

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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authority of
The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, September 3, 2013

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no bills, we'll move on to—

PETITIONS

Hydro Capital Development—NFAT Review

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the reasons for this petition are as follows:

(1) Manitoba Hydro was mandated by the provincial government to commence a \$21-billion capital development plan to service uncertain electricity export markets.

(2) In the last five years, competition from alternative energy sources is decreasing the price and demand for Manitoba's hydroelectricity and causing the financial viability of this capital plan to be questioned.

(3) The \$21-billion capital plan requires Manitoba Hydro to increase domestic electricity rates by up to 4 per cent annually for the next 20 years and possibly more if export opportunities fail to materialize.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro create a complete and transparent needs-for-and-alternatives-to review of Manitoba Hydro's total capital development plan to ensure the financial viability of Manitoba Hydro.

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by K. Lee, M. Wilkinson, R. Matthews and many other Manitobans.

**Provincial Sales Tax Increase—
Cross-Border Shopping**

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Manitoba has a thriving and competitive retail environment in communities near its borders, including Bowsman, Swan River, Minitonas, Benito, Russell, Binscarth, St-Lazare, Birtle, Elkhorn,

Viriden, Melita, Waskada, Boissevain, Deloraine, Cartwright, Pilot Mound, Crystal City, Manitou, Morden, Winkler, Plum Coulee, Altona, Gretna, Emerson, Morris, Killarney, Sprague, Vita, Reston, Pierson, Miniota, McAuley, St. Malo, Foxwarren, Roblin and many others.

Both the Saskatchewan PST rate and the North Dakota retail sales tax rate are 5 per cent, and the Minnesota retail sales tax rate is 6 per cent.

The retail sales tax rate is 40 per cent cheaper in North Dakota and Saskatchewan and 25 per cent cheaper in Minnesota as compared to Manitoba.

The differential in tax rates creates a disincentive for Manitoba consumers to shop locally to purchase their goods and services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To acknowledge that the increase in the PST will significantly encourage cross-border shopping and put additional strain on the retail sector, especially for those businesses located close to Manitoba's provincial borders.

To urge the provincial government to reverse its PST increase to ensure Manitoba consumers can shop affordably in Manitoba and support local businesses.

This petition is signed by C. Laughlin, L. McFadyen, G. Beyok and many other fine 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 Sales Tax Increase—Referendum

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by D. Johannson, D. MacDonald, G. Dantirn and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this is signed by P. Kobb, S. Wiebe, J. Letkeman and many others.

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

PST, by one point without the legally required referendum.

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition's signed by E. Chartrand, J. Federowich and B. Vint and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Provincial Road 520 Renewal

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The rural municipality of Lac du Bonnet and Alexander are experiencing record growth due especially to an increasing number of Manitobans retiring in cottage country.

(2) The population in the RM of Lac du Bonnet grows exponentially in the summer months due to increased cottage use.

(3) Due to population growth, Provincial Road 520 experiences heavy traffic, especially during the summer months.

(4) PR 520 connects cottage country to the Pinawa Hospital and as such is frequently used by emergency medical services to transport patients.

(5) PR 520 is in such poor condition that there are serious concerns about its safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to recognize the serious safety concerns of Provincial Road 520 and to address its poor condition by prioritizing its renewal.

This petition is signed by P. Husles, R. Anderson, R. Lacroix and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Applied Behaviour Analysis Services

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 broke a commitment to support families of children with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, including timely diagnosis and access to necessary treatment such as applied behaviour analysis, also known as ABA services.

The provincial government did not follow its own policy statement on autism services which notes the importance of early intervention for children with autism.

School learning services has its first ever wait-list–waiting list which started with two children. The waiting list is subjected–or projected to keep growing and to be in excess of 20 children by September 2013. Therefore, these children will go through the biggest transition of their lives without receiving ABA services that have helped other children achieve huge gains.

The provincial government has adopted a policy to eliminate ABA services in schools by grade 5 despite the fact that these children have been diagnosed with autism which still requires therapy. These children are being denied necessary ABA services that will allow them access to the same educational opportunities as any other Manitoban.

Waiting lists and denials of treatment are unacceptable. No child should be denied access or–to or eliminated from eligibility for ABA services if their need still exists.

* (13:40)

This petition's signed by–or we petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Education consider making funding available to eliminate the current waiting list for ABA school-age services and fund ABA services for individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

This petition's signed by V. Penner, A. Lucas, S. Clement and many more Manitobans.

Provincial Sales Tax Increase–Referendum

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present the following petition to the Province–or to the Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is submitted on behalf of C. Charbonneau, M. Warkentin, J. Pelletier and many other fine Manitobans.

Applied Behaviour Analysis Services

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government broke a commitment to support families of children with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, including timely diagnosis and access to necessary treatment such as applied behavioural analysis, also known as ABA services.

(2) The provincial government did not follow its own policy statement on autism services which notes the importance of early intervention for children with autism.

(3) The preschool waiting list for ABA services has reached its highest level ever with at least 56 children waiting for services. That number is expected to exceed 70 children by September 2013 despite commitments to reduce the waiting list and provide timely access to services.

(4) The provincial government policy of eliminating ABA services in schools by grade 5 has caused many children in Manitoba to age out of the window for this very effective ABA treatment because of a lack of access. Many more children are

expected to age out because of a lack of available treatment spaces.

(5) Waiting lists and denials of treatment are unacceptable. No child should be denied access to or age out of eligibility for ABA services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Family Services and Labour consider making funding available to address the current waiting list for ABA services.

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by B. Jones, A. Yerlitz, B. Kozan and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government broke a commitment to support families of children with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, including timely diagnosis and access to necessary treatment such as applied behavioural analysis, also known as ABA services.

(2) The provincial government did not follow its own policy statement on autism services which notes the importance of early intervention for children with autism.

(3) School learning services has its first ever waiting list which started with two children. The waiting list is projected to keep growing and to be in excess of 20 children by September 2013. Therefore, these children will go through the biggest transition of their lives without receiving ABA services that has helped other children achieve huge gains.

(4) The provincial government has adopted a policy to eliminate ABA services in schools by grade 5 despite the fact that these children have been diagnosed with autism which still requires therapy. These children are being denied necessary ABA services that will allow them to access the same educational opportunities as any other Manitoban.

(5) Waiting lists and denials of treatment are unacceptable. No child should be denied access to or 'eliminated' from eligibility for ABA services if their need still exists.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Education consider making funding available to eliminate the current waiting lists for ABA school-age services and fund ABA services for individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

This petition is signed by K. Janzen, J. Lauk, S. Dalgleish and many more fine Manitobans.

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

The provincial government broke a commitment to support families of children with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, including timely diagnosis and access to necessary treatment such as applied behavioural analysis, also known as ABA services.

(2) The provincial government did not follow its own policy statement on autism services which notes the importance of early intervention for children with autism.

(3) School learning services has its first ever waiting list which started with two children. The waiting list is projected to keep growing and to be in excess of 20 children by September 2013. Therefore, these children will go through the biggest transition of their lives without receiving ABA services that has helped other children achieve huge gains.

(4) The provincial government has adopted a policy to eliminate ABA services in schools by grade 5 despite the fact that these children have been diagnosed with autism which still requires therapy. These children are being denied necessary ABA services that will allow them access to the same educational opportunities as any other Manitoban.

(5) Waiting lists and denials of treatment are not acceptable—or unacceptable. No child should be denied access to or eliminated from the eligibility for ABA services if their need still exists.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Education consider making funding available to eliminate the current waiting list for ABA school-age services and fund ABA services for individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

And this petition is signed by R. Clair, M. Manesa and R. Quilley and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Bipole III—Alternative Route

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

And the reasons for this petition are as follows:

Manitoba Hydro has been forced by the NDP government to construct its next high-voltage direct transmission line, Bipole III, down the west side of Manitoba, a decision which the NDP government has not been able to provide any logical justification.

Since this will cost Manitoba ratepayers at least \$640 million more than an east-side route, and given that the Province of Manitoba is facing its largest deficit on record, the burden on this extra cost could not come at a worse time.

Between 2002 and 2009 electricity rates increased by 16 per cent, and Manitoba has filed a request for further rate increases totalling 6 per cent over the next two years.

A western Bipole III route will invariably lead to more rate increases.

In addition to being cheaper, an east-side route would be hundreds of kilometres shorter and would be more reliable than a west-side route.

West-side residents have not been adequately consulted and have identified serious concerns with the proposed line.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider proceeding with the cheaper, shorter and more logical east-side route, subject to necessary regulatory approvals, to save ratepayers hundreds of millions of dollars during these challenging economic times.

And this petition is signed by J. Guillas, L. Dupas, F. Gamache and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Mr. Cameron Friesen (Morden-Winkler): Mr. Speaker, is there leave for me to read a petition on behalf of the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire)?

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to allow the honourable member for Morden-Winkler to read the petition on behalf of the honourable member for Arthur-Virden?

An Honourable Member: No.

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been denied.

* (13:50)

So we'll move on with committee reports. No committee reports? Ministerial statements? Seeing none—

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members that over the course of the next two weeks our new pages for the 2013 and 2014 will be starting work—to work in the Chamber. Today's pages are Emily Biggar, who is a student of Fort Richmond Collegiate, and Nicole Gomes, a student at West Kildonan Collegiate. Both are in grade 12. And for the members' information, for the first two weeks a page from last year will be working as well to assist in the training, and Austin Amy, who is with us here today, is the page from last year. On behalf of all honourable members, I'd like to welcome our two new pages with us here.

And also, in the Speaker's Gallery we have with us today Jackie Carr—Carey, pardon me—Emma Carey, Adam Yarish and Grace Carey, who are the family members of our Deputy Clerk, Mr. Rick Yarish. On behalf of honourable members, we welcome you here today. I'm pretty sure our Deputy Clerk will be on his best behaviour today.

So now it's time for—

ORAL QUESTIONS

Affordability Advantage Tax Increases

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): Welcome, everybody, back.

My first question today pertains to the NDP so-called affordability advantage.

In the old days, cagey retailers used to use a technique called loss leaders. This is where they would put a low-priced product for sale at something less than their cost in order to encourage customers to come into their store to take advantage of the big markups they had on other higher priced items.

The Premier and the spenDP affordability promise is like that. It's like a loss leader. They promise low-cost hydro, low-cost car insurance. They promote a low-cost bundle, Mr. Speaker, but Manitobans have to put a lot of other items in their shopping cart. They have to pay taxes too, to the spenDP, and the spenDP forget—they forgot to include in their bundle the taxes.

Now, can the Premier admit that with the taxes included in the bundle Manitobans don't actually have an affordability advantage at all, they have an affordability disadvantage?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, using the same methodology that the Leader of the Opposition used when he was in office, Manitoba remains in the top three for affordability in the country. When other provinces do comparisons of us, they rank us even higher than that; frequently they rank us in the No. 1 position.

Affordability advantage is—includes the costs of things like home heating, electricity and auto insurance, very significant expenditures for every family. It also recognizes what we carve out of any sales tax requirements in this province. Many things that the GST taxes we do not tax, and it really speaks to the fact that Manitobans have jobs. They're working and making good incomes, which is the key to any kind of affordability [*inaudible*]

Mr. Pallister: And Manitobans are working harder to get less, Mr. Speaker, while this government's in power.

And the reality is, of course, that cheap utilities are nice. Everybody loves to have cheap utilities. That's great. But taxes actually have twice the impact on Manitoba families that utility bills do. NDP taxes are not cheap; they are high.

So there's us and Québec battling it out for top spot across the country. A Manitoba family making \$60,000, after their utilities and their taxes, doesn't have an affordability advantage at all. They, in fact, pay \$2,200 a year more than a Saskatchewan family in that same position. And that is not an affordability advantage, Mr. Speaker, that's an affordability disadvantage.

Now, taxes aren't optional. Taxes are in the bundle, and I'm sure the Premier pays his taxes and I'm sure he expects Manitobans to pay their taxes to him.

So how could he forget to include the taxes?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the affordability advantage includes the cost of education, post-secondary education—tuition fees among the lowest in Canada, with very strong support both on the bursary side as well as student loan side. And a graduate tuition tax rebate for any person that graduates from a post-secondary institution, from a community college, lives and works in Manitoba, they get an immediate benefit which keeps taxes for new graduates in Canada, the marginal rate of taxation, the lowest in the country.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the NDP priority's pretty clear. They give themselves a 13 per cent revenue raise without the PST; they give universities 2. Mr. Speaker, that's not how you keep an affordable education in the province.

Manitobans are smart shoppers. Manitobans don't get fooled by loss leaders. Businesses will go where they're wanted and business will go where it's wanted as well. And the PST is 40 per cent less in Saskatchewan than it is in Manitoba. The PST is 40 per cent less in North Dakota than it is in Manitoba.

Weekend border rate times of two hours plus tell me that people shop where business is better for them. North Dakota's constructing a kilometre-long extra lane to facilitate returning Manitoba shoppers to come back to this province.

Meanwhile, this government makes an affordability promise that ignores taxes. They forgot to include the taxes.

Doesn't the Premier understand that his PST hike will only make matters worse? Doesn't he understand that high NDP taxes encourage Manitobans to vote with their feet?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, when you take a look at when the Leader of the Opposition was in office, there was a capital tax; that no longer exists, because we eliminated it. There was an education support levy on every homeowner, worth about \$170 million; that has been eliminated, no longer exists. The Leader of the Opposition was a part of a government that cut the property tax credits to \$250; they're now \$700 for all Manitobans at minimum and \$1,100 for a senior citizen. When the Leader of the Opposition was in office, small-business taxation rates were 9 per cent on small businesses; they are now zero in Manitoba.

The biggest threat to affordability in Manitoba is the Leader of the Opposition's promise to have

two-tier health care. When you have two-tier health care, people will be paying for tests. They will be paying for access to basic health facilities.

We won't do that; we will retain and maintain and strengthen universal health care in Manitoba. And we will go beyond universal health care to offer services such as home-care services which are not covered under the Canada Health Act, the best home-care services in the country available to Manitobans.

