crops and farmland where they could not get a crop, and sometimes they just don't have the money to be able to pay their taxes, Mr. Speaker. So what we seen by this government is try to take advantage, take advantage of those that are down and out when they should be offering a hand up and not a handout. I can tell you that putting the cap on as well has also discouraged any farmer or family from

wanting to expand their farm business. This is unfortunate.

Also, the thing that I've been harping on with this government from time to time is order to—for the education rebate to go back to those farmers. All they have to do is walk down the hall, walk down there from the Department of Agriculture to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) would save a million dollars, a million dollars in administration fees, just on that alone.

Mr. Speaker, so we add that to the 670-bonus package, the \$650,000 for steady growth and good jobs, a million dollars for the spin doctors, a million dollars for the vote tax, another million dollars for administration fees—they wonder where the efficiencies are. That's why we won't support this budget. That's why we're going to stand in this House and we'll debate anything this government wants to bring forward. And that's why we're going to stand in our place and hold this government to account the way good opposition should, and that's what we're going to do.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): It's an honour to speak to the budget today, Mr. Speaker.

Our budget in 2015 continues to grow and build on what we've done in Manitoba, creating a—good jobs and a steady economy. This is a budget that delivers on the priorities of Manitobans: more jobs, better roads, flood protection and protection of core services and improvement of core services. Even as other jurisdictions across Canada struggle with recession, Manitoba's economy remains strong among the leaders in Canada.

With Budget 2015 we are continuing to build on what is working for Manitoba families. We are investing in education and infrastructure to grow the economy, creating good jobs and investing in key services that matter to Manitoba families.

This budget delivers on the priorities. It is a plan that keeps moving us forward, Mr. Speaker, and is guided by the values of compassion and inclusivity so that all Manitobans can share in our growth. Our plan is working. Even as other jurisdictions across Canada are struggling, we are remaining one of the stronger economies in Canada. The labour force statistics show that our plan is keeping Manitobans working and our economy on the right path.

Private sector job growth is the strongest in the country with 15,500 new jobs, up 3.4 per cent, Mr. Speaker, 15,500 more jobs. Our unemployment

rate is the second best in the nation at 5.5 per cent and we are leading the pack when it comes to full-time jobs with an increase of 23,100 jobs in this province. Four out of five jobs created over the last year were in the private sector.

Just last week we got a glimpse into the private investment that is growing Manitoba's economy, Mr. Speaker. Louisiana-Pacific Corporation will invest \$95 million to convert its Swan Valley plant into a mill. This new mill will produce siding for the residential, industrial and light commercial construction sectors, and with it we will create 40 new jobs in the Swan Valley region.

*(15:10)

Wages are growing too, Mr. Speaker. Average weekly earnings in Manitoba grew by 4.3 per cent last year, once again, the best in the country. And that 4.3 per cent translates into about \$2,000 a year for the average family. That money makes a real difference in the lives of Manitoba families. It's money that families can save for retirement, invest in new home renovations or put into activities for their children. This is a great story, but it is no accident; this was our plan. With Budget 2015, we continue to build on what works for Manitobans and our economy.

And it starts, Mr. Speaker, with jobs and education and skills. By investing in education and training, we are helping more Manitobans get the skills they need to take advantage of opportunities here at home. We are helping Manitobans when they need that crucial first job or are looking to change career paths. Budget 2015 creates more opportunities for Manitobans to gain work experience and training for today's most in-demand careers. We are adding 200 more apprenticeship seats in Manitoba's colleges to build on our skilled workforce, and we are creating a youth job strategy, including a new fund to support more paid work and on-the-job training opportunities.

We are enhancing co-op education and apprenticeship tax credits to create bridges between education and employment. We are ensuring funding increases for universities and 'colleeges'. And this—and colleges. And this August, student loans will be interest free for the first time ever in the history of Manitoba.

We are focused on increasing funding for public schools, creating smaller class sizes and building new schools. Since 1999, our government

has invested over \$1 billion to build, renovate and maintain schools. We've built 35 new schools, and there are more on the way, Mr. Speaker—Riverbend, South Pointe are examples.

We are building and renovating 48 new classrooms to create smaller class sizes; we are building and renovating 14 gyms that are key to keeping our kids healthy; and we have built and renovated 50 science labs, and 21 more are under the way, Mr. Speaker. And that's not even to mention our skills shops program. I've been out in the schools all across Manitoba where we're upgrading those, what we call skills shops, what used to be called shops. We're turning those into facilities that have first-class technology, mentorship opportunities, partnerships with industry.

I was at Tec Voc school just over a week and a half ago, Mr. Speaker, and in that school they're training young people to enter into skilled trades, very specific skills for the aerospace industry, skills that advance composite manufacturing, skills on engine repair. Those are the kinds of jobs that pay well and will offer young people a bright future here in Manitoba in the manufacturing sector.

In the past weeks we've seen—I was up in Dauphin, Manitoba, at Mackenzie Middle School where we announced a major renovation of their shops class. I was at Collège Louis-Riel where we are working with the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine and the Université de Saint-Boniface to develop a new culinary arts program for the tourism industry. Young people there will be able to develop skills as a chef, they will be able to get small business skills. They will then be able to transfer their credits to the University of St. Boniface and get a degree and be able to be a person with a wide range of skills in the hospitality and tourism sector. Those are good jobs for the future, Mr. Speaker.

In Brandon, we recently announced the Green Acres School is getting a 4,000-square-foot gym expansion. That's after we did the one at George Fitton School where we expanded the gym there.

Every parent wants their child to have a clear path to a career. These investments in education make that possible.

Mr. Speaker, there's another approach in Manitoba other than investing in good jobs. And what is the plan of the Leader of the Opposition? When he asked him what he would do, he doesn't

seem to have an answer. He refers to his 36 promises on the website and when you go there, they don't exist. It doesn't exist.

But here's what we do know. He would cut, Mr. Speaker. He would single-handedly threaten over 70,000 jobs in Manitoba. How would he do that? He says he would cancel the infrastructure program—60,000 jobs; he says he would cancel building hydro for export—10,000 jobs. Seventy thousand jobs there, and that's not even before he gets to the half a million cuts he wants to visit on the budget of the people of Manitoba.