PST Increase Impact on Families

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, the Premier obviously can't defend his own record so he's got to attack the record of something that happened 20 years ago.

Today, children across our province are heading back to school, and part of their weekend was no doubt spent buying school supplies. Of course, we know that these school supplies are subject to PST. Manitoba families have been feeling the pinch from this NDP government's tax-and-spend policies.

Preparing to send our children back to school is a stressful enough time for Manitoba families. Why is this NDP government placing more stress on these families with this PST hike?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, let me assure you, we don't have to look back 20 years to see what the members of the opposition would do if they were in government. The member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister) just a few weeks ago said exactly what he was going to do. He's going to cut across the board, indiscriminately, 2 per cent, \$550 million across the board to things like schools, which the member for Tuxedo gets up and asks about today.

When it comes to showing support for kids going back to school, whatever those—age those kids are, we'll put our record up against their record any day.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, if you do, Mr. Speaker, they will quickly find that their record is worse than ours was any day and Manitobans are worse off.

This PST hike has placed further unnecessary stress on Manitoba families. Not only has this NDP government hiked the PST on school supplies but they have—*[interjection]* Mr. Speaker, not only has this government hiked the PST on school supplies but they have also forced families to cut back on

extracurricular activities for their children. Whether it be hockey or soccer or piano lessons or an art class, less disposable income means less activities for our kids.

Why is this NDP government placing more stress on these Manitoba families as a result of their PST hike?

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, it would've been a lot more plausible if she hadn't broke into laughter as she made that preamble to her statement.

Our record is very clear. We've invested in schools every year. We've met, every year, our commitment to fund to the rate of economic growth in this province, and we've done that, as opposed to her leader, who just last week put out a list of the—his hit list of what is going to get cut, and on that he wants to cancel a new school in Sage Creek, he wants to cancel a new school in Amber Trails and he wants to cancel a new school in Waverley West.

You know, Mr. Speaker, any day of the week I'd put our support over their cuts, and I think Manitobans will agree—

* (14:00)

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

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, their record is very clear: they have left us dead last in Canada in many areas.

The PST hike has placed undue stress on Manitoba families. The NDP spoke last week of their so-called affordability pledge, but hiking the PST on Manitoba families does not make things more affordable for those families.

Will this NDP government agree to reverse their decision to hike the PST, thus removing the additional stress from these hard-working Manitoba families?

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, if we're going to compare records, then let's compare records. In the 1990s, members opposite—yes, in the 1990s—when the member for Fort Whyte was in Cabinet, him and Gary Filmon spent a lot of time firing teachers, which doesn't translate into support for our students.

The member for Tuxedo gets up today and she talks about commitment to kids going back to school. Well, it was her government in the 1990s that expanded the tax, that expanded the PST to school

clothing to begin with. How can she get up and now ask that question in this House, I wonder.

PST Increase Cross-Border Shopping

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, the long weekend provides Manitobans an opportunity to get some shopping done and prepare for back to school this week. Manitobans did their shopping somewhere else this year, in North Dakota, Minnesota, where the sales tax is lower and inflation is even less.

Mr. Speaker, why is it this government's supporting the economies of North Dakota and Minnesota?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Well, what's very clear is that we're supporting the Manitoba economy by putting in place the measure dedicated directly to infrastructure, dedicated directly to building schools, dedicated directly to building hospitals, building—going directly into building roads and bridges so that we can grow our economy, so we can provide employment, so that we continue to work with the private sector to make sure we have strong growth in this country.

Again, I'll put our record and our commitment to the future up against theirs any day.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, lineups to get back into Canada were over two hours long on 70—Highway 75, with long lineups in Gretna on Highway 59 as well. This means only one thing: Manitobans are voting with their spending money. They aren't spending it here. High taxes and high inflation are sending people to United States to shop in record levels, all thanks to this government and their broken promises.

Mr. Speaker, when will this government let Manitobans decide with a referendum on their record of lies, high taxes and broken promises?

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, the preamble of the member for Emerson does not add up to what the facts are. In June Manitoba retail sales increased by 4.4 per cent; that's well above the national average, which was 0.5 per cent. Motor vehicle sales were up 11 and a half per cent; that's amongst the best of the provinces. And housing starts in Manitoba increased by 27.4 per cent, again, amongst the best in the country, with 58.8–15.8 per cent being the national average.

So once in a while, it'd be nice if the member's assertions would actually match the truth.

Mr. Graydon: What the minister failed to say was that Manitobans' personal debt went up higher than any other province in Canada as well.

Mr. Speaker, the shoppers aren't coming to Winnipeg. They're going to Grand Forks and Fargo. High taxes and high inflation do nothing for the economy except drive shoppers away. If Manitobans aren't spending their money in this economy, the economy is going in the same direction as the shoppers are, going south in a real hurry.

Mr. Speaker, when will this government stop their high-tax policy, call a referendum, allow Manitobans to stop at home—at-shop at home without breaking the bank?

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, what's clear is what's gone south is a commitment to the facts by members opposite. For example, contrary to what the member from Emerson just said, the Conference Board of Canada—and I—with all apologies to the member for Emerson, I'd just as soon believe the Conference Board of Canada than him—but the Conference Board of Canada said that household disposable income in Manitoba is forecast to increase 3.8 per cent, and that's above the Canadian average of 3.4 per cent.

I know members opposite like to be all doom and gloom, Mr. Speaker, but Manitoba's economy needs to continue to chug along. And this side of the House, this government, is very committed to making sure we stimulate that economy by investing the 1 cent on the—

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

PST Increase Impact on Small Business

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): And you know what? Manitobans aren't buying this minister's spin with regard to PST increase. It's directly on—it's affecting the backs of small-business owners across the province.

Last weekend a small-business owner in Russell indicated that they have, on behalf of government, collected a significant amount of taxes which they believe they have not received any direct benefit. And now with this 1 per cent increase, it is actually going to hurt them even further, Mr. Speaker.

The 8 per cent PST increase is a significant challenge as Saskatchewan's PST is only 5 per cent. I am told that business sales are showing that locals are opting to travel the 20 minutes west to Saskatchewan and are saving the 3 per cent difference.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Finance, who is the MLA for Dauphin, representing small-business owners along the Saskatchewan border facing similar tax challenges—

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

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Finance): Well, Mr. Speaker, what is also clear is that we are already showing very clearly where the benefits in the Russell area, the Roblin area, are going when it comes to infrastructure. We've already begun that work.

What would really hurt the economy of Russell would be if the members opposite got their way and if they continue—and if they came forward with the cuts that they said they have—they are going to make. Mr. Speaker, things like expanded doctor training and recruitment, that's—from members opposite, from nobody else but from members opposite, they think it's non-essential to recruit doctors and retain doctors in places like Roblin and Russell and communities in that part—

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

Request to Reverse

Mrs. Rowat: Well, the—I was talking to a person from Roblin the other day, and they indicated that if the NDP and this Minister of Finance, who's their MLA, really believed that this is the best way for our province to prosper, then they should be able to define it, which they said this minister, their MLA, is having a lot of trouble doing, Mr. Speaker.

So will this Minister of Finance hold the public referendum in which all citizens can either approve or disapprove this increase for the tax, as the members for—the member for Dauphin's constituents are asking, or will he just reverse the PST increase, which is hurting his communities and those communities along the Saskatchewan border, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Struthers: Well, I'll—the people that live in my constituency understand, as do other people all across the province of Manitoba, they understand

that the items that the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Pallister) have—has deemed as non-essential are 'pritical'—are pretty critical for life for families in Manitoba. Mr. Speaker, \$800 million in cuts that the Leader of the Opposition has committed to, he wants to cancel schools, he doesn't—he wants to cancel expanded doctor training and recruitment, which have—would have a horrendous impact on our area of the province as well as others, and he wants to cancel cancer QuickCare clinics.

We've made good progress in bringing services, health services, closer to people in Russell and Roblin. We're committed to continue that—

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

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, constituents along the Saskatchewan border are appalled at yet another violation of their rights to have a say on the vote for the PST, something that will impact their lives, their families' lives, their communities' lives and, ultimately, the province's lives with regard to tax intake, because they will leave this province and people will continue to look for purchases outside of Manitoba's jurisdiction because they are getting a better deal.

When will they—we hear—when will this minister respect the rule of law and reverse his decision to increase the PST? When will he respect Manitobans and their right to have a vote, Mr. Speaker?

* (14:10)

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Speaker, respect, let's look at respect. Respect is when—that's when the government does things like eliminate the small-business tax in Manitoba. That's when a government in the 2013 budget moves the threshold to \$425,000 so more small businesses can take advantage of that tax-free stratus—status.

These amounts are very real benefits for small businesses, whether you live along the Saskatchewan border or elsewhere in this province. It encourages the growth of our economy. It encourages good, strong employment numbers like we have. It means that we are the—we have the third best numbers in terms of unemployment—

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

Housing Allowance Request for Increase

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): This government's afforded—the affordability pledge means little.

By this government's own records, women in Manitoba are far more likely than men to live in poverty and experience longer and deeper periods of poverty. The top-down approach of this government to dealing with poverty hasn't been working.

In fact, this government's own consultation process on ALL Aboard has suggested the highest priority should be increasing the housing allowance through EI.

Will this government commit to increasing the housing allowances through EI to take more people out of poverty?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Housing and Community Development): What I can tell you is that the rates of poverty have reduced no matter what measurement that you use. But are we giving up on reducing poverty further? No, we're not, and that's why we've partnered with community groups, with volunteers, with non-profit organizations and have developed the ALL Aboard strategy.

That ALL Aboard strategy went out on consultations this spring, and we heard loud and clear from Manitobans from all over that they are interested in the reduction of poverty. They highlighted the two top things that we need to do: build more housing; the second one is food security. We're working on that and I can give you more information on that in the next question.

Poverty Rates Government Policies

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): They also prioritized an increase in the EI housing allowance.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba has the highest child poverty rates in Canada. Over 20 per cent of children in Manitoba live below the low-income measure, a total of 54,000 children. This government's top-down approach to dealing with poverty is failing. The number of women and children 'living' in poverty is a testament to that.

Will the minister admit that the 'gov'—that this government's policies of dealing with poverty for women and children have failed some of the most vulnerable Manitobans?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Housing and Community Development): Mr. Speaker, as I said in the previous answer and I will repeat again, our commitment is a reduction of poverty and it is by working with all Manitobans, whether they live in rural, urban, the north and the south. We are talking with them. We are meeting with them.

And we are seeing results because of our commitment, our commitment of returning back the now-national child tax benefit to individuals. That put an additional \$588 back into people's—in fact, into people's households.

As we've done that, we've ensured that we've improved education opportunities in the post-secondary, as well as doing the programs around prenatal care for families.

We are working together to ensure that we are providing shelter and employment and education, and that makes a difference.

Tax Increases

Mr. Wishart: Across Canada, fewer children lived in poverty less than five years ago; however, in Manitoba we have 5,000 more today than in 2005. Aboriginal women, women with disabilities and single female parents are particularly affected by poverty. This government's increase in consumptive taxes like the PST has reduced the disposable income available to these families to live on.

Will this minister acknowledge today that this government's tax policy has hurt those in poverty?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: What I will tell the members of this House is that we have seen a reduction in poverty, and why have we seen that reduction in poverty? We've seen that because we have returned back the now-national child tax benefit. We've created employment opportunities. We've increased minimum wage. We have 'sup'—provided those supports that are necessary.

We did not do what the previous government did when they went and slashed income assistance rates, clawed back the national child tax benefit, stopped building housing.

So we will continue to build better housing, to restore the housing that we have, to ensure that we're providing employment and education opportunities for all Manitobans so we can continue to make a difference in people living in—with poverty.

**Deputy Premier
FIPPA Redaction**

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): They could start by giving back that vote tax.

Mr. Speaker, on more than one occasion we had asked, was the decision to redact the minister's inflammatory comment covered under section 23(1)(a) of the act to protect against the material that would reveal advice, opinions, proposals, recommendations, analyses or policy options developed by or for the public body or a minister?

Can the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism (Ms. Marcelino), the minister in charge of the act, tell the House: What part of section 23(1)(a) would the redacting of the Deputy Premier's (Mr. Robinson) comments fall under?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour): We had a good discussion about this last week and we responded to these questions last week, and I think we've made it clear a number of times that the redacting of that information was done consistent with the act. It was done in every department by senior officials who handle FIPPA requests who know the act, who do it according to the act. This situation was no different than those situations, Mr. Speaker. So that's what happened here. It was done according to the process.

As we said last week, people who have a complaint about how their FIPPA's are handled have recourse to the Ombudsman. They can go to the Ombudsman and make that complaint.

Mr. Ewasko: Mr. Speaker, it must have been a long-weekend Cabinet shuffle on that side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, last week I had raised another issue alongside the comments made by the Deputy Premier, my concerns regarding this government's abuse of section 23(1)(a), the law under FIPPA, to which they have been unable to answer.

On the weekend, Brian Bowman, a lawyer who specializes in privacy and access to information, also questioned the actions surrounding the redaction of this government and whether they had any legal or moral right to hide it.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Minister for Culture, Heritage and Tourism: Why are they hiding behind the act? Do they feel once again that they are above the law?

Ms. Howard: Well, I think if any expert on privacy was to look at the record of this government as opposed to the record when the leader opposite was in Cabinet, they would see that we are more transparent and more accountable on this side of the House.

Last week I talked about an example that, when we were in opposition, we sent a request to the minister of Health of the day for a wait-list for health procedures. We knew that those wait-lists existed because they had defended those wait-lists. When we asked for that information, the response that was given: no such records exist. Total denial that they had the information. On this side of the House, those wait-lists are online and any member of the public can go and look at them.

Mr. Ewasko: Once again, Mr. Speaker, the seat belt light is on.

Cindy Stevens, the Deputy Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism, stated, and I quote: People who disagree with the decision can appeal to the provincial Ombudsman's office. A spokeswoman for the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism indicated the government has no plans to review the decision to redact the Deputy Premier's comments nor to review the discretionary powers of FIPPA officers. Mr. Speaker, it is clear that this minister has lost control of her department.

How can one appeal a decision if the information is censored and you do not know how it is—what—that it exists?

Ms. Howard: I know that it's typical of the opposite side of the House to go after independent officers of the Legislature. We've seen that time and time again in this House.

But the Ombudsman does have the power to review any complaints that come forward. Complaints can be made on a variety of grounds, Mr. Speaker. When those complaints come in, those complaints are responded to by the department. The Ombudsman, if he finds fault with the way that we do things, we make adjustments accordingly.

I know that they are keen to find someone to blame here. I know that that's what they're looking to do. But the facts remain that this FIPPA procedure was done in accordance with the law and was done with the sign-off of senior civil servants. That's how it was done, Mr. Speaker. That is the fact—

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

Nutritional Deficiencies Government Record

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, it's a serious health issue when there are major nutritional deficiencies in Manitobans which are directly impacting the health and the development of children.

* (14:20)

In this Chamber I've repeatedly highlighted the extremely high levels of vitamin D deficiency which adversely impact the bone and teeth growth of children. I've highlighted the deficiency in long-chain polyunsaturated omega-3 fatty acids, found in fish oils, which are vital to healthy brain development and function.

I ask the Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities (Mr. Chief): Why, in 14 years of NDP government, has there been no progress in addressing these major nutritional deficiencies?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): I thank the member for the question.

Proper nutrition is important to the development of children and the maintenance of health in adults as well, which is exactly why we've had food security programs across this province, Mr. Speaker. The member will know, when he came into office, that there were virtually no community gardening programs in northern Manitoba. There's over 900 of them now. Schools are growing gardens. Community groups are growing gardens. Young students are involved with their families in growing gardens. This is providing them with nutritious vegetables and foods from their own—from their very own community.

We've put in place a prenatal benefit, which is available to all young expectant mothers in Manitoba, which will provide some additional support each month for proper nutrition, including supplements, if that's required, and we're doing research in this area as well.

We support having proper nutrition for people and key nutrients such as vitamin D, vitamin A, et cetera, and we're putting resources in place to allow that to be accomplished, and we will continue to work on that with the support of the member opposite.

Call for Task Force

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, if the Premier actually has evidence that nutritional deficiencies are less, he should table it. We've looked. As far as we can find, no such records actually exist. It is a serious problem when this government can't even provide such records.

When I have raised questions about deficiencies in vitamin D and long-chain polyunsaturated omega-3 fatty acids in Manitoba five times, now six, the Premier has given the wrong solution—planting gardens—to solve the problem. Vegetables contain virtually none of these two critical substances.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: Because of the absence of progress under this government and the misinformation being spread, will he call the all-party committee together, including nutritionists, to help address this critical problem?

Mr. Selinger: I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

Not only is there healthy gardens in Manitoba, there's access to protein in many of our northern communities. They're growing some of their—and raising some of their own protein in northern communities. We had a young group down here recently from one of our northern communities that's got a goat program. They're actually raising and using goats for food in their community.

So protein's very important as well, Mr. Speaker. The member knows that. If he has an interest in working with us on that, we'd be pleased to do that.

We have a Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet. The Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet is required by law. They can look at a broad range of interventions that will support people, and we will continue to find ways to do that, including making breakfast programs available in schools, which do provide vitamin D supplements in the form of milk.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, it is highly probable that the very high incidence of depression in Manitoba is in part related to nutritional deficiencies. As I said on July 18, depression in mothers has increased by 30 per cent under this government, the government's own report.

A large body of evidence now links increased depression with a deficiency of the long-chain

polyunsaturated omega-3 fatty acids, which are present in fish oils. I table a graph which illustrates this. Populations of countries with significantly more fish in their diets have very low levels of depression.

It's time to look at the population health of Manitoba more seriously than this government has done in 14 years.

I ask the Premier: Will he act now and form that all-party task force, including nutritionists, today?

Mr. Selinger: I thank the member for that. He will know that we actually are doing a lot to protect fisheries in Manitoba and to make sure there is an abundance of fish in this province, Mr. Speaker.

As a matter of fact, some of the hydro projects that the members opposite do not want to proceed, as part of their reacting to environmental issues up there, are putting in place the renewal of the sturgeon fish industry in northern Manitoba so that people in the north can have access to fish, can have access to good protein. These are kinds of initiatives that, in some cases, have been going on for years where good protein like fish is provided to some of our communities where there was damage done by the flooding of the '70s.

As we go forward, we want to make sure that the fish supplies continue to be healthy and, in fact, improved, and that's part of our northern hydro development in Manitoba.

Experimental Lakes Research Facility Long-Term Funding Commitment

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and I know one of the few things that members opposite simply cannot stand is good news. But, you know, maybe that's a little bit presumptive.

There's something they don't like even more, and that is governments actually making a positive impact in people's lives, which produces the good news. They hate that even more.

And even more than that, they hate even more than governments making a difference, it's when a progressive NDP government picks up the ball dropped by the federal Conservative cousins in Ottawa. They can't stand that.

All three of these strung together—very gently, I might add—I have to ask the question of anyone in government that might want to answer it: How are the Experimental Lakes Area doing these days?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'm very—*[interjection]* Well, members of the opposition, I think, should welcome this announcement that the Premier (Mr. Selinger) made in Kenora yesterday.

To make sure that Manitoba has a continued role when it comes to freshwater research, yesterday, the Province of Manitoba announced that it would commit to a new long-term arrangement, a contract with the International Institute for Sustainable Development to ensure that there's a sustainable, predictable long-term funding for the institute on which they can now build their role. A significant part of the funding is specifically directed to ELA research. We want to particularly commend the research—

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

Keeyask Community Centre Project Update

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): Mr. Speaker, five weeks ago, the NDP member for Kildonan, the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro, said there would be a second sod-turning for the Keeyask Centre for the TCN First Nation. That was five weeks ago.

I'd like to ask the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro: When exactly will the sod-turning be for the Keeyask Centre?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to the member for St. Paul, who's been so against hydro development in northern Manitoba for some time, that the agreement with respect to building the Keeyask Centre is between the community council and their contractor.

And there is a dissident councillor who's been providing information, who I've met with, and I've talked to the chief and council and I understand the chief said he would appeal directly—discuss the matter directly with the member for St. Paul, the member of the Tea Party, to discuss that particular issue.

I'll withdraw, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: You know, I got the sense here that things were—really turned the corner, and I'm starting to notice that the volume in here is increasing and the off-the-record debate is occurring and then the comments that were made that the minister just

withdrew moments ago are all leading me to the conclusion that we're starting to revert back to our old form, of which I've cautioned this House a few times in the last couple of weeks on this.

So I'm going to ask for the co-operation of the minister in answering the questions and all other members of the Assembly, please—I think we have done a pretty good job in the last couple of weeks, and I'm asking for your co-operation to make sure that we continue to follow that track. I think we did really good, and I wanted to thank you for that, because I think it's a very positive improvement.

Mr. Schuler: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I have some photos to table for the Legislature and they are for the photo album of shame for the minister. In there is a family that clearly could use the Keeyask Centre for the TCN First Nation.

And I'd like to point out to the minister that it wasn't the contractor that got up five weeks ago, or anybody else in this House, who took credit that in two weeks' time there would be a sod-turning. It was the minister. The minister made the promise and we'd like to hold the minister to his word. Five weeks ago, he said in two weeks there'd be a sod-turning.

The family and a lot of families from the TCN First Nation, including the family in the photo, would like to know: Where's the Keeyask Centre?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, the member knows full well, because he talked to the dissident member, and he has been advised by me that he ought to talk to the chief, who advised me that there would be a sod-turning. The member refuses.

* (14:30)

I've asked him to come to my office. We'll phone the chief and council. I've asked him—I'll even go to his office and phone the chief and council. I said phone the chief and council. The chief has told me he'll talk directly to the member, because Hydro does not have responsibility for the use of those funds. The member knows that. He keeps raising inaccurate information in this House alleging that I have the responsibility for paying those funds. I do not.

And I've advised the member that he should talk to the chief and council, who are the ones who are constituted as the independent body to deal with that particular issue. He ought to do that, Mr. Speaker, and not allege things that are not in fact accurate.

Deputy Premier FIPPA Redaction

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): The minister responsible for the FIPPA act has repeatedly refused to stand and answer questions related to the recent cover-up by her office of the racist remarks that were made by the Deputy Premier (Mr. Robinson) of this province.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister explain why these remarks were redacted, or is it simply her department's policy to cover up for ministers' unfortunate comments in the FIPPA—under the FIPPA legislation?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Family Services and Labour): And I will say it again for the benefit of the member from Tuxedo: The way that this was handled is the way that FIPPAs are handled in departments. It came in. There was a—there is a FIPPA—an access co-ordinator in every department that is trained in how to apply the act. The act was applied. That was signed off by a senior civil servant. That is what happened here.

There is a marked change in openness; this government has been much more open and transparent and accountable than the government of the members opposite ever was. And you can look at the amount of information that is provided online that never was, the amount of accountability that's provided online that never was, Mr. Speaker. That is a fact.

I know the members opposite don't like to accept the facts, but that is what they are, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

It's time for—

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Community Youth Resource Centre Mural Project

Mr. Clarence Pettersen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to tell you about an incredible project organized by the Community Youth Resource Centre that is helping to better our community and empower our youth.

Starting last Wednesday, children and youth from the Community Youth Resource Centre began to work to paint murals on the Jack Freedman Bridge underpass. The participants were mentioned by—or mentored by Jasyn Lucas, a northern Manitoba artist known for his ability to depict the surreal moments

in nature. Jasyn guided the children and youth through painting two scenes representing night and day which included seven sacred teachings in Aboriginal culture.

Forty young people aged 6 to 27 were involved in everything from planning to painting the murals. Used to cover up graffiti, the murals add colour and beauty to our city while also encouraging our young people to develop their creativity and explore their imaginations. Many of the young people at the youth centre feel this project empowered them and are now drawing and painting more.

Mr. Speaker, on Monday, the youth centre drum group, Silver Evening Star Singers, played the Grandmother Song and the Friendship Song to celebrate the new artwork. Our elder Margaret Steppan also smudged the murals as a blessing.

Now that the murals are completed, the community is just waiting for some of the young artists to sign the project. By having the children and youth sign the murals they helped create, they are developing pride in their work and also lifting the spirits of the community. The underpass is no longer an eyesore; it's a beautiful display of community partnership.

In addition to this mural project, the Community Youth Resource Centre also worked in the community by volunteering as personal-care homes, helping to green spaces, working to clean up the highway and more.

I'd like to thank Loretta McDermott and all those at the Community Youth Resource Centre, the Indian-Metis Friendship Centre, the NorVA Centre, Jasyn Lucas and his helper, Nicki Brightnose. I would especially like to thank all the young people who joined together to paint these murals, making our city a more beautiful place to live.

Thank you.

West Park Manor

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to acknowledge the 40th anniversary of West Park Manor, a personal-care facility within the Tuxedo constituency.

West Park Manor is a non-profit nursing home and a registered charity that is governed by the principles of the general conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which considers its health message an important part of their faith and a

key component in the dimension of the health-of health.

Being sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it recognizes a strong responsibility to the health of humanity. The church operates a global organization including over 400 hospitals, clinics, nursing homes and dispensaries in over 100 countries around the world. It is also engaged in strong education programs in its hospitals and universities in the medical and paramedical fields.

West Park Manor has 210 staff members along with 65 volunteers, many of whom are residents of Tuxedo and Charleswood. Its volunteers contribute over 5,000 volunteer hours annually and serve the residents of the facility and the community in a variety of ways. This April, as part of the 40th anniversary celebration, several long-serving staff members were recognized for their commitment to West Park Manor, including a volunteer who has been with the facility for over 40 years.

On September 10th, West Park Manor will be continuing their celebrations with an open house for the families of their residents and other members of the community. This event will be followed up with a gala dinner on September 18th, which will focus on a fundraising project to purchase new dining room furniture for the residents.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members of the House join me in wishing the staff and volunteers of West Park Manor, as well as the residents and their families, all the best as they celebrate this 40th anniversary and for many more to come.

Anthony Semeniuk

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I rise today to recognize Anthony Semeniuk, who has been in the—a leader in the Pine River community for the last six decades. Born in 1923 to Steven and Anastasia Semeniuk, Anthony grad-attended grade school in Fletcher district and high school in Pine River, Manitoba. He went on to study agriculture and animal husbandry at the University of Manitoba.

Over 65 years ago, Mr. Semeniuk took over the poolroom operation in Pine River from his father, Steven Semeniuk. The following spring, Anthony bought the well-known Chokecherry Hall from the Ukrainec family and moved it to the village next to the poolroom. He took this and converted it into a first egg-candling station in the community.

In 1949, Anthony bought a taxi business from the late Harry Marko, the local hotel owner. In 1950, Anthony undertook a general insurance agency, which eventually expanded to investment and a real estate brokerage. In 1962, the old poolroom building was torn down to make way for the new billiard hall, which also included a barbershop and a confectionary quarter. The egg-candling building was also remodelled to—into an insurance office.

In 1973, Anthony and his wife, Pauline, purchased the Shewchuk's groceries and brought the business over from the billiard hall. Eventually, this building was remodelled and modified again in order to turn it into a full-fledged grocery and liquor outlet, Semeniuk's Lucky Dollar groceries. At the young age of 90 years old, Anthony still runs the store, which is also a Grey Goose bus depot and it also remains a grocery store in Pine River.

I would like to thank Mr. Anthony for a lifetime support to service to Pine River and local area for his great entrepreneurship for the people in the area.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Julianna Moore

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): I'm proud to rise today and recognize a talented young constituent. Fourteen-year-old Julianna Moore from St-Lazare recently auditioned to participate in the Jamais trop tôt competition. One week later, she received word that she was chosen to represent Manitoba at the International Music Festival, which is held in Granby, Québec.

Julianna's family moved to St-Lazare in 2007, at which time Julianna started singing in both English and French. Since she was 7 years old, she has shared her music gift with the community at local talent shows, fundraising events, at her local church, school functions, cultural events and also at funerals.