When they were in power, they did fire 1,000 nurses. They did lay off 700 teachers, and they cut funding for education, the facilities, repairing roads and bridges. Those things were done at the same time as they raised the gas tax, Mr. Speaker, and now instead of helping Manitoba to build, they're demanding \$550 million in more cuts that would hurt Manitoba families. So, while our budget provides a clear and proven path forward, the members opposite continue to fall back on failed policies of cuts and privatization.

Mr. Speaker, one of the cornerstones of our budget is investment in infrastructure; to do that we are making strategic investments. The conference board confirms—of Canada confirms that infrastructure investments will create 60,000 good jobs and give our economy a \$6.3-billion boost. Budget 2015 is investing an all-time record of more than \$1 billion with projects all over Manitoba including: beginning work on the Highway 59 interchange at the Perimeter in the northeast corner of Winnipeg which will allow traffic to flow faster through one of the busiest intersections in the province; continuing to bring Highway 75 to interstate standards for flood protection; and improving the Trans-Canada Highway west of Winnipeg for allow—to allow for the safe increase of the speed limit to 110 kilometres an hour starting on June 2nd. Those are investments that are making a differ—safer roads, more efficient roads, less greenhouse gas emissions and safety for the people that are on those roads.

Mr. Speaker, by upgrading our major trade routes, our infrastructure plan makes our economy even more competitive by helping ensure businesses can get goods to market efficiently and reliably. And that includes the investments we've made in CentrePort way where there's 38 businesses which has—have either set up shop or have expanded in that

area. That is a strategic investment in infrastructure that hooks into the—into our Highway 71, 75 investments; it hooks into our Highway No. 1 investments and will continue to provide us as a multi-modal transportation hub right here in Manitoba. And it's a foreign trade zone, which means there are tax advantages for companies that bring goods and services there and add value to them in that location.

It's not just highways. I recently, with the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar), announced the elimination of the jet fuel tax on international flights outside of North America, Mr. Speaker. This incentive will help bring more international flights to the Winnipeg airport, further connecting Manitoba businesses with the world. And, because small businesses are the driving force of a strong economy, we are raising the threshold for the small businesses to be exempt from paying corporate taxes to \$450,000. And what is the small-business tax rate in Manitoba? Zero. What was it under the members opposite? Nine per cent. This will reduce—mean an additional 2,000 small businesses will pay no corporate income taxes and save over \$3.3 million.

Our government continues to provide record funding to municipalities, including the City of Winnipeg. Last week we announced that investments in Winnipeg roads will reach a record \$65 million this year, Mr. Speaker, and we are also increasing our support for transit, including funding for phase 2 of the southwest rapid transit corridor. We now pay for half of all roadwork in Winnipeg and we are also funding half of the transit system.

Outside of Winnipeg funding has been increased for the Municipal Road Improvement Program and the Municipal Bridge Program has been doubled with an increase of \$1 million. In Brandon, major road projects—major projects include repairs to the Keystone Centre roof, upgrades to the Brandon airport along with the federal and the municipal government, twinning the bridge at 1st Street and upgrading the Daly Overpass. In northern Manitoba we are building Manitoba Hydro to create jobs and opportunities including in Aboriginal and indigenous communities; continuing work on Highway No. 6, a key link to the North through the Interlake; completing additional work on Highway 10 near Swan River and south of Flin Flon.

Those strategic investments in infrastructure will make a difference in those regions; it will make a difference in those communities. It will mean more

job opportunities for young people, and they will get the training in their local high school that will allow them to do those jobs.

Will the members opposite vote for a budget that is paving a better future for Manitoba, or will they oppose it and oppose building highways and schools, repairing potholes and improving flood protection, Mr. Speaker? Will they vote for flood protection or will they vote against flood protection? The members opposite would let our infrastructure crumble, just like they did in the 1990s.

* (15:20)

Mr. Speaker, another component of the budget is fiscal responsibility. Our balanced approach means we are finding ways to save government money and to save Manitoba families money. One of the best ways to support families is to ensure that Manitoba has strong public utilities that keep our cost of living one of the lowest in Canada. In fact, when it comes to home heating, electricity and auto insurance rates, Manitobans paid over \$2,000 less than the Canadian average. That is the Manitoba advantage.

And we will continue to make life more affordable by eliminating property taxes for another 6,700 seniors, Mr. Speaker. While working to ensure—save Manitobans money, we are also taking meaningful steps to make government more efficient. In our Throne Speech, we committed to reducing government office space by 100,000 square feet. This year we are now on track to exceed that by 40,000 square feet; 140,000 square feet of office space has been shrunk in the province of Manitoba.

We've decided—we decided—said we reduce the civil service by 600, and we have made good on that commitment, Mr. Speaker.

And our deficit is smaller year over year, Mr. Speaker. And our deficit is smaller as a proportion of the economy—0.6 of 1 per cent is the proposed deficit for this year. Last year it was 0.7 of 1 per cent.

When we look at the facts, our debt costs are more affordable than they were under the previous Conservative government. Our debt servicing costs are down from 13 cents on the dollar to 5.6 cents on the dollar today. Our net debt to GDP, our net debt as a proportion of the economy, has gone down to 22 and 23 per cent. It now remains at 30.9 per cent, which is less than when it was when we came into office when it was over 32 per cent.

We have a fiscal plan, and that is working. Now is not the time to make those reckless cuts. Now is not the time to slam on the brakes, Mr. Speaker. Now is not the time to eliminate 70,000 jobs in Manitoba.

And our economy is forecast to grow among the—faster than any other province over the next two years according to the Conference Board of Canada. We must continue to protect what matters to Manitobans.

And we're helping families, Mr. Speaker. We're continuing to invest in services that support families. Our province is strongest when it works together to provide key services like health care, child care and support for low-income earners and seniors. In health care, our plan will continue to help families to get the care they need close to home.