Julianna is a self-taught musician, spending countless hours rehearsing. Considered the French song contest the most prestigious in North America, FICG also presents a multitude of unique concerts under the tent and hosts more than 100 artists from Québec, francophone Canada, France, Switzerland and Belgium.

Never Too Soon, or Jamais trop tôt, emerged from a partnership of the international festival of the song of Granby and the national network of the galas of the song. The festival will conclude with a show

featuring 24 songs whose contexts have been written by students aged 14 and 17 years attending a francophone school of one of the five participating provinces.

* (14:40)

These texts are the result of a song-writing workshop offered by a professional writer whose objective is to encourage youth to appropriate francophone song. All submitted in the contest, the 24 best are selected and set to perform—or set to music by performers, semi-finalists of the FICG. These texts, transformed into songs, have been interpreted by singers from 14 to 17 representing all of the different provinces at a high-level show. These interpreters will be accompanied by a group of professional musicians, a music director, a vocal coach and a director. Five days of rehearsals will be required for the creation of this show presented on September 11th, 2013, during the 45th edition of the FICG.

I would like to invite the House to join me in congratulating Julianna on her—on being selected as the Manitoba representative at the festival and, to her, the best of luck in Québec.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Stomperfest

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, I was one of the—of about 3,000 Manitobans fortunate enough to attend the Asham Stomperfest at Reedy Creek on the September long weekend. The Reedy Creek Stomperfest is an initiative of Arnold Asham's and was celebrating its 10th anniversary this year.

The festival provides top-notch entertainment throughout the weekend. This year's lineup included Don Amero on Friday night, Charlie Major on Saturday night and the C-Weed Band on Sunday night. Other entertainers include Ryan Keplin, a multi-talented entertainer who was recently inducted into the International Fiddlers Hall of Fame. The program also featured Ryan Richard, JJ Guy, Diana Desjardins, Kimberley Dawn, Clint and Tom Dutiamé, Shawn Mosseau and White Lightning and the always popular Asham Stompers.

The Asham Stompers are a high-energy jig and square dancing group whose aim is to recapture and preserve the history of the Metis people. Since their formation in 2002, they have performed over a 100 times a year in venues all across North America.

Other events at the Stomperfest include the World Jigging Championship and the World Aboriginal Square Dance Championships. The World Jigging Championship includes age-group classes from the very young to adult competitors. The enthusiasm, showmanship and energy of children as young as 5 years old is wonderful and receives many standing ovations from the spectators.

The Helen Betty Osborne Memorial Foundation is the charity of choice of the Asham Stompers, and a portion of the Stomperfest proceeds are donated to that worthy charity every year.

I congratulate Arnold Asham and Asham Stompers on the success of the Stomperfest and their dedication to promoting Metis traditions in Manitoba. I ask all members of the Legislature to join with me in paying tribute to the people responsible for making the 10th annual Reedy Creek Stomperfest such an entertaining and successful event.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to rule 31(8), I'm announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be one put forward by the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe). The title of the resolution is "Strong Public Health Care."

Mr. Speaker: It has been announced that, pursuant to rule 31(8), that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be the one brought forward by the honourable member for Concordia and the title of the resolution is "Strong Public Health Care."

* * *

Ms. Howard: Mr. Speaker, would you please call second reading of Bill 33.

Mr. Speaker: I may have neglected to call grievances. Just to make sure that the record is correct. I will call grievances. No grievances?

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Mr. Speaker: All right, then, we'll proceed to call Bill 33, The Municipal Modernization Act

(Municipal Amalgamations), standing in the name of the honourable member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire), who has unlimited time.

Bill 33—The Municipal Modernization Act (Municipal Amalgamations)

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to allow this matter to remain standing in the name of the honourable member for Arthur-Virden?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Is there any further debate?

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I want to speak briefly to the hoist motion, which is what we're speaking on at the moment.

I think it was very clear, when this bill was brought in, that the reaction from many, many municipalities—that there were some fundamental problems with this bill, as it was brought forward. And one of these problems was that when the government arbitrarily took a size of a community as 1,000, that this didn't take into account what was the actual capacity economically or in other ways for that community and to what extent there was a need to amalgamate to provide larger services than was possible with smaller municipalities.

Certainly, if it was the government's intention to look at the ability of municipalities to participate in programs like infrastructure programs where there's one-third sharing from municipalities, one-third from the Province and one-third from the federal government, then there are other measures than just the population of 1,000 which should be looked at. These would include the assessment base, the revenue that the municipality has from all sources and whether, in fact, that revenue is 'substantavle' enough to be able to participate. And this is clearly something that should've been looked at but was not. And there are different needs for different municipalities, and those different needs would vary in terms of the infrastructure requirements of a municipality which needs a lot of drainage versus a municipality which is looking at recreational or other facilities versus sewage facilities or water treatment plants. The municipalities are at different stages, have different needs and different capacities to carry out those needs.

There may be some instances where there are efficiencies to be gained because a single municipality may not need a full-time person

managing drainage, but could operate in terms of a third of a full-time person. And it may be easier to get somebody working full-time. Mechanisms to allow municipalities to work together could and should have been looked at in more detail, rather than just imposing the amalgamation. And, of course, one of the issues that has come up relates to the fact that the population of a number of municipalities is quite different in the summer than in the winter. And yet the government provided no mechanism for balancing out this population and achieving number which really reflected what was an accurate year-round estimate for the population.

You know, it could have been done by dividing the summer population in two and adding that, but it could have been done in a number of ways, but this government tried to bring in just a blanket one-size-fits-all. One thousand population is the critical difference between a municipality which needs to amalgamate and then one which did not.

So, Mr. Speaker, there remain major issues with this bill. I thank the House for the opportunity to speak to this bill and put some words on the record, and I look forward to hearing comments from other members and both sides of this Chamber on this motion. Thank you.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Spruce Woods): Mr. Speaker, it's a good opportunity today, thank you, to speak to the hoist motion that's before the House on Bill 33.

We know there's been a lot of controversy over Bill 33 in the last several months since it was introduced by the NDP government. In fact, it—quite frankly, this legislation brought a lot of concern to many Manitobans and quite, in fact, caught a lot of people off guard. And certainly the municipalities themselves were caught off guard in terms of this legislation, Mr. Speaker, please.

And I know there's an article here by Doug Dobrowolski, who's president of AMM. He noted in one article, too, that amalgamation wasn't even on the Association of Manitoba Municipalities' radar until two days before last fall's November 19th Throne Speech, when it was notified by the Province that an initiative would be announced in the speech that required smaller municipalities to amalgamate.

* (14:50)

Well, quite clearly, there was no consultation with the key stakeholders, in terms of this legislation being brought forward. You know, municipalities are wrestling with a lot of major issues, a lot of major

infrastructure issues and that was kind of on their minds, Mr. Speaker, and how they are going to go forward with some of those projects. But, when this announcement was made just at the Throne Speech, and just prior to the AMM conference as well, it certainly caught them by surprise.

And I know when we attended that conference, the municipalities and the councillors and the reeves were busy discussing what the amalgamation would mean to the municipalities. And, clearly, they were caught off guard, and being caught off guard, they were not focused on the real issues before the municipalities. And they were finding themselves, actually, in a lot of cases, arguing over what the future would hold for municipalities, and that really is unfortunate. And it really speaks to the—what the Broadway bullies here across the way are trying to do in Manitoba. They are not consulting with Manitobans, and they were putting forward legislation making it mandatory for Manitobans to do things that they fundamentally don't agree with.

And, quite frankly, we on this side of the House fundamentally oppose to the—what's happening in Bill 33. Bill 33 actually forces municipalities fewer than a thousand people to amalgamate. Now we know there has been instances where municipalities have amalgamated, and it's been a relatively, in some cases, a positive experience. But those municipalities took it upon themselves to voluntarily enter into discussions on amalgamations, and that is the difference, the key difference between Bill 33 and what municipalities want to see and what we want to see. It really is the carrot versus the stick approach here. Clearly, the NDP have brought forward the stick and they are going to force these smaller municipalities to amalgamate, and we don't believe that it's fundamentally right.

And what the government is also proposing in this legislation is to actually choose dance partners for the various municipalities. So what they're doing is they're going to be forcing municipalities to amalgamate with some of their neighbours. And if you know anything about rural politics, you will know that there is a number of local municipalities out there who do not necessarily see eye to eye with their neighbours, and as a result they have chosen not to amalgamate. They have chosen not to maybe join forces in terms of some of the various boards that they may have.

And I want to speak to that for a minute, Mr. Speaker, because there is a number of municipalities

and, in fact, I would say probably almost every municipality across this province is already involved in some kind of shared agreement or shared-service agreement with neighbouring municipalities, and for the most part those seem to be working fairly favourably. And I know we have across the province approximately 20 conservation districts, and each of those conservation districts are made up of a number of local municipalities, and the municipalities work together. They have members from various municipalities that are represented on the various conservation boards and they work together to provide the best interests of their ratepayers, and they find that a very positive way to move forward.

That's just one example too. I know in, certainly, a number of my communities, a lot of the fire departments and emergency services coexist in terms of local municipalities. For instance, you may have a community such as Glenboro—I'll take my home community for example. Glenboro and the Rural Municipality of South Cypress share services and they share a fire department. So they put their budget together in terms of that emergency services component, and it works very well. And we know other municipalities are doing the same thing with various fire departments throughout the province.

We've also—see weed control districts. Weed control districts are also made up of a number of municipalities where the municipalities have found it efficient to go together, to put their budget and their resources together to form an independent weed control district, and, as a result, that district serves a number of local municipalities and, for the most part, serves it quite well. But, if something does go sideways, if there is a disagreement, well, the local jurisdiction will have—has the ability to pull out of that particular district if they like.

And the same thing can be said for recreation districts. I know there's a number of recreation districts around the province made up of local municipalities, and, again, sometimes priorities change within municipalities, and, as a result, some of those recreation districts change from time to time where various municipalities get involved in the plan—in the recreation districts.

The other probably major area where municipalities share services is in terms of planning districts, and we know there's still planning districts that are getting up and running and a number of municipalities that come together to foster development in their areas through the various

planning districts and, it's pretty key. I know there's three or four municipalities in my area where they're—actually gone through the process to amalgamate. They put together their proposal, submitted it to the Province of Manitoba and have been waiting for months and months, Mr. Speaker, to get the approval to operate that particular planning district.

So this also really speaks to the timeliness issue on this piece of legislation. Municipalities are saying it's going to be almost impossible to have all the i's dotted and the t's crossed by the end of the year prior to the next municipal election. And that's really the point of the hoist motion, is to give us six months from now to—for municipalities to get their ducks in a row, and I would ask or submit to you, Mr. Speaker, it would allow time for the government to get its ducks in a row here if they are going to propose—continue to propose the amalgamation of smaller municipalities.

I'll go back to municipalities in my own riding, that being the former town of Killarney and the rural municipality of Turtle Mountain, who actually did go through the exercise and did amalgamate, Mr. Speaker. But that particular amalgamation was a five- to six-year project, because there's a lot of issues that have to be addressed when you go through amalgamations. And they found that to be a fairly time-consuming and quite tedious if you go through all of the complete project and look at all the issues that have to be addressed. I think that's something that the government hasn't thought of in terms of their bud—Bill 33.

Mr. Speaker, there's certainly a lot of issues that have to be addressed, not just taxes issues, but the number of councillors who will represent the given area, how the wards will be allocated. And the other thing that hasn't been really talked about in this legislation is potential changes in municipal boundaries. You know, as things evolved over the years, sometimes we should have a look at the boundaries, because sometimes those municipal boundaries aren't quite as—I would say, not quite maybe where they should be as compared to the way they were a number of years ago. So, if we had a little more time on our hands that might be an opportunity for us to more fully investigate where the boundaries should be for in their respective municipalities. And, of course, if we had more time on our hands, we could enter into a more fuller discussion between municipalities and also the

public, in terms of we should move forward in terms of amalgamation.

And that's another issue I think that should be discussed, Mr. Speaker, was the actual consultation with the ratepayer. Now, we can tell by the time frames inferred in Bill 33 there will be very little time for public consultation. In fact, I would suggest to you that just getting the message out to the public will be an exercise in itself without actually allowing time for individual ratepayers to come together and provide their input to their local council, their local reeve or their local mayor. So that is quite alarming. And I know the government says we should have public consultations, but the reality is with the tight time frames in this legislation, that will allow—not allow for that, really, what I believe would be effective consultation with ratepayers.

And, certainly, Mr. Speaker, I know on this side of the House we are getting calls from individual ratepayers asking how this public consultation is going to proceed. And we're not sure exactly how that's going to proceed, but I would suggest to you that by the time frames here, there is going to be very, very little time for actual public consultation. I would suggest to you that the NDP, through this legislation, will be telling municipalities who they're going to be amalgamating with, when they are going to be amalgamating with them and that will be the end of it.

* (15:00)

Mr. Speaker, it's ironic that we also have Bill 18 before the House. In fact, we're going to have committee on Bill 18 tonight, and Bill 18 talks about bullying. And we firmly believe that bullying is a very important issue that should be addressed and it certainly should be addressed in our schools. And there should be tight rules around the issue of bullying, what represents bullying and how we're going to deal with bullying.

Well—and we'll get into that debate another day on Bill 18, but quite clearly we're not satisfied that the NDP have—are—really know where they're going in terms of the building—bullying legislation that they're providing under Bill 18. So over there they're trying to effectively manage bullying under Bill 18. Well, we're not so sure they can effectively manage bullying under Bill 18 at its—as it's currently written, and we're certainly looking forward to the public comments starting tonight on Bill 18.

But given that, Mr. Speaker, Bill 33, in my mind, is atypical government bullying. This is a bill designed to bully local municipalities. There was no consultation on this. The municipalities are going to be told in which municipalities they will amalgamate with if they have not already gone out and had discussions with neighbouring municipalities. And I know there's a lot of municipalities in that situation where there—some of them are having discussions. But some of them, as I said previously, do not necessarily get along with their neighbouring municipalities. So that is a tougher pill to swallow. So we will see what the outcome is in terms of Bill 33 and whether the government of the day will look at any amendments after we hear from people coming forward to committee.

Mr. Speaker, you know, Doug Dobrowolski, who certainly has been involved in municipal politics for quite some time, he goes on to say in his—one of his articles that the government feels that immediate amalgamation of smaller municipalities will allow for efficiencies, but we feel that this is not addressing the real problems that exist in rural Manitoba. Now, this is coming from somebody that really understands what's going on in rural Manitoba and how municipalities work.

Mr. Speaker, I also had letters from some of my municipalities who are concerned about Bill 33, and from the Village of Cartwright, in a letter signed by Mayor Bruce Leadbeater there—it talks about some of the concerns that he and his council have as well, and he's concerned about the issue of amalgamation going forward. And clearly municipalities and rural municipalities and town councils quite often have different priorities in terms of how they want to move forward, and clearly the provincial government has different priorities in terms of how they want to move forward as well. Mr. Leadbeater, he raises the issue here and he points out a line that's—is currently in bill 'fif'—pardon me—33 that causes him some concern. And he quotes in his letter: significant complexities which cannot be adequately considered and addressed by the deadline, section 3(5), and he's pretty concerned about that. And his concern is if the local municipalities can't iron out their differences, what are the implications moving forward?

And I would suggest under Bill 33, the government with their heavy hand will come forward and tell those municipalities who will be amalgamating with who, when it will happen and what the repercussions will be in terms of the amalgamation. And, furthermore, they may even lay

down the parameters around the amalgamations, Mr. Speaker, and lay out some of that criteria that those municipalities maybe have not been able to iron out themselves. So clearly he is concerned about that aspect of it and he's certainly concerned and their council is concerned about the tight time frames as well to move that forward.

I also had a letter from the Rural Municipality of Argyle. This particular letter is signed by Reeve Bob Conibear there from that municipality, and, Mr. Speaker, I just want to quote from the issues that they are raising in regards to amalgamation. And just to quote from this letter it says: Since this announcement, Minister of Local Government (Mr. Lemieux) has attended meetings with the municipalities and has indicated that amalgamations are going ahead no matter what we have to say. This is a clear indication that the government is not listening or caring how the municipalities feel about this decision. I would suggest to you that is probably as close to a definition of bullying tactics as we can get. So, clearly, the NDP are using bullying tactics to get their way in terms of Bill 33.

Mr. Speaker, and this letter goes on to talk about the actual cost savings that the NDP are throwing out in terms of amalgamation, and the letter says: The rural municipality of Argyle is not being forced to amalgamate at this time, but it is still going to cost us money for the following reason: we currently share several services with surrounding municipalities and some of these municipalities are being forced to amalgamate. The planning district, the recreation district, the weed district are just some examples of the services we share with other municipalities. These service districts will have to be reworked as each of these services are shared with different municipalities. This comes with a hefty cost for each municipality involved.

Now, Mr. Speaker, clearly, there's extra costs that are going to be incurred by municipalities whether they are forced to amalgamate or whether they are going to be amalgamating on their own, or even, in this case, a municipality that may not even be forced to amalgamate and may not amalgamate will still be impacted by Bill 33. And that's something that I think sometimes we lose sight of when we, as legislators, when we try to resolve an issue, end up making different consequences for individuals, or, in this case, municipalities, and in this case, individual ratepayers across our province.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to you I'm not sure what was broken previously. I'm not even

sure what the NDP are trying to fix here under Bill 33. They certainly are creating a lot of confusion and a lot of mental hardship for municipal councillors across this province, and certainly, if that was the intent of Bill 33, well they certainly have achieved that. But the unfortunate side occurrence here is that those municipalities and those councillors and those reeves and those mayors are being sidetracked into this discussion about amalgamation and have sometimes—will lose sight of some of the other important projects that should be looked after in terms of their own local municipality. And that certainly is cause for concern by itself.

Now, I know the NDP seem to be big on amalgamation. That seems to be something that they're talking about in different areas. I know we had the same minister involved in school amalgamation a number of years ago. We've got the NDP out there now who have amalgamated some of the regional health authorities, Mr. Speaker, and, clearly, I would suggest to you the jury is probably still out in terms of what amalgamation will do for regional health authorities. We certainly look forward to see the outcomes there. We certainly know there's more and more people being hired within the regions for administrative purposes. So we will certainly wait to see what the outcome is there.

Certainly, from the schools' perspective, I don't think that's been a cost saving over the years. I'm sure we'll find that, in a lot of the cases when schools were amalgamated—school districts were amalgamated, the highest 'denometer' is looked at and, in fact, probably did not save either the Province of Manitoba money or, I would suggest, individual ratepayers.

I know there's others, Mr. Speaker, that certainly want to speak to this legislation as well, but it certainly is an interesting discussion that we should be having, and I'm certainly looking forward to this particular legislation coming forward to committee, hearing what councillors and reeves and mayors from across the province have to say. And we certainly hope that the NDP will be open to suggestions that they may bring forward in committee at some point in time.

So, with that, I just wanted to thank you for the opportunity to speak on Bill 33.

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, once again it gives me great pleasure to rise to put a few words on the record in regards to this hoist motion on Bill 33 today. I'd just like to add to

what our member on this side of the House from Spruce Woods had put on the record in regards to looking forward to hearing various presenters coming to committee on Bill 33. I'm actually hoping that some of the government members do take a good look at this Bill 33 and possibly have a change of heart today and maybe vote in favour of the hoist motion, being able to set it aside for six months and actually give the minister—as we've questioned him quite a few times in the House—give the minister an opportunity to make his way outside to chat to some of those municipalities that are affected under Bill 33 and maybe come up with some amendments to Bill 33 that the various municipalities could agree upon.

* (15:10)

Bill 33, The Municipal Modernization Act, will make it law that municipalities with fewer than a thousand residents must amalgamate. Now, Mr. Speaker, we know that this came about after the Throne Speech last fall in 2012. And it basically had surprised many, many people that they were bringing this forward, because they did not—the minister and his department—did not go through the regular process when you're creating a bill or making some changes to an act, and that would be consulting with Manitobans.

Now, the impact that this is going to have on many municipalities is that basically it is imposing amalgamations, there's no real improvements in cost savings will be afforded to the municipalities and the local democratic representation will be drastically limited. And we know that for a fact, Mr. Speaker. In fact, there was no plan put forward by the minister when he stood up at—during the Throne Speech and also at the AMM conference last year. There was no plan to be brought forward.

And one of my—and I know I've said this more than once in the Chamber, Mr. Speaker, and asked questions to the minister as well. I have a couple different situations happening in my constituency. And one of those municipalities that are being forced to amalgamate is the Rural Municipality of Victoria Beach. And I know that I've said on more than one occasion and I've pleaded with the minister and many, many other people—not only permanent residents of Victoria Beach but also seasonal residents of Victoria Beach, have not only emailed me and cc'd—or cc'd me on the various emails that have gone to the minister, and pleading with him to make amendments to the bill, but of—also various

phone calls and various consultations or chats that I've had with those constituents and non-constituents, for that matter, on this issue.

There is no one that I have met through consultations, through emails, that are supporting Bill 33. So that's why I applaud the efforts on our side of the House to bring forward this hoist motion to delay it for six months and to give the opportunity for the—again—for the minister to go about and have those consultations with those municipalities.

I've asked on more than one occasion for him to list the dates that he has had meetings with Victoria Beach. I know and he knows that those meetings did not happen. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, is that there is four—over 4,000 people living in Victoria Beach in the summer months, and that's roughly 2,200 taxpayers. And so, many of the emails that come across my desk are questioning the fact that, how come their votes do not count? Why is this minister moving ahead with Bill 33 and ignoring the fact that there are over 4,000 people who do count in the RM of Victoria Beach, who do pay large taxes, and also a lot of them are very angry. Why are they angry? They're also angry because in these taxes that they pay to the municipality there's, of course, the education tax, and because these are their seasonal properties, they don't get the—they do not get the education tax rebate on there as well. So they're actually ending up paying more.

And many of them have applauded the—our side of the House for holding the government to account and also the amount of effort that the municipal council, headed up by Reeve Tom Farrell, as well, for the steps that they've tried to do to postpone this, if not negate it, and to have—try to have some of those conversations.

Now, Victoria Beach is very self-sufficient, Mr. Speaker. The total assessed value of RM of Victoria Beach is more than \$380 million. They managed to build a drinking-water treatment plant at a cost of \$3.2 million, and this was done without any provincial assistance and is designed to serve 5,000-plus people.

The fact is, I wanted to stand up today and make sure that we put a few words on the record in favour of the hoist motion because I truly feel that the 10 months since the Throne Speech and since the minister has been answering various questions throughout the House—in fact, Mr. Speaker, he has not made the trip north to Victoria Beach or even downtown Winnipeg here, to have those

conversations with the reeve and council or any of the residents, whether that be permanent residents or seasonal. The fact is that their votes count. And that's what I want to see happen. I want to see the proper democratic process followed. I would love to see, again, the government side stand up and put a few words on the record in regards to the hoist motion, for or against. That's the biggest problem, is we don't hear what the plan is and what the reasons for it.

So, with that, I'm going to allow other people to put a few words on the record in regards to the hoist motion. I know that, no doubt, the government side is going to vote down the hoist motion and, therefore, we're going to probably see the residents, whether they're seasonal or permanent, of Victoria Beach and many, many other municipalities that are being affected by this bill, Mr. Speaker, come to committee, voice their concerns, and I'm strongly encouraging them to come and plead with the minister and, at the very least, get some amendments done up to Bill 33 because I think some municipalities are targeted for no apparent reason. So, with that, I thank you for your time.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, I do want to put a few words on the record in regards to the 'holst'-hoist motion brought forward by the member from Steinbach, and I can seriously say that this is a perfect opportunity for the government to have a sober second thought.

In fact, I know the member from Gimli knows this fellow quite well; Rob Campbell is his name, from the Village of Dunnottar, and this is a publication that was just in our local Free Press that has some suggestions for the government.

In fact, it goes on to say: I would ask the member from St. Boniface to engage in a sober second thought regarding forced amalgamation. Make it voluntary exercise between municipalities which best unique needs the challenges of their communities. At the very least, uphold the spirit of Manitoba municipal act, which recognizes the reality of cottage communities in law, in particular, articles 86(3), also 93(1) of the act, regulate election dates and campaign periods in Victoria Beach, Winnipeg Beach and Dunnottar. By changing the municipal election dates from July to October, it will be more difficult to politically engage summer residents. This is one factor-indicator of large or true forced amalgamations significantly reduces the number of elected municipal officials in Manitoba.

By eliminating close to half of all municipalities, the Province drastically reduces accountability. These changes do not bode well for the democratic process. How ironic the popular pier, promoted with the pride of the Province, is welcome Manitoba to—welcome home page may longer be in the public in our area with the risk of amalgamation. We face an unwelcome possibility that the only pier stretching off the shoreline will be privately owned, such as the legacy of opposed amalgamation with no consultation.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, we heard very clearly that last year during the Throne Speech, the government decided in their wisdom to bring forward this amalgamation legislation, and they announced it. They announced it at AMM and made it very clear that this was the mandate of the government. And what we've seen very clearly is a push back from a large number of the municipalities, and I know I've received letters; I know the government has received letters, and we've received emails, and the government say, well, no, things are going just fine, everything's great. Well, I can tell you, the cc on the emails has every member of that side of the House copied on this legislation, so we know very clearly that they've got a number of the same emails and letters that we have.

* (15:20)

In fact, the Rural Municipality of Park has very serious concerns, and we know very clearly that they have huge considerations as well. In fact, this letter was signed by Craig Atkinson, the reeve, who asked the government to have another second look. And we've met with the AMM, a number of our side-people on this side of the House met with them, and I know the minister has asked for amendments to be brought forward by us and the AMM, and we'll be happy to table those. We know very clearly that there's a number of issues, in particular, not only with the Village of Dunnottar but others as well. We know Victoria Beach has a number of concerns that they brought forward as well.

And we know that other municipalities that's been impacted, another one in the Gimli constituency of Riverton, the town of Riverton, and I know very clearly meeting with those folks and, in fact, I met with them again last week. I was up in that area and they asked for a meeting and I can tell you we're listening to Manitobans and we hear very clearly they have serious concerns and I know that I'm looking forward to what the member from Gimli has

to say, you know, in this regard because, you know, it's part of his riding. I know he's going to make sure that those people, in fact, those voices are heard. I knocked on one individual's door and it happened to be a councillor there, and he said, you know, I just feel devastated not having the opportunity to have input into this amalgamation issue.

So he said, with this hoist motion, that'll give us the opportunity to be able to meet with our MLAs, meet with our government folks in preparation for our AGM coming up in November. Hopefully, the government will listen to you in this hoist motion, and, in fact, we hope that the government does take a second look at this thing and have the opportunity to have feedback from those RMs, in fact, to make sure that this legislation is really something that is best for all Manitobans, not just for the Province of Manitoba.

In fact, a number of municipalities and towns and communities and villages have an awful lot to lose. Remember, a number of those municipalities and communities already share services whereby they're sharing fire services, other things, community halls, curling rinks, hockey rinks. A number of those initiatives are already being followed so this is a prime opportunity for the government to sit back and have that consultation that we think is so badly needed on this piece of legislation.

So we are hoping that the government will support this hoist motion, and I know that a number of other MLAs, in particular, want to speak on this, so on the hoist motion we'll leave it at that and, hopefully, we'll have enough debate on this thing to make it become a reality and, hopefully, all members will support the hoist motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Any further debate on Bill 33 and the amendment thereto?

House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: Question before the House is the amendment to Bill 33, The Municipal Modernization Act (Municipal Amalgamations).

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

Some Honourable Members: No.

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

Recorded Vote

Mr. Cullen: I request a recorded vote.

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

* (15:40)

Order, please. The question before the House is the amendment to Bill 33.

Division

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

Yeas

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

Nays

Allan, Allum, Altemeyer, Ashton, Bjornson, Braun, Chief, Chomiak, Crothers, Dewar, Gaudreau, Howard, Irvin-Ross, Kostyshyn, Mackintosh, Maloway, Marcelino (Logan), Marcelino (Tyndall Park), Nevakshonoff, Oswald, Pettersen, Robinson, Rondeau, Saran, Selinger, Struthers, Swan, Wiebe, Wight.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Yeas 16, Nays 29.