This week I was in Notre Dame de Lourdes breaking ground on a brand new, fully bilingual, 10-bed health-care centre in the constituency of Midland, Mr. Speaker. We are opening two new QuickCare clinics in Southdale and Seven Oaks that complement the one on McGregor Street, that complement the one in—on—in saint—on St. Mary's Road, that complement the one on—in Selkirk, Manitoba. Then all of those facilities are allowing, on average, in each QuickCare clinic, on average, 22 new, different people get rapid access to health care with advanced-care nurses, with nurse practitioners and with nurses and other professionals.

New and improved health facilities are under development in Steinbach, Swan River, Dauphin, The Pas, Thompson and Brandon. And our Family Doctor Finder has already connected more than 28,000 Manitobans with a family doctor since it was launched last year.

And we are increasing our innovative caregiver tax credit benefit in order to help increasing Manitobans in the sandwich generation. The sandwich generation, they want their young people to do well and have good jobs and education and they want to be able to look after their parents, and we're doing both with this budget, Mr. Speaker.

And we will continue to help Manitoba families by making 'chare' care, child care more accessible—over 900 million new spaces, Mr. Speaker. An 800—\$8-million investment which grows on the tripling of the child-care budget that we have generated since we've been in office.

Members opposite, they supported the federal government when they cancelled the universal

child-care program to the country, Mr. Speaker. We are expanding it. They want to cancel it; we want to expand it.

And we've increased support for low-income families, Mr. Speaker, working families, families on social assistance that want to get an opportunity to work and get an education. The median market shelter benefits have been increased to 75 per cent of median market rent.

And we have raised the minimum wage to \$11 an hour. Every single year we have been in office, we've seen an increase in the minimum wage. What did the members opposite do? They increased the minimum wage once every four years on the eve of an election, and between elections they froze it so nobody had increased purchasing power. And we're on track to meet the—our commitments to expand the number of affordable and social housing units across Manitoba by 1,000.

So, Mr. Speaker, when I look at this budget, it's about investing in education, it's about investing in infrastructure, it's about investing in Manitobans.

And we have 16,000 more people calling Manitoba home now. That's the largest increase in population in the last 40 years. Manitoba is a growing province, Mr. Speaker. Faced with the same challenges in the 1990s, the members opposite chose a path of cuts. They chose a path of layoffs. They chose a path of firings. They chose a path of letting our infrastructure go to waste. That is not the path that will move us forward today. They fired nurses, they laid off teachers; we're doing the opposite. We've got more nurses working in Manitoba than we've ever seen in the history of province. We've seen over 660 more doctors working in Manitoba versus 200 leaving in the 1990s. That damage is being repaired every single day that we continue to serve the people of Manitoba. And we're doing that by expanding the number of personal-care beds in Manitoba—and homes. We're doing that by expanding the number of hospitals. We're doing that by expanding the number of schools.

Steady growth, good jobs and public services that people can count on, that's how we'll make life better for Manitobans. These are the priorities of Manitobans. They have told us that. It's consistent with the values of Manitobans and it will allow us to move this province forward in a fiscally responsible way while keeping the cost of living affordable in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I commend this budget to you and all members of the Legislature, and I look forward to everybody supporting it.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): It's my pleasure today and stand and put a few comments on the record with respect to Budget 2015.

And I just have to remark at the front, as a newer member of the Legislature, as I know the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) is, that certainly is a very lacklustre response to any premier's comments on the budget. And I know these are uncertain times, but I just have to remark, I've not been in a situation where I've heard that kind of response to any first minister's delivery of comments on the budget. But I think it's a sign of the times and it's perhaps business as usual for the—today's NDP on the other side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, first, I just want to acknowledge the new member for The Pas (Ms. Lathlin) and welcome her to the Chamber. I can remember the first day I was in this Chamber sitting in this seat, rising when the procession came in and looking at the Latin inscriptions in the Chamber above me, and, you know, I know what that first day is like. It's a quite an overwhelming experience to be here. It's also overwhelming to feel that your constituency has put you here, and I hope we never lose that tremendous respect that we have for the people that we represent in this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, we have three children in our household. Our oldest is now graduating this year, so I know when I first stood in this Chamber they were a lot smaller and now they've gotten a lot bigger. But it—today's budget reminded me of a funny experience we once had in Polo Park with my youngest.

Ms. Jennifer Howard, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Gwen is now 13 but she was five, and we got her her own debit card. And the idea was we wanted to start instilling in our kids early on a knowledge of how money worked, transacting for things that they wanted, saving for things that they wanted and then making that purchase on their own independently. And I guess at the time, I think that my five-year-old had a shared paper route with her brother and, of course, at five she really wanted the route, but we really didn't want her out of our sight because we were a little nervous. So we used to watch her out the front window as she'd deliver a few papers in the cul de sac where we lived. And so I think Gwen had

probably managed to save about \$30 or so, and she took her debit card to the mall with us and she proudly went to Polo Park and she started to spend her money. And so she spotted something she wanted and she used that debit card the first time, punched in her code and it worked. And then she went to another store and find—found something else that she liked and she punched in the code and it worked. And the clerks were getting a real kick out of this because to see a five-year-old come in and try to put their hand on the top of the counter and use the Interac machine is always interesting.

* (15:30)

But, after a few purchases, my wife and I began to get a little bit nervous because we were watching her transactions and we were collecting the receipts and we weren't quite sure how she was doing the math. And finally we pulled her aside and said, Gwen, about this Interac thing, like, are you concerned about overspending? And she turned to me and she said, without even thinking about it, oh, no, Dad, this debit card thing is easy because you just keep spending and spending the money, and when it's all gone the clerk at the store lets you know. And I said, well, you know, Gwen, that's not really the way you want it to work because if you do it that way it's going to come with some embarrassment because you will have spent all your money and you will have no money and someone else will have to look at you and tell you you're all out of money. And she thought about that for a long time and she thought that, no, it wouldn't work that way; she could simply rely on the clerk at the store to tell her when all the money was gone.

The reason I share that story to start, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that the approach that this NDP government has taken to the finances of this province resembles, to a great degree, that approach when it comes to spending money, that approach when it comes to financial management, really, because what they've done is they've simply said, well, when it comes to deficits, when it comes to debt, when it comes to the rainy day fund, the Fiscal Stabilization Account, we're going to rely on something else. We're going to rely on another agency to tell us when it's finally time to turn the lights out.