Mr. Speaker: Declare the amendment accordingly defeated.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: Now, to resume the main motion on Bill 33, any further debate?

Honourable member for River Heights.

Mr. Gerrard: No, I've already—

Mr. Speaker: Oh, I guess the honourable member for River Heights is yielding to the honourable member for Emerson.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Just trying to co-operate with the lone ranger in town here.

It gives me great pleasure to stand up and speak to this Bill 33, and I guess there's a lot of concern from the municipalities. I represent a number of municipalities. I've sat on a municipal council for six years in the past, and there's a lot of concern from these municipalities that they're being forced without any consultation, none whatsoever. There was no speaking to them, no consultation before the announcement, and the announcement was made in the most inopportune time that one could expect.

The announcement was made at the AGM for the AMM, and it certainly created quite a buzz that evening when the minister said there will be an amalgamation and it will go through. He put unreasonable timelines on this amalgamation, and, quite frankly, after putting these timelines on we found out—or the municipalities found out—that there was really no road map to the end of this discussion whatsoever; there were no guidelines. And so the minister, he kind of dealt with this as he went along. Every time a question was raised and he would try and address that question and there would be new criteria all the time. It showed disrespect—disrespect for the municipalities.

And, as the member for the Interlake pointed out that a lot of the municipalities were just dysfunctional, so that's the level of disrespect coming from that quarter and it actually goes with the other things that he has been saying about municipalities. But, at the same time, Mr. Speaker, the minister himself said that they were—they acted like insolent children.

And they had their district meeting, Mr. Speaker, and the municipalities from—*[interjection]*—the municipalities—I don't—was he throwing that at me? No? Okay. Thank you. Because I had my back turned to him there for a minute. I didn't want to get personal with him, but, at any rate, I'm losing my train of thought now here.

But some of the big issues that did come out of the district meetings that were just held this past summer were very, very clear. And those decisions made by many municipalities were that they weren't interested in—at all in amalgamations. And I know there's municipalities like Mossey River and the

town of Ethelbert and the municipality of Ethelbert, that there's a forced amalgamation there and—but there's no co-operation whatsoever between the town of Ethelbert and the municipality of Ethelbert, and we find that in different places.

If there is co-operation and if there is a will to amalgamate, by all means facilitate that and facilitate it for that reason. But you have to understand that the capital investments that these municipalities all have and capital assets they have, but as well as the capital liabilities, need to be taken into account.

And looking down the road, many of these are hard to evaluate, and having that done by the end of the year was completely impossible when you had zero guidelines from the minister when he brought this in. The timelines were terribly, terribly short and unrealistic, and at the same time there were no cost savings, no cost savings whatsoever. The municipalities, many of them have worked back and forth together, and I know there's municipalities like—I'm going to—I believe it's Minnedosa and Odanah that share an office. They share some equipment. But they also have their identity, and people in these ridings that share these things have been co-operating for years. They don't have to be forced by Big Brother government at all.

And if there's no cost savings for the other municipalities where we have municipalities with a population in 2010 when the last census was taken, these municipalities are within 50, within a hundred, of being the number 1,000. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll say to you that the crescent, the crescent that's in southern Manitoba and around to the eastern side of the province, has grown exponentially in spite of the management by this particular government, in spite of the mess that they have made with a lot of their investments or lack of investments, which I should point out, the lack of investment. These communities and municipalities have grown exponentially.

And so in two years it's not unrealistic to think that a place like Plum Coulee would have gone from 870 up to a thousand or 1,200. There's no question that that could easily have taken place. And I know for a fact that that municipality wanted to do some expansion. They wanted to grow their community and allow subdivisions, and there was a roadblock thrown up by this particular government. It was thrown up and said, no, you can't do that right now; we've got something else in the works. But no, they wouldn't tell them why. They just couldn't do that.

They couldn't do this extra subdivision, even though there were people that were willing to build on it. And so they were being held at ransom—held for ransom by this particular administration or some people in this administration. It's—we've heard this in many, many places, and we've also seen many of the different departments in government, when applications for subdivisions have been put forward, other departments that had absolutely no interest whatsoever in those particular subdivisions, would say no to it. And then it stops and you go through another process. You go through it for some time. But, Mr. Speaker, there was no cost savings to this forced amalgamation.

We in Canada believe in a democracy. These municipalities have balanced their books, and they're obligated; they're obligated to balance their books every year. Every year they have to file their budget and they have to balance the books. They're limited on the taxation that they can do. They're limited on how much money they can borrow, and yet they continue to survive. They employ people in the municipalities that understand what that municipality needs. The local concerns are addressed by the people that are the closest to them.

* (15:50)

And I take my hat off to these people that put their names forward on councils. These people sit in church with these individuals, with their constituents, they curl with their constituents, they play baseball with their constituents, they fundraise with their constituents. They're on church boards with them. They have to be responsive. And they are responsive to the needs of the constituents in the municipalities. But when you make that municipality so much larger, and then it becomes that they're out of touch with reality for that particular area that the councillor is representing—and many of the municipalities have five or six or three councillors, but many of them now are electing them at large.

And when this concept first came out—the concept came out that there would be no award systems. They were going to take that system away and they were going to elect at large. So that meant that if there was a town in the municipality or villages like we have in the municipality that I live in, in the RM of Franklin, there's a number of small villages like Tolstoi and Rosa River and Rosa and Killarney and Arnaud, and all of these people said, well, we're not too sure of, you know, Dominion City is the biggest centre in that municipality and they

could probably control the whole municipality. And that was a concern for many other municipalities. But first one municipality tried it and it worked very well, and it has worked well in a lot of other ones.

There's been variations of this system, of a large—what they've done is in De Salaberry, for example, a municipality that I represent, they've split the municipality into three equal parts with an equal population, then three equal parts elect two councillors, and they're elected at large then. They're elected for that particular area and so they have to be responsive. And, because municipalities work just the same as governments do, all governments, they work on committees. So, if there's an individual committee that's on a—or an individual that's on a gravel committee and he just gravels his own area, he gravels his own road, his own driveway, and I see that my colleague from—[*interjection*] I beg your pardon?

An Honourable Member: It could be a she.

Mr. Graydon: And I stand corrected. It could be a she, yes. Yes, it could well be a she—[*interjection*]—and he or she could be the gravel committee chairman and, actually, in the RM of Franklin—[*interjection*] Mr. Speaker, is there anything about your own members heckling you? He or she could be a chairperson—[*interjection*]—but they're quick to pat you on the back when you catch on. That's what I like about them on this side of the House. They've got your back all the time—[*interjection*]—and it's nice to have advice too.

But the truth of the matter is that many of these elections at large, you have to be responsive to all the people in that particular municipality. And, if you're not, your term of councillor will be very, very short. And plus you get a rough ride in the community because, as I said, you sit in church with them; you're on a number of boards with them, and, yes, you fraternize with them. In fact, there's the odd time that you would be at the meat draw at the legion, for example. So you will get a pretty rough ride, but you will not get elected.

But you cannot force people to do things. That's not the Canadian way. That's not the democracy that we have in Canada today. And, if you're trying to force them to do things that are undemocratic, when they balance their books they do that on a yearly basis and the person that's trying to force them to do that does not balance his own books. So the Big Brother government is saying to the little government, you are not balancing—or you are

balancing your books, but we don't have to. We don't have to and, furthermore, we're going to penalize you. We're going to penalize you by telling you what you have to do. You have to pay tax. You have to pay tax on all your equipment. We're going to add some insult to this. The federal government doesn't tax, but the provincial government taxes all the municipalities. They tax them onto insurance now; they're taxing them on their equipment; they tax them on a number of different areas, and what are they getting for it?

There's a hundred and forty-some bridges that are out in the province, many of these in small municipalities that are provincial responsibilities that have not been done. They have not been built, which forces the traffic in those areas to take a lot of roads that aren't made to take that kind of weight. They're offloading that responsibility on the municipalities, for their constituents. And what it causes? It causes them to raise taxes. It causes more issues for these different municipalities.

The fact that the NDP neither consulted nor notified the affected municipalities of their decision before the Throne Speech was delivered, so we, on this side of the House, understand why these municipalities were caught off guard. And not only were they caught off guard, but that were demanded—that were demanded they have to amalgamate.

And so it would be normal to amalgamate with one that's next to you. But that individual that's next to you, that municipality may have a large deficit, it may have capital improvements that are necessary that you already have in your municipality, but you're expected to take that on as a challenge. So we were under the impression, as most municipalities, that you had to amalgamate with the municipality next to you on one of your borders. But the Premier (Mr. Selinger) of the province indicated very clearly to the mayor of Emerson that that's not necessary, you can jump right overtop of a municipality and amalgamate with someone else. Apparently it can happen. So you're going to parachute overtop of one into another municipality, and you write up an agreement that says, I want to amalgamate with Morris, for example. But, in fact, Morris doesn't want them. So the deadline of December becomes unrealistic.

And we're being faced with municipal elections in 2014, and the boundaries haven't been decided and won't be decided by that time. I'm thinking that the minister responsible for Bill 33 would have

introduced some—certainly some amendments to this, after he spent all summer running around from meeting to meeting in this spring's—or summer sessions—or summer meetings. And I know from seeing him at a meeting, that he came in the side door, he stood inside the door and waited 'til everybody had sat down, spoke for two minutes and exited by the side door. He certainly wasn't happy with what he was hearing at this meeting that I was at. He knew that the people there were not happy with the decision that this government had brought forward. But he was—kept being adamant that there was going to be no changes, there was going to be no amendments, that it was going to go through as it's presented.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, that probably shouldn't be the case. And if—I would strongly suggest to the minister that he bring some amendments forward and that he listen carefully. And his colleagues—I think it's important at committee that his colleagues that attend committee holster their BlackBerrys and pay close attention to what the presenters are saying and to issues that those presenters are bringing forward.

And they'll bring forward issues like the extra cost of policing. It isn't a cost saving, this is an extra cost. And what they're saying is, yes, so you have policing now, but it's not with the RCMP. So in three years you can just force the RCMP to take over your policing if it's costing you too much. Well, of course, it's costing too much, it—that's—they've already know that that's going to happen.

We also know that there's other costs involved that really at this point are still unforeseen, but just doing the work that's necessary to put together the proposal for an amalgamation is very, very costly. And so the minister says, yes, I understand that and we're going to try and find some experts that have done this. Well, that wasn't real easy, but he went to work in the staff and hired a bunch of people that are going to help the municipalities put together a proposal for an amalgamation.

* (16:00)

But, if there's not a will on either side of the amalgamation to move forward with this, then, of course, the cost is going to get higher and higher. But, in the meantime, the municipalities have already done their budget. They've done their budget for this year and are proposing for the next year. They're also looking at what capital investments they have for next year and the—that are supposed to and have been

proposed to go ahead. These capital investments may well be a water and sewer line; they may well be a lagoon. It may well be a highway project or an upgrade to a number of their roads. And—or it may be, in the case of some of the municipalities in southeastern Manitoba that are looking at getting a cell service in their area, and they have worked very, very hard with a number of providers, and right now, it would appear that they are actually going to do their own cell service, that they will buy the proper band that's needed for it and will probably manage it themselves. But, of course, they have to go to Big Brother government to get the right to do this, to raise money to run a business. They can't do that right now, even though they are running a business. They run a business every day, all day long, 365 days of the year when they run their municipality. And they run that business and balance their books.

We have to keep coming back to, they balance their books. The NDP find that to be strange. It's foreign. It's a foreign idea to them to balance their books. They haven't balanced their books for many, many years. But at the same time, they want to amalgamate what they refer to as dysfunctional or insolent children. They want to amalgamate them because they have been complying with the law. They haven't been breaking the law.

Municipalities deserve to be treated with respect. And, as I've said before, any amalgamation should be voluntary in nature and led by the municipalities themselves. Now, we know that there are a couple of municipalities that have been in the process of amalgamation and they've been in the process now for five years. And it's a friendly, co-operative amalgamation. It just takes that much time to understand what all of the liabilities are, what all of the capital assets are and what's expected—what's expected going forward so that the constituents in both municipalities feel that they've been treated fairly and that they also have representation, proper representation and that their voices will be heard. They're concerned, really concerned, that in some areas that that's not going to take place. And, because of the size, the extent of the—just the sheer size of some of these municipalities, when they do amalgamate, it's going to be very, very difficult if at one end of the municipality your representation is and you live at the other end.

And I've outlined this before, but it does bear repeating that we believe that the local municipalities are the closest to the ratepayers. They have a

comprehensive understanding of the local and the regional environment, and the environment is very important. And a number of the municipalities that may have a lot of arable land, and then they're forced to amalgamate with someone that has less productive—but still, that land needs to be protected environmentally. And so, how do you rationalize the difference in the mill rates, the difference in the evaluation or the assessed value of these properties, especially if you're contemplating a major investment and a capital project such as a lagoon, which can run into 4, 5 and 6 million dollars? So, quite simply, we're asking the NDP government to begin working co-operatively and respectfully with Manitoba municipalities, rather than adversarial and 'dictatorial' fashion. And the impact that these—of these amalgamations on the municipalities—there'll be no improvement in cost savings, and then the local democratic representation will be drastically limited.

Local governments are further concerned that the amalgamation will fail to address the serious issues currently facing municipalities, including the absence of reliable infrastructure funding and timely flood compensation. And that's a good point, Mr. Speaker, as we talk about timely flood compensation. That's not really a catchphrase with the NDP at all; they're not really concerned about timely compensation for flooding that was a man-made flood, actually, in 2011 that caused all the damage around Lake Manitoba and that surrounding area, but many other areas as well, as we take a look at the flooding from the Shellmouth, for example, and that's been over a year.

There's legislation that says that they have to be paid. They haven't been paid. There's the willingness to even co-operate around Lake Manitoba; 500 claims that have not been dealt with in a reasonable fashion; 2,000 people that are out of their homes, Mr. Speaker. So municipalities have a real concern about any timely flood compensation or actually any flood prevention, and they have a good reason to be because of the track record of this particular government has been terrible.