And we know that the thinking is rationalized, it's based on a Keynes approach to financial and economic management. But the fact of the matter is it's not as if the storm clouds aren't darkening, and it is not as if money lenders aren't taking notice of this

government's record. I think, in many ways, they're treating it as if Moody's in New York is like that clerk behind the counter in Polo Park who's simply going to tell them, I'm sorry, there's no more left for you. And I wish it was just a cute story like it was with my daughter, but I can assure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the stakes are much higher when it comes to the finances of our great province that we all share and love.

Mr. Speaker, we've made it very clear in the last few days of budget debate that we believe that Manitobans are increasingly tired with this NDP government's broken promises when it comes to what they say they will do and the time by which they will accomplish it. We have said that under this NDP, for 16 years, it's just a matter of pay more and get less. And we are saying we really need to finish the sentence for Manitobans. We have to understand that the waste and mismanagement of this NDP government makes it harder and harder for front-line services, and we keep hearing account after account after account of where those shortfalls lie. Indeed, just today, the member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) stood up and talked yet again about another OR closure in his local community. And the Minister of Health (Ms. Blady) gets up and says, well, we may get to fixing that problem in six months. And she says it with a smile on her face. And we should be incredulous at that kind of response, but under this NDP it has become a business-as-usual type of response.

Mr. Speaker, as Finance critic, we've—I've made it clear, and my colleagues have made it clear in the last number of days, we are at a juncture where the NDP has promised to eliminate the deficit. Indeed, that time has come and gone. I was in this Chamber in 2011 after the last election when there was a Throne Speech and there were promises made about when the deficit of this province would be put back—would be retired and the balance of the budget would be restored. And the NDP government made assurances to Manitobans at that time. Well, they made those assurances and then they broke their promises. And, indeed, this Finance Minister now, the fifth Finance minister in six years, says that he's ahead of the game. Now, how does he make a statement like that?

Well, it goes like this: Two years ago, they said they were actually going to have about \$150 million of deficit at the end of the fiscal year, and when the fourth quarter results came in and the Public

Accounts were tabled, it turned out that it was closer to \$400 million than to—than \$150 million.

And then, in the next year, that is the past fiscal year, they tabled a budget and said that their deficit would come in at \$357 million; only it didn't come in there. Last week's tabling of this budget made clear that for the—well, I guess, the fourth-quarter results make it clear that the actual deficit for the '14-15 year will be \$424 million.

Now the Finance Minister then tables a budget, trims \$2 million off of his projected deficit and has the audacity to say that he is moving in the right direction. He compares actual to budget. He does not compare budget to budget and he does not compare actual to actual—and, indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker, you and I had that conversation in the Estimates process last year when you were in that role. And I know we had our disagreements on those kinds of things, but we talked about the importance of comparing actual to actual.

There isn't an economist in this country, there isn't a professor of economy at the University of Manitoba or any other institution who will not look at that pronouncement and roll their eyes, to say that he's ahead by showing a projection that has gone over his estimate by 20 per cent, comparing it to his new estimate \$2 million lower. No, no. Any kind of analysis would say, well, I guess what would be fair in this case would say, if the projection was this and the actual was 20 per cent more, where does 20 per cent on this projection put us? It puts us back to \$500 million in deficit.

What it means, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that three years after this NDP broke their word to every Manitoban and hiked the PST, first widening it, of course, in 2012. I know my colleagues remember that. Many of them have put comments on the record in the last few days to talk about how this NDP first of all widened the tax, applying the retail sales tax to places it had never been applied before—home insurance and life insurance and haircuts that were \$50, and legal fees—and don't forget that before legal fees it was on accounting fees.

These widening the tax structures didn't start in 2012, but when they raised that tax in 2013 and broke their word to every Manitoban after saying they wouldn't raise the PST, indeed, they campaigned on a promise not to raise the PST. They did and they generated revenue, and this Finance Minister knows they did well by that generation of revenue. As a matter of fact, we have tabled

documents and we have put comments on the record in this House to say that the revenue that the government now takes in just on account of the additional 8 per cent PST, a one point hike in the PST, is about \$500 million a year, just south of that.

Now, how can a government that is sitting on an additional revenue windfall of \$500 million fail so spectacularly to make forward progress on their deficit targets as they were telling economists and Manitobans they were doing—forward progress? They used terms like going in the right direction. This Finance Minister—and I jotted the term down a few days ago—said we are on your side, when he should have said we are on your back; we are in your pockets. We are right on top of the situation and we will shake every tree to loose every dollar to flow into revenues.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I didn't get into the fact that even this year alone the government and its revenues are up very, very healthy. Revenues are up this year compared to last year by \$334 million. We know that personal income tax and corporate income tax create a lot of—generates a lot of income for government, and every year, the Finance Minister would agree with me, that revenue increases as the economy expands and new businesses come into Winkler and into Morden and set up, and those hard-working entrepreneurs hire more people and build their business. And I assure the NDP this is the work of the private sector and not them, so they should not crow about it. Yes, there's more money, there's more revenue for government. It wasn't enough for them. They went back and raised the PST and generated \$500 million more.

But Ms.—Madam Deputy Speaker, the colossal betrayal of Manitobans doesn't stop there. The betrayal is that in what they call good times, in what they call a positive environment—and, indeed, just previous to my comments the First Minister put comments on the record and said these are the best of times—and yet, in that climate, that they would go back to the Fiscal Stabilization Account and make a withdrawal of more than \$100 million, they are clearly speaking out of both sides of their mouth. This government has removed over \$800 million from the Fiscal Stabilization Account, and while the Finance Minister may chirp about paying down debt, he knows very well that changes that they made to the balanced budget act allow them to move money in and out with ever actually saying whether it was a withdrawal or a deposit. They changed the language so that it would disguise the movement and

transaction of funds in and out of that account. So he knows what he's talking about.

* (15:40)

But Mr.—Madam Deputy Speaker, there is, of course, as my colleagues have made clear, there is another cost to Manitobans. It is for sure the fact that there's a structural deficit there that the government is not moving to address. There is for sure this real consequence of draining a rainy day account when the sun is supposedly shining according to the NDP, and not leaving the money there for the times that in doubt—that no doubt will come again when times are tough.