Over the 13 years, they have spent less than 0.18 per cent of their budget on flood control. That is just horrible. That's shameful, and they should be apologizing on a daily basis to the Manitobans, not just the ones that they haven't settled their flood claims, not with the ones that have been displaced or have been bought out after 100 years on the same family farm, being forced out of business by this

NDP government. They should be apologizing to all of Manitobans for not dealing with respect and dealing fairly with the different municipalities in our province. And when we look at some of the municipalities along the lake, that—they faced horrible, horrible challenges with the lost—of a lot of income from the people, whether they were cabins or whether they were permanent residences that were lost along the lake, they lost a lot of income and were forced—forced—to do a lot of infrastructure work that they haven't been reversed—reimbursed for.

The NDP government isn't concerned about timely compensation for any flooding anywhere, and nor are they really concerned about reliable infrastructure in rural Manitoba. And a good example of that, Mr. Speaker, would be in the RM of Montcalm. There's a number of communities, but two of them depend on a bridge across the Red River. For more than 10 years, the bridge over the Red River on 201 was one lane, one way, had a red light, restricted, so the municipalities on both sides suffered a lot of economic loss. Finally, with the help of the Honourable Vic Toews, who had put forward 17 and a half million dollars towards building a bridge, yes, we got a bridge finally there.

St. Jean, just down the road, what happened in St. Jean? Well, now when we talk about timely flood compensation, paying attention to what the flooding has been doing on the Red River, when they could have—could have claimed a bridge on flood, they weren't paying attention and so then they decided, oh, we got to do some work in Morris on bridge—23 Highway and so what we're going to do is we're going to use the bridge in St. Jean as a bypass while we close this other bridge for four months of the year. Four months on a major highway they're going to close the bridge. So they go out and they spend upwards of \$800,000 on a bridge in St. Jean, and how long was it after they put that up that they put up a barricade? Two weeks, Mr. Speaker, \$800,000 later and two weeks later they put up a sign that said: Bridge closed.

And the minister's office told me and many, many people, that this was a temporary thing, that there had been some slippage on the bank and the ring dike was slipping and—but they were going to lift the top of the bridge off, set it off to the side, repair the pier and put this bridge back on, and they did that. For four months they told me that, and many of the people in my riding, that's what they told them, until we got a letter in the mail that said they

were going to dynamite. They had known all along they were going to dynamite.

* (16:10)

That's why the municipalities do not have any faith in what this minister has said and what he has brought forward, that there was going to be any type of consultation. There was none in this situation, and today a community that's had a bridge and a way to get across the river for over a hundred years has to drive around.

What that's done—it's rang the 'neth'—the death bell for that particular community. The only store in the community was owned by the co-op. It's divested itself of that store now, and it's basically become a convenience store, much like a 7-Eleven, only it's out in the middle of nowhere. The caisse populaire is thinking very seriously about moving. The school is a DSFM school, it's an all-French school, and the enrolment is going to suffer, and they're not sure that they're going to be able to continue.

And yet the minister says, we're bringing this bill forward so that we can provide better services. I'm saying that he's—hasn't been supplying services and these communities have all got a population over—of a thousand. They're over the thousand. They're not—they don't have to amalgamate. That municipality is fine, but there has been no service supplied, and there is nothing in this bill that defines what the services will be going forward. There's nothing that indicates that there's going to be savings to any of the people that are being forced to participate in this.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those words, I hope that this minister listens very carefully and his colleagues listen very carefully at committee and come forward with some meaningful amendments to this bill.

Thank you.

Mr. Ron Schuler (St. Paul): In the last six months, we've seen a lot of legislation debated in this Chamber, in fact, more so than in many years previous. In fact, it's of a historical nature, the session that we've just gone through, and Bill 33 is one of those pieces of legislation that has been fairly contentious.

We understand that we have a majority government, but I think a majority government also has to understand that we have a opposition. And not just do the Progressive Conservative caucus oppose some of the aspects of this legislation, so do many Manitobans, and when we get up and we speak to

this Chamber, we speak on behalf of those individuals who wish to have the ear of the government, the members on the opposite side. Perhaps we can say something that will give them pause to reflect. Perhaps we can say something that will give them some concern, and they will look at the legislation and perhaps tweak it, amend it or, in some cases, even pull the legislation.

Bill 33 certainly is one of those pieces of legislation that we hope, through this last six-month session, that we have maybe gotten through to some members. Perhaps they are listening and are looking at the legislation, looking at the feedback that's coming from across the province. Those, certainly, that are most impacted are trying to raise issues with this government, saying to them the consultation process was flawed, if at all existent, and that there were problems in the way the legislation was put forward. Unfortunately, like most pieces of legislation, there doesn't seem to be a lot of uptake on the—our NDP government's side. We understand that they have a majority that is massive by Manitoba proportions. They have elected 37 members in the last election, and they have the right to put through legislation as they deem fit.

I would like to read into the record—in fact, Mr. Speaker, I was going through my desk and looking at various bills that are going to be coming forward, and I found one of the articles that I had run off for a previous bill. Actually, I had read parts of it into the record on Bill 20. And the author is Thomas M. Cunningham. He's a 15-year veteran of the United States Naval Academy fire department in Annapolis, Maryland, and I want to make it very clear that I give credit to him. These are actually his thoughts, so I want to quote from it.

And he talks about leadership 101, and he puts right next to that, integrity. And throughout the article, he talks about leadership being about integrity. In fact, he lists 14 points about a successful leader, and I'm going to highlight five of them out of the 14.

One of those is comprehension of what power and authority are; second one, to communicate, listen and persuade; the third one, a leader builds morale and can motivate; fourth one, can form or build a coalition; and the fifth one is integrity, character and honesty.

The first point, comprehension of what power and authority are, I mean, I think we get it. We have a government that has the power to bring in this

legislation. They have a substantial majority. I'm not too sure that they ran in the last election on this platform. I don't know if they have the moral authority to do it but in our British parliamentary system, certainly, they have the power authority to do it. My question is: Do they actually have the comprehension of what that means, the kind of lives that they're going to affect?

I think we're all getting a lot of emails where individuals are raising what I think are legitimate concerns. And we've all gotten emails. Some of them are slightly—on various issues—some of them are slightly a little bit more heated and some of them are a little bit more difficult to understand. The emails on this particular piece of legislation, Bill 33, are very clear and concise and they lay out the difficulties. Other colleagues have read some of them in the record, have talked about those individuals. I won't go there today because what I do want to make clear is that you should have a comprehension of what power and authority are. Just because the NDP has the power and has the authority doesn't necessarily make it right what they do. My first point.

Second of all, if you go back to this article, he states, to communicate, listen and persuade. And I would put forward the argument that this NDP government, minister, in particular, did not do that, and if he did, it wasn't in a very respectful manner. To communicate: what that actually means is being able to go out and put forward what it is you're trying to do with your legislation, try to communicate why this would be the right thing. Further, to listen and then persuade, and I would suggest to this House that the minister responsible did neither communicate properly, certainly didn't listen and didn't persuade. We've heard examples—and I'm going to reference a few later on—but we've heard examples of the minister coming in, having his say and leaving. That's not listening. And you don't persuade people that way either. If you're just there to tell them what's going to happen, you're not going to persuade them. And I doubt that the minister did his job in either of those.

The third one, builds morale and can motivate, and we've not seen anywhere within this government on this particular piece of legislation that they have either built morale or that they've been able to motivate people on their side. This piece of legislation will go in front of committee. There are going to be a lot of individuals that are going to speak, and I would suggest to this House that

probably the majority of them are going to raise concerns. It doesn't show that there is a lot of motivation behind this legislation; in fact, if there's one thing the government has done on this piece of legislation, as on others—another bill that we're going to do tonight—there seems to be an ability by the NDP to motivate people to come out and speak against the kinds of legislation they've put forward.

The next point, point four, from this article is: can form or build a coalition. On Bill 33, you know, maybe this NDP government was successful in the fact that they actually built a coalition that got together to oppose the government. That's the only coalition, and I don't think the writer of this article meant it that way, that you shouldn't actually do things and use power, use authority to actually get people to dislike you and dislike what you're trying to do with the power and authority that you have. I think what they're trying to say is that you're trying to build a coalition for what you're trying to do. In the case of Bill 33 the government has failed; they have not built a coalition. They have not filled—formed any kind of an organization or a groundswell that people actually support this legislation. In fact, they've done the opposite; they've actually riled people up against them.

* (16:20)

The last point that he makes out of the 14, the five that I listed out of the 14, is integrity, character and honesty. In fact, he goes on and I'd like to read into the record and I want to give this individual credit. I mentioned his name earlier, and I quote: Integrity is defined by Webster's as a firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values, and he puts in brackets incorruptibility. I go on, quote: An unimpaired condition—or he puts in brackets, soundness—and he goes further and says: and the quality or state of being complete or undivided. And he calls that completeness. Basically, what you have defined by Webster's dictionary is incorruptibility, soundness and completeness.

Well, I don't think this bill is corrupt in any fashion, but when you get to the second point of soundness, does it withstand the test of scrutiny? And it hasn't. Those that it affects most, it has gotten to them, to a point of time where they are in a state of uproar, despair and concern. It does not withstand the test of time. And I would suggest to government members, maybe look at Webster's dictionary. Look at the definition and decide for yourselves if Bill 33 is, in fact, one of those bills that should proceed.

The last one is completeness. In fact, we have seen from various speakers, individuals that have emailed all of us—I know all of us have gotten them—that this bill is not complete in its current state. It should probably not proceed. It is one of those bills that more than likely should be pulled back. We had a hoist motion. Government had an opportunity, could have given it some time to be further debated. Perhaps it could have gone out and consulted some more and then come back perhaps with a more complete bill if they deemed it so possible. But to just run this bill through is unfortunate.

I'd like to move on and just quote a little bit more from the same article: There is a common thing among—theme among experts who have studied or written about modern leadership, that all leaders must act with integrity at all times. The first reason for acting with integrity is that subordinates are constantly observing the lead figure. Go on to quote: A leader is the role model by which the group that they command is most influenced. Eventually this will lead to a molding or modelling of the group's behaviour. That is why a leader must have and maintain the highest standard of character and integrity.

I would like to put forward to this House, and I will close with this: to have members of the government or the management team or the leadership team, however you want to call it, but the lead minister, going out and referring to opponents, people who oppose the legislation, and calling them howling coyotes. I don't know where that kind of a name-calling fits in anywhere in the definition of what it means to be a leader, to be an individual with integrity and character, because I will read again for this House, this one quote. Again, I want to make sure I give credit to Thomas M. Cunningham; these are, in fact, not my own words. And I quote: There is a common thing—theme among experts who have studied or written about modern leadership. That all leaders must act with integrity at all times. The first reason for acting with integrity is that subordinates are constantly observing the lead figure. Referring to them as howling coyotes probably does not fit that test. It doesn't fit the smell test. It—you could put that on the scale and it will always be found wanting.

Then there was this second quote. I understand from the leadership team the minister called the—his opponents insolent children. I don't know if anywhere in anything that we've read about leadership and integrity, if referring to your opponents as the leadership team, as the main

individual driving the legislation, that you would actually find you calling those opponents of yours insolent children. In fact, there was a third time when the minister called them dysfunctional, and then you wonder why there is such animosity towards the government and Bill 33.

I'd like to quote from the Winnipeg Free Press. I believe—and make sure I get the date right here. I do not have the date. It was Winnipeg Free Press, and I apologize to the House. I—it was written by Bruce Owen, and I apologize to the House. I don't actually have the date, but I will quote from the article in which he says: "There are no exemptions. There are none. Zero. Nada. Squat. Nothing. There's no magic wand either," he goes on to say. This is the minister responsible for Bill 33, the minister responsible for his department.

In everything that we have studied, everything that's gone on the record today, and I would do a compare and contrast, and I'm mindful of time today, if you look at some of the things, some of the five points of leadership, comprehension of what power and authority are. To go out and say that there are no, zero, nada, squat, nothing, no changes, calling people howling coyotes, it doesn't fit. It does not fit that particular point of leadership. To communicate this and persuade was the second point of leadership. Does anything that the minister says, calling opponents insolent children or dysfunctional, doesn't fit there.

The third, and I would ask the Legislature, listen to what the third point is again: builds morale and can motivate. I would put forth that the minister failed miserably by going out and making statements that were so inflammatory that there was never an opportunity that he could ever build the morale or 'motivate' individuals to back this piece of legislation.

Fourth point—and I've put this on the record before—I want to do it as a compare and contrast: can form or build a coalition. By calling those who have concerns insolent children, dysfunctional and howling coyotes, will never, never get you to the point where you want to go where you build a coalition. If you want people to follow, you've got to lead with integrity. You've got to be able to bring people behind you. That's the whole point behind the article that I'm quoting from.

And the last point being: integrity, character and honesty. And I would say that the minister and his NDP government has been found terribly wanting on

this particular bill, Bill 33, in all those respects. The integrity: there wasn't a proper 'consulla'—consultation process; character: I don't think the minister showed good character by going out and slandering his opponents; and honesty: I don't think the minister, on either three of those points, is actually done what he should have done and that's why we have so much opposition to Bill 33.

And I would comment to members opposite, look at what people are saying. Look through it through a prism whereby—there was a lot of writers out there who talk about leadership, who talk about how these kinds of bills, whether it's within a workplace, whether it's in a legislative process, on how you should bring people along with you. The fact, and I've said this before, the fact that you have the majority, the fact that you have the authority, doesn't necessarily make it right. You still have to do your work and you've got to do it with integrity, and I would suggest that the government hasn't done that.

I conclude by saying I would recommend to this government, do not take your power lightly. Do not take the authority that you have been given by Manitobans carelessly or callously. Do not use Might is Right as a rationale for doing things. I would recommend to members opposite: listen to debate, listen to what happens at committee, listen to presenters, show leadership, show integrity, and, on Bill 33, because it has been found so wanting, my suggestion is to members opposite, perhaps they should bring a hoist motion or perhaps even let this bill go and come back with the proper consultation, a respectful consultation, one that shows leadership and integrity.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to put a few remarks on the record on Bill 33, The Municipal Modernization Act (Municipal Amalgamations). I do wish that some of the members opposite would get up on this bill and indulge in some healthy debate on it. I'd like to really, because of my long-standing municipal background, I would really like to hear their rationale, their true rationale for putting this bill forward.