Those of us who threw sandbags in 1997, those of us who worked with neighbours or friends or family members on those—in those times, those of us who helped in the more recent floods in the western part of the province, we understand that this province faces enormous challenges from time to time in terms of our climate and in terms of our topography, in terms of our geography, but this government is removing funds from that account, a rainy day account, just because they want to create a rosier fiscal picture.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the other real cost, of course, is that just like my daughter who was there at the debit machine at Polo Park trying to take out funds that were no longer in her account at the age of five because she didn't understand basic principles of finance, in the same way this government is causing Manitobans to pay a terrible price for their short-sighted approach in this economy, and that terrible price comes in the form of debt servicing costs. Now, when it comes to debt servicing costs the—Moody's was very clear last summer. It was in August when they issued a warning, and actually what they did is they expressed a negative outlook on the Manitoba's—Manitoba's economy—and now don't get me wrong. They did not downgrade Manitoba's economic performance. What they did is they said this is a warning, this is a shot across the bow.

Why would they have done that? Well, they did it because they said they had—they thought that the NDP's plan to get back into balance indicated an execution risk—execution risk—and this government has treated that warning with contempt. They have dismissed it. They went out and scrambled for other, you know, expressions that might be rosier than that. But the fact is in the months that have followed, Moody's was vindicated in their concern because Moody's was clear that the conditions that would

lead to a downgrade or that could very well lead to a downgrade in Manitoba's debt rating would be the following: a reduced commitment to stabilize debt burden in median term, check; No. 2, reduced likelihood of returning to a balance in '16-17, check, check; No. 3, loss of fiscal discipline, check; and No. 4, a continued and sustained increase in debt and debt servicing ratios beyond projections, check.

Madam Deputy Speaker, on all of these concerns that Moody's expressed in August, they have now come to pass. The NDP will not move the deficit in the right direction. They have ballooned the debt to \$36 billion and counting. They are not indicating that they, in the medium term, will stabilize that debt burden and they have lost fiscal control. This is the context in which we find ourselves today: a context of high deficits, soaring debt, raiding the Fiscal Stabilization Account, and in that context still no relief for hard-working Manitoba families to relieve them of the burden.

Manitoba has the highest taxes in most of Canada, certainly in the West, paying thousands of dollars more than in Saskatchewan. As a matter of fact, the average Manitoba family pays \$3,200 more alone in income tax and PST than the same family living in Saskatchewan. And in lieu of this fiscal condition in which we find ourselves, which might be business as usual under this NDP but it is not for Manitobans who have to balance their budgets, the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has said some very—made some very specious arguments. As a matter of fact, he said, and it was quoted in *The Globe and Mail* on April the 28th, that, well, he says, yes, we've, you know, deficits, I guess are important and stuff, but listen, he says, have you noticed the oil prices in the last few months? There's been pretty dramatic changes all across the country in what the forecast for the economy is.

Now, the First Minister was clearly referring to the Manitoba economy, and yet what he was failing to report is that in a report called the *Regional Shakeup*, the Conference Board of Canada was saying that Manitoba and New Brunswick could see as much as a 0.5 per cent added to real GDP from the 40 per cent reduction in crude oil prices. He was scapegoating. When it suits his purposes, he'll find a scapegoat. He'll find an excuse. Some days that excuse is the federal government. But we all know that transfer payments are incredibly stable and rising, as they have been for years and years and years, and I would challenge these members to look at those payments and prove otherwise.

Sometimes that argument that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) makes and his ministers make is about floods. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, there is no flood this year and yet they raid the rainy day account. Sometimes the argument they make is about Filmon, and they refer to times 25 years ago and they try to make a substantive argument on the basis that somehow, you know, things that happen 25 years ago now suddenly have tremendous bearing on our situation.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, I make this point every time I stand to deliver remarks on finances in this Chamber, and I'll say it again today, and I won't belabour the point but I'll challenge this new Finance Minister to go in and examine the conditions that existed in the late 1990s in Saskatchewan because they, well, how about Manitoba? Examine the conditions that existed under former Premier Roy Romanow and ask the Premier what was it like when the federal government in an interest-rate environment that was three, four times today's—three and four times today's—when they said we're going to balance our budget and overnight. Those provinces—that province found itself with \$1 billion less to spend. Can't imagine what this Finance Minister would do in an interest environment that was three times what this one is. What this context is is a complete wasted opportunity by this NDP government.

Mr.—Madam Deputy Speaker, but what do others have to say about this budget? Here is a—one headline that reads, leaders agree the budget record NDP DAC tax grab, ordinary people to shoulder the increase. Oh, pardon me, that's from the provincial government's budget of 1987.

Now, fast-forwarding to the future, if we look at commentaries now, it's amazing how close to those comments they now are. So, if we just look at a couple of things that are said about the budget, here's one comment: The NDP's 2015-16 budget dispenses within the—with even the flimsiest attempt to feign financial credibility. And that's from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

Okay, so they'll chirp at that one. All right, we'll go on. Good. So we'll go on. This one: The 2015 Budget was the last chance to implement many of the policies promised by the government in the 2011 election. Entrepreneurs are disappointed to see these promises broken once again and small-business-friendly policies ignored. Now, that

one's from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

All right, so they still don't like that one. Let's go on, Mr.—Madam Deputy Speaker, because there's more. All right. The provincial government employs fear of controlled spending—controlled spending—as a threat to the quality of services, but in fact this government's fiscal stewardship is the greatest threat—Loren Remillard, executive VP, Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce.

All right, no chirping on that one. Let's go on, Madam Deputy Speaker. This fiscal fallacy produces massive deficits, poor results and limited options.

Still no chirping. Let's go on. Manitobans become an island. When you take measures that make us uncompetitive, business takes action; business has the ability to move. The government has obviously been preoccupied with something else over these past eight months and has not been focused on governing—Chuck Davidson, MB Chambers of Commerce. And I believe he said that in response to the government's hike of the bank profits tax, explaining that this minister can raise the taxes, he just can't force business to remain in Manitoba.

* (15:50)

What about another one? The pattern since the last—[*interjection*] Oh, I hear a comment that I'm defending, somehow, the rich. But I want the other members to know if they understand the simplest principle about raising taxes on any entity, it is this. And I understand there's no background, there's no acumen there about business, but they should understand—just because economists say it—the tax will be passed on. Increased fees will be taxed on, increased costs of operating are passed on. Who is going to bear the brunt of raising profit taxes on banks? The banks? Absolutely not. Low-income Manitobans, working Manitobans whose fees go up, and this minister will complain, oh, the banks are raising their fees. He created the conditions in which they raised their fees.

One more quote, and then we'll move on. I like this one. There was a day when the NDP at least paid lip service to being concerned about deficits. That has pretty much evaporated. Oh, that was the Winnipeg Free Press that said that. Yes. I would tell them what Tom Brodbeck said, but they would howl again, so I won't tell them that he said it was the

worst budget in 15 years, and that's really saying something. So I won't mention that.

But I thought that one of the clearest pieces of analysis came not from a professional and not from the media. One of the clearest pieces of analysis came in the form of a letter to the editor to the Winnipeg Free Press. I photocopied it, I circled it, I marked it as appearing on May the 2nd and it said this. It said: Unflinching faith in a failed fiscal plan, referring, of course, to an earlier editorial. The problem is there is no plan. They have failed miserably every time they have promised a date to return to the black. There's no blueprint to get there, just a graph that shows deficits shrinking every year until, magically, there's a surplus. There is no warning bells—there are no warning bells about the increasing debt or how interest payments will soar on that debt when interest rates rise. If they cannot instill some mild austerity now—mild austerity that I remind them their former-former Finance minister actually put in his budget in 2012 and didn't get there; that's their own mild austerity—they are committing future governments—and I would say, more importantly, Manitobans—to more extreme measures. Think of the current situation in Greece, where the government put off change until it was forced upon them.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these are the things that the pundits, the press and the public are saying about this government's plan. I think if the public could see some of the words in the preamble, in the first few pages of the budget, they would howl with outrage at the words, words like balance, words like on the right track. This is a train that has gone, clearly, off the track, and it's clear even in the NDP leadership contest there were other contestants looking at that same PST hike and said, I wouldn't have done that. There were NDP contestants saying, well, I would have kept the referendum in place. Indeed, the member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton) said, I believe in the referendum, and the first thing I would do if elected the leader is I would bring that budget requirement back so that Manitobans could have a say on the PST.

They're at odds with each other. It is no wonder that they sit there so morose when their leader speaks. They're at odds; they are not in unity. It is not a unanimous government we see before us; it's a divided one. And a divided house, they say, falls.

In a few minutes more, just let me say this. The government was not content to raise taxes. The

government was not content with their escalating sources of revenues. There are whole new areas of fees which I will appreciate the chance to explore in the Estimates process with the Finance Minister—new fees for subdivision applications; new fees for things like veterinary services; new fees, of course, for cottagers—with no transparency on how those fees would be used. And, of course, it would be idealistic for us to think that the government would actually use fees that were collected to actually pay certain areas and keep a system transparent. This is not a government that believes in transparency. This is a government that believes, very simply, that Manitobans should pay more and get less. This is a government that believes in waste and mismanagement, but I assure them that their waste and mismanagement are hurting front-line services, and what we keep trying to tell them, and they do not hear. But they are bound to hear from the voters at the doors, they're bound to hear on the weekends when they go back into their constituencies is that Manitobans just don't believe them anymore.

Mr. Speaker, there's a lot that my colleagues have put on the record, a lot that my leader has put on the record, and I thank them for their analysis and I thank them for their attention to detail. I don't want to end my remarks by speaking about more numbers. What I want to do is just tell a quick story.

I met a new Manitoban about 12 months ago. I was with some colleagues, we were in south Winnipeg. And she had moved from Saskatchewan to Manitoba because she works in the non-profit sector—wonderful woman, a wonderful agency she works with. Name is Corinne [*phonetic*]. I can't remember her husband's name, but they moved from Regina—no, they moved from Saskatoon, I remember that. And what she told us when she met us is, she says, oh, you're with the opposition. And she smiled and she looked at us and she says, you know, I have two kids, and she says, I had no idea—I had no idea how expensive it would be to move to Manitoba. And she told us you can feel the difference. And I think that it might've been the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) with me that day. I remember her saying, at the end of the month you can feel the difference.

Now, in this Chamber I've shared stories about an accountant who wants to move to Moosomin and use the tax savings to go visit his kids, and we've used other stories as well to tell the stories of Manitobans about people who come here and don't understand the cost.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me just end my remarks by saying we have been clear this is not a budget that we can support. It's a budget that fails to recognize that Manitobans are tired of broken promises, it is a budget that fails to recognize that Manitobans are paying more and getting less and it fails to recognize that government waste has caused the provincial debt to double since 2008. As a consequence, we cannot support this budget.

Thank you.

Hon. Greg Dewar (Minister of Finance): I'm honoured to rise today to speak to—the second time to the budget. Actually, I'm speaking to the amendment brought forward by the Leader of the Opposition, and I want to begin—Madam Speaker, I want to welcome you back. I want to welcome all members back to the Legislature. In particular, I want to welcome the new member for The Pas (Ms. Lathlin). I worked with her father in this Chamber; he was a great MLA. He was known for his wisdom and his humour, and I know that you'll do well.

I want to recognize the—my colleagues, the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) and the member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau), who recently announced they won't be seeking re-election. And I just want to let them both know how much I valued their friendship and their good advice over the years. Both of you can be very proud of your career and your contribution to public service.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank and acknowledge the hard work of the staff in the Department of Finance and the Treasury Board Secretariat. You know, they literally worked night and day preparing the Estimates and the budget papers which were presented last week, and we're all blessed to have these dedicated and hard-working men and women working in our civil service. I want to thank the staff in my office and also my colleagues who sat on Treasury Board. We met very frequently over the last number of months. We were there literally for hours poring over the budget documents and Estimates, and they did a—one remarkable job. I want to thank them for their approach and their hard work to this budget.