* (16:30)

Mr. Mohinder Saran, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

The hoist motion, which the debate ended on just a few minutes ago, I think, probably should have been endorsed by the House. Another six months to

have a look and explore this process of municipal amalgamation, I think, would have been quite helpful in the whole process. But, obviously, the government, the NDP government, chose not to embrace that hoist motion.

We've had conversations a couple of times with the minister. And the minister's even made the remarks in the House that we should be putting forward amendments to improve the bill. This is a bill that really is beyond being improved. It's a bad bill. It's a poor bill. It's a bill that wasn't very well thought out; put time frames in that—on the amalgamation processes that are not doable, can't be met. And, being as how they've decided they don't want to indulge in our hoist motion on this bill, the next best thing they can do is pull the bill.

I know we're going to committee very shortly on this bill, and I know there are somewhere around 80 or 90 presenters on this bill at committee. I expect almost unanimously in opposition of this bill. And I expect they will give a lot of good rationale why they don't want to comply with this bill. And I hope the government is going to do more than just pay them lip service. I hope the members that are sitting at committee will actually listen—actually listen—to what these people are saying. They're taking times out of their busy lives to come in here because they really feel strongly about something, and they want to put their thoughts forward, and they want to know that somebody's listened to them. And, when they make a good point, they want to know that they're having an impact.

We've seen too many times where we go through many, many presenters at committee, and no one—the government—on government side—as they move forward with a particular bill, pay any attention to it. They don't make any meaningful amendments. They don't do anything to build on what they hear at committee.

Now, I'll go back to what I said before: Making amendments to this bill is probably almost a waste of time because it's a poor bill. There's—I totally support—and I totally support the principle of municipal amalgamation. I think some municipalities do need to amalgamate, but forced amalgamation is the wrong way to go. All you did—all that was done by this government was to create anxiety, create frictions between members of councils, and between one—from one council to another—where they've caused a lot of—a lot of—dissension and grief out in the municipalities.

They—I believe that the reason the bill was introduced when it was, without any consultation, was based on the fact that the government wanted to misdirect, they wanted to get the heat off their lack of providing infrastructure funding to municipalities. And this was a good way to do it.

The convention last fall, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities convention last fall, was going to be centered and key on infrastructure funding in municipalities. And, by introducing the amalgamation proposal a day or two before the convention, it deflected all that discussion on infrastructure funding.

You know, the government goes on at length to say, oh, we have increased infrastructure funding to municipalities by 8 or 8 and a half per cent, whatever the number is they use. They conveniently leave out of—when they're talking about the increases in funding for municipal infrastructure—they conveniently leave out the fact that they've dragged far more money than that back out of the municipalities over the last few years with expanded PST and the PST increase that's going on right now, and so in essence they've dragged the money out of the municipalities. And if they have given them a small increase in infrastructure funding, it's just returning the extra money that they pulled out of the municipalities.

You know, a number of years ago, the federal—Federation of Canadian Municipalities lobbied long and hard—and I was part of that organization when this was going on—to have the federal government remove GST charges to municipalities, and were successful. And across Canada the removal of GST to municipalities resulted in about 400 to 500 million dollars savings to municipalities. That's quite significant. That's like going out and giving the municipalities an extra four or five hundred million dollars, so it was quite significant.

And I had always hoped that the Province of Manitoba—the NDP government and the Province of Manitoba would follow the same guideline and remove PST from municipalities, because in essence what you're doing is you're taxing tax. You're tie—municipalities' income comes off the tax base—the property tax base mostly—and then the Province takes PST from the municipality, which is money that was collected as taxes and then it's taxed again. So, if the NDP government wanted to do something reasonable for municipalities, start a process that removes the PST.

Instead, in 2002 they expanded it to engineering and I believe it was architectural. In 2004, they expanded it to accounting, audits, legal fees, a number of other things. And then in 2010, they really hit them. They extended it to insurance and that resulted in an extra cost to the municipalities outside of the city of Winnipeg—not including the city of Winnipeg—of somewhere between 800 and 850 thousand dollars. That's money that municipalities can make a lot of use of.

Municipalities, by the way, are very, very good at getting the best bang for the buck, at getting the most out of their dollar that they're spending on infrastructure. I remember a number of years ago, the conservation district that I live in, there was a third-order drain—a crossing on a third-order drain, a bridge to be replaced and—north of Neepawa. And the Province—the provincial government said to the conservation district, you handle it and replace it, we'll pay you. Keep track of your bills and we'll pay you. So they did. They replaced the crossing, did a very nice job of it, sent in the bills and the Province sent them back. It said, you couldn't have done that project for that kind of money. Well, they actually had. But you couldn't have done it; you must have missed something. So the manager of the conservation district added a couple of hundred hours of heigh-ho work and built up the bill a little bit, sent it back in and they paid it.

You know, it's the people out there, the municipalities, the municipal people on the ground are the ones that are very inventive, very able to get the best bang for the buck on infrastructure anybody in this province can. The larger you get, the more you lose that direction. The—this whole bill and a number of other actions the NDP have taken kind of revolves around respect and the lack of respect.

* (16:40)

The introduction of this bill, when it was introduced, which I just covered, and the lack of consultation prior to its introduction, and, as I said, the misdirection that came out of it, but also even the interpretation of the act, once again, I spent 20 years on a municipal council, I think a very good municipal council, by the way, in a municipality that's below these population numbers, and I think we were a very good, successful municipality, very efficient. And I was there—once again, I was there when The Municipal Act was rewritten, giving the municipalities more power than they had before, which I thought was a good thing. That was under—

the minister of the day was Len Derkach, was the minister of local government at that time—1997, as a matter of fact. And Len Derkach set up a committee that travelled this province. That committee was chaired by—I believe his first name was Henry Wiebe—was a mayor of Winkler, and Gil Strachan was on that committee. Jack Nicol used to be the reeve—Jack Nicol used to be the reeve of Springfield and a former president of the UMM. He was on that committee. Susan Shineton from McCreary, and they travelled the province. They had hearings all over the province on revamping The Municipal Act. And I know a number of the members over here keep trying to tell me that The Municipal Act says municipalities must have a thousand population. That's not what it says. The Municipal Act says, any new municipalities formed must have a thousand population.

The former municipalities were grandfathered. They were—there was nothing in there that said that they had to have a thousand population. And I remind the members opposite that municipalities are more than people. Municipalities are an area of land, an area of the province. Some of these municipalities are huge already, cover huge tracts of land. Some of the former LGDs are massive—the RM of Alonsa in the north end of my constituency runs for miles. There's not much of a population—it's not highly populated, but the needs of the municipality and the property needs are still there, and that's what, on your tax bill in a municipality, you've got two parts of it: You've got school tax and you've got the municipal tax, and the municipal tax, in my view, is for service to property. And the service to property is not only in the rural municipalities, but also in the urbans, is what municipalities are all about.

So population really isn't a big factor. Population isn't the—shouldn't be the only criteria. Heaven help us, that's—there's no way it should be the only criteria. There are other factors, other issues, that should be taken into account.

After Len Derkach finished off his—and I think that was a great initiative, rewriting the act. I think it did a lot of good for municipalities, but the minister following him was a lady who I have a lot of respect for. Jean Friesen was the minister that happened to be in place when I was president of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities. Jean's constituency was Wolseley in Winnipeg. Jean didn't have a rural background. She didn't have a huge understanding of the urban and rural municipalities in Manitoba. What Jean did was went out and made sure she learned

about them and was dedicated to it and treated the municipalities with the utmost respect. She was extremely well liked by the municipalities, unlike the present minister, who has dug himself quite a hole with the municipalities, Jean was well respected.

Respect goes two ways. If you don't respect someone, don't expect respect back from them, and obviously this NDP government doesn't respect municipalities. So don't 'respe'—don't expect any respect from them.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

You know, the municipality I live in, the RM of Langford, and I'm very proud of it. My family has lived in that municipality since 1890. We've been around about the same length of time as the municipality's been there, actually. The municipality was incorporated 122 years ago. If I got my figures right, I think it was 122 years ago. It's balanced its budget every year, continued to provide good governance for its people and it is the identity of the area. The people know the name of their municipality. They're proud of their municipality.

It was named—the RM of Langford was named after a crossing on the Whitemud River. A family just south of where I live, actually, about five miles south of where I live, there was a family named Langs lived there and they had a barn and the people travelling west, on the—one of the trails going west, the homesteaders would come through there and Langs, they—Lang's was a common stopping place and they corduroyed—and corduroy, by the way, is cutting trees and laying them down to give a solid bottom to a crossing in a river—they corduroyed the crossing on the—in that area. It's called Boggy Creek but it's the upper Whitemud River—they corduroyed that and they called it Lang's Crossing and that got shortened to Lang's Ford and then, lo and behold, when the municipality was formed, it was called Langford. So that's some of the history of my municipality.

We've been a very progressive municipality over the years and I think it's notable that we've been as successful as we have been. You know, when I was president of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, one of the things that we did was travel around the province periodically and visit with each municipality in their own council chambers, and I had the honour, the good fortune, to visit every municipal office in this province at least twice in the—my term at the AMM. I think—I don't want to blow my own horn too much—but I think I

understand municipalities. I think, if anybody in this place understands municipalities, I do.

I saw how municipalities worked. I ran into the odd dysfunctional council and you could tell within five minutes of walking in when you were walking into the office of a dysfunctional council. But by and large—by and large they are honourable people doing an honourable job and doing it almost on a volunteer basis. They do get a small stipend, most of them, but key word is small. It's—it—none of them are getting paid anything significant for what they actually do.

You know, I could go on for quite a while. I know there's other members that want to speak to this bill and I just want to, once again, encourage the members opposite to go to the committee hearings with an open mind. I believe this bill is a flawed, weak bill. I believe that municipalities will go through the process themselves on their own initiative, without being forced, and I believe this is a bill that they should pull. I don't think it's a legitimate bill. All it's done is cause anxiety in municipalities all across this province, and I hope they go to the committee hearings with an open mind, come back to a third reading and give some consideration to taking this bill off the table. Thank you.

* (16:50)

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): I appreciate the opportunity to get up and put a few words on the record regarding Bill 33. Certainly, our hoist motion that was defeated earlier this afternoon says it all in many ways, that this is bad legislation that needs some sober second thought. Isn't that a line from the Senate that the government office so vehemently opposes, but, in this case, it would be good advice. It was brought in, frankly, in a hurry, without any consultation and dealing with another level of government that, frankly, should be held in some respect by this other, second level, of government, simply because they do an awful lot of things that individuals are directly impacted and directly benefit from.

That—the municipal governments are the ones closest to the ground, and, as the member for Agassiz has so eloquently put, they're the ones who actually do a lot of this stuff, that might—someone might develop policy at another level, be it federal or provincial, and say, okay, this must happen. Well, someone has to implement it, and I cannot help but think of the best example was actually during 2011, during the floods. And I know that some

municipalities have been slandered a little bit in terms of saying that they were dysfunctional or not able to handle the stress of it—and it was extremely stressful for a number of municipalities—but the municipalities did wonderful work, both with their staff, with their councillors, the reeves, and, frankly, lining up the volunteers.

None of this stuff would have happened without the municipalities as part of the mix, and they have to be close to the ground. They have to have the contact to the people; they got to be able to go to the phone and phone Joe down the road and say, Joe, we need some help with this, and get reaction. And, because they're held in respect in their community—very few councillors are in it for the money, I can tell you; the money just isn't there. And the reeves, the same. They're really there because they want to make a difference, and they want to do that at the local level because that's where they feel most comfortable and that's where people actually interact with them. So, most cases, councillors and reeves are in it almost as a—to some degree, as a tradition. They have some family connections in some places, or they have a desire and have been great volunteers in the community and they're doing it because they want to do it.

And, for one level of government to go to the other and say, you must amalgamate, without any consultation just seems the ultimate in disrespect and, to some degree, a level of bullying.

And, certainly, there may have been other motivations. We wondered at the time if they were trying to distract because clearly that annual general meeting of the Manitoba municipalities probably would have focused on the infrastructure issue, which is a huge issue here in Manitoba. And I'm sure they'll come back to that, but it certainly took the discussion completely away from that and left them with another set of problems. Now there are some municipalities out there that, frankly, have been talking about amalgamation and slowly working through the process of making it happen and getting to where they want to go.

And the constituency I represent is not one. With the city of Portage la Prairie, at about 13,000, depending on the polls, and the municipality around it at just slightly less, at about 12,000, clearly, there's no need for those ones to look at amalgamation, and yet the minister advised the municipality of Portage la Prairie, which, until a few years ago, was the highest assessed municipality in the province, now

have been overtaken by a couple around the city that have had more residential growth than we have had. They were advised to look around for another municipality to amalgamate with.

Well, they're geographically quite large already, have a lot of responsibilities, a huge tax base, and none of the surrounding municipalities can compare in any way. It would be an elephant and an ant put together, and so clearly none of them had much interest in that and they didn't waste a lot of time, frankly, doing that because what they have done, instead of actually amalgamating, is they have worked out revenue and responsibility sharing with the city of Portage. It worked out very well.

When a new business comes to the community, there's no longer the traditional fight over are you on that side of the line or are you on this side of the line. Who's going to provide the service, who's going to provide the water, who's going to provide the services, who's going to pave the road—none of that is fought over anymore. It is just done, and there is a revenue sharing from the tax base that comes from that and a responsibility sharing in terms of providing the service. And these are ongoing agreements. Did that happen quickly? No, in fact, it took 10 years, start to finish, for that to be developed, but it's because they took the time and made sure that they had everything in place and they had foreseen everything that might be a problem, they have a good working agreement that, in fact, now has been in place for about 15 years.

And those are the kinds of amalgamations, not formal, that