We're proud of our budget. I think if you were to look at other provinces, what they've done in other jurisdictions, you'll see that we've taken a different approach to the finances and the economy here in Manitoba.

British Columbia: They went to war with their teachers. They literally had a teacher strike for weeks and weeks and weeks in Alberta—or, excuse me, BC.

Alberta: Before they saw the light—before they saw the light in Alberta, they—orange light in Alberta, they brought in user fees, health-care premiums and a \$5-billion deficit.

Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan cut \$50 million out of the University of Saskatchewan, their main university. We did not do that here. We're—provided a 2 and a half per cent increase into our universities.

The province of Quebec downloaded their deficit onto the municipal governments. We did—we do not do that here.

New Brunswick: 250 teachers were fired in the province of New Brunswick. We hired 50 teachers here in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

* (16:00)

Newfoundland and Labrador: They have a \$1-billion deficit. This is a Progressive Conservative government of Newfoundland and Labrador—a \$1-billion deficit, Mr. Speaker, plus they raised their HST by 2 percentage points. I don't know how many percentage that would be on the PST. It went from 13 to 15 per cent in Newfoundland and Labrador. Now I don't say that to be, you know, disrespectful to the fine people of Newfoundland and Labrador, they are fellow Canadians like ourselves, but they have taken a different approach. We did not do that here in this budget.

Our budget is a plan to deliver on the priorities of Manitoba families: more roads, better jobs and stronger services. And following the great recession, a coin—a term that was coined by Stephen Harper—we chose to invest in building our core infrastructure and keeping Manitoba strong by providing more training opportunities. And our plan is working; the Conference Board of Canada said that Manitoba will lead the nation in 2015 and 2016.

Mr. Speaker, budgets are more than just numbers, as a member was alerting to. They're about people and they're about choices. We'll always choose to put families first. We'll always protect the jobs and front-line services Manitoba families count on. And that is why this budget says to Manitobans that we're on your side.

Now the members opposite have a different approach. I was here in the 1990s. I remember those days well. They decided at the time, Mr. Speaker, to make deep and reckless cuts in front-line services and infrastructure that Manitobans count on most. I remember those days well. Go back to the budget of 1995. Highways budget at that time was \$167 million; in 1996, \$161 million; in 1997, \$152 million. This year we'll be investing over \$1 billion in core infrastructure here in the province.

Now the Leader of the Opposition, I was reading his motion, it seemed rather vague in terms of when they plan on to return to balance. I know in the last election they said they'd return to balance in 2018. I notice they're very vague on—when they're talking about when they plan on returning to balance when you read their amendment, Mr. Speaker.

I think it's fair to say their plan is a different plan than ours. Their plan is to cut \$550 million out of the services that Manitobans count on. That would destroy our economic growth and throw Manitobans into the unemployment line. Seventy thousand jobs are at jeopardy, Mr. Speaker, if the members opposite were ever to have—sit on this side of the House. We must reject that. Manitobans reject that. We reject that.

As I said, we've got one of the strongest economies in Canada—the best in Canada. The most important indicator of a strong economy is whether people have good jobs. Our province is creating jobs faster than any other province—20,000 new jobs. That is also, Mr. Speaker, the best in Canada. And these are good jobs. Three out of every four jobs are in the private sector and four out of five are full-time jobs.

Wages are up as well. They grew at 4.3 per cent last year. That works out to roughly \$2,000 per family.

We know we have a strong economy. Our economy is working, our plan is working. The Conference Board of Canada said our infrastructure plan will boost Manitoba's economy by \$6.3 billion, boost exports by \$5.5 billion and create almost 60,000 jobs, Mr. Speaker. And because of our tax reductions, an average Manitoban will save over 4,200 jobs this year.

The fact is, well, when you add up the basic utilities costs, Manitobans will save over \$5,400 less, Mr. Speaker.

Budget 2015 creates more opportunities for young Manitobans to gain work. We're creating

a youth job strategy. We—doubling the Career Development Initiative. We're enhancing co-op education and apprenticeship tax credits. We're creating 200 more apprenticeship seats. We're creating a new post-secondary educational strategy. We're adding engineering seats at the University of Manitoba. We're ensuring funding increases—universities and colleges, as I said, to the universities 2 and a half per cent and to colleges 2 per cent. And we continue to fund education at the rate of the growing—growth of the economy.

For 16 consecutive years, we've either met that or increased the—our commitment to universities—or, excuse me, to colleges, as well as to the education system. We're doing that to ensure that our students have the supports they need. While other provinces—I've mentioned the province in Saskatchewan—are cutting university budget; we're increasing it, Mr. Speaker.

Since we formed government in '99, we have built or replaced 35 new schools. We rebuilt the system from the 1990s when teachers laid off and classrooms were overcrowded. Our education strategy is the heart of our economic 'strategy' and it's working.

Mr. Speaker, this budget makes life affordable for Manitobans. We had this debate in the House that the critic and I, or about, over the, about Saskatchewan, and so they said even in the budget documents prepared by the Saskatchewan government, they say that Manitoba is one of the most affordable places to live.

Mr. Speaker, we've increased the caregivers' tax credit by 10 per cent, up to \$4,200. We've doubled the seniors' property tax rebate from \$235 to \$400, and we'll fully implement it in 2016.

And, Mr. Speaker, this is something I know that must irritate the members opposite, and that is we're taking additional 2,000 small businesses off the corporate tax rate.

These great titans of industry across the way, Mr. Speaker; these great captains of commerce, you know, across the way, who stand up for small business, it is this government that eliminated the small-business tax. And this is the government that's increasing the threshold, so another two, excuse me, 2,000 small businesses will pay no taxes.

We came into power the corporate tax rate was 17 per cent; now it's down—was one of the highest in Canada—now it's down to 12 per cent.

We're increasing rent aid to 75 per cent of the medium market rent to low-income Manitobans. We're doing that; we're doing that now.

We're investing in 900 new child-care spaces; we're increasing the minimum wage to \$11 an hour in October. We're introducing a new volunteer firefighter and search and rescue tax credits, and we're also continue on with important tax credits.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, our investment in infrastructure is building Manitoba like never before.

The Conference Board of Canada has indicated that this, our plan, will create nearly 60,000 jobs and give our economy a \$6.3-billion boost, Mr. Speaker, 60,000 jobs. As the Premier (Mr. Selinger) has stated, you've never seen—you'll see new interchange in Highway 59 and the Perimeter. Highway 75 will be upgraded to interstate standards, and we've improved Highway No. 1 west, so now the speed limit will be up to 110 kilometres per hour.

We're going to be working with the City of Winnipeg to build the new Waverley and Marion Street underpasses, and we've also notified the City that we'd be prepared to work with them on the new BuildWINNIPEG partnership.

We're investing more than 440 thousand—\$440 million in municipal priorities from roads to flood protection to police.

Mr. Speaker, while some governments have chosen to cut, as I said, the Alberta government for one, we're making further investments in front-line services like health care. We're putting patients and families first.

As the Premier's mentioned, we're opening up two new QuickCare clinics, one in Southdale, one in Seven Oaks. We're adding—that's to the ones we already have now. We have a new community centre we're building in Swan River, a Dauphin emergency department, a new Selkirk hospital, a new 10-day–10-bed health centre in Notre Dame de Lourdes. We're building a new personal-care homes in Winnipeg; we're building one in Morden; we're building one in Lac du Bonnet. We're increasing health facilities in Steinbach, The Pas, Thompson, Brandon. We've got a new youth and child mental health strategy to promote mental health awareness.

Mr. Speaker, we've—we're going to provide more resources to help young people quit smoking. And we continue to reject the opposition's approach to

health care, which is cuts to services, two-tiered health care and privatization.

Mr. Speaker, we're taking responsible—we're taking a responsible approach to the fiscal position of the Province. We're limiting the increase to core government spending to the rate of economic growth. We've taken meaningful steps to deliver government more efficiently, reduce the number of health authorities; we've 'reduced' the number of Crown corporations; and we reduced the number of government-appointed boards, agencies and commissions.

As I said, we've made a commitment, Mr. Speaker, to lower the size of our workforce by 600; we've done that. We've lowered the size of our footprint and our office space by 100,000 feet. Every single year our budget, our deficit is getting smaller and smaller and smaller. As relative to the size of the economy; it's shrinking even faster.

* (16:10)

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to reduce the deficit in a responsible way. Members opposite have a different plan, as I mentioned earlier. Their plan is to kill our strategy. Their plan is to kill 70,000 jobs. They want to put at risk our plan which has put Manitoba No. 1 in the nation.

Mr. Speaker, on this Manitoba Day, I urge all members to vote for the future of Manitoba, urge all members to vote for our young Manitobans; I urge all members to vote for health care, vote for education, vote for the best economy in Canada, vote for this budget.

Mr. Speaker: As the Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) has closed debate on the motion, we'll now proceed to the questions to be put to the House.

The question before the House now is the proposed amendment moved by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Pallister) to the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Do the members wish to have the amendment read?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Yes?

The amendment is as follows:

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

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

- (a) failing to recognize that Manitobans are tired of broken promises such as balancing the budget by 2014 and not raising taxes, not respecting the right to vote on tax increases and not recognizing that Manitobans want a change for the better; and
- (b) failing to recognize Manitobans are paying more and getting less due to front-line services like health care and education being ranked last, and also due to an average family in Winnipeg having to pay \$3,200 more in provincial taxes than a comparable family-average family living in Regina; and
- (c) failing to acknowledge that government waste has caused the provincial debt to double since 2008, requiring Manitobans to pay more than \$800 million in debt interest charges which threatens Manitoba's future as that money cannot be invested to protect essential front-line services, reduce health-care wait times or improve education results for our children.

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

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in favour of the amendment will please signify it by saying aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to the amendment will please signify it by saying nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Recorded Vote

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): A recorded vote, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: A recorded vote having been requested, call in the members.

Order, please. The question before the House now is the proposed amendment moved by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Pallister) to the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Yeas

Briese, Cullen, Driedger, Eichler, Ewasko, Friesen, Goertzen, Graydon, Helwer, Martin, Mitchelson, Pallister, Pedersen, Piwniuk, Rowat, Schuler, Smook, Stefanson, Wishart.

Nays

Allan, Allum, Altemeyer, Ashton, Bjornson, Blady, Braun, Caldwell, Chief, Chomiak, Dewar, Gaudreau, Gerrard, Howard, Irvin-Ross, Jha, Kostyshyn, Lathlin, Lemieux, Mackintosh, Maloway, Marcelino (Logan), Marcelino (Tyndall Park), Melnick, Nevakshonoff, Oswald, Pettersen, Rondeau, Saran, Selby, Selinger, Struthers, Swan, Wiebe, Wight.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Yeas 19, Nays 35.

Mr. Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Now, the question before the House is the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please signify by saying aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed to the motion will please signify by saying nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Recorded Vote

Mr. Goertzen: Recorded vote, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: A recorded vote having been requested, call in the members.

Order, please. The question before the House is the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Dewar) that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

* (16:20)

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Yeas

Allan, Allum, Altemeyer, Ashton, Bjornson, Blady, Braun, Caldwell, Chief, Chomiak, Dewar, Gaudreau,

Howard, Irvin-Ross, Jha, Kostyshyn, Lathlin, Lemieux, Mackintosh, Maloway, Marcelino (Logan), Marcelino (Tyndall Park), Melnick, Nevakshonoff, Oswald, Pettersen, Rondeau, Saran, Selby, Selinger, Struthers, Swan, Wiebe, Wight.

Nays

Briese, Cullen, Driedger, Eichler, Ewasko, Friesen, Gerrard, Goertzen, Graydon, Helwer, Martin, Mitchelson, Pallister, Pedersen, Pivniuk, Rowat, Schuler, Smook, Stefanson, Wishart.

Clerk: Yeas, thirty—pardon me—yes, Yeas 34, Nays 20.

Mr. Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): I'm seeking 'unananimity'—seeking agreement of the House to call it 5 o'clock.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to call it 5 p.m.? *[Agreed]*

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 12, 2015

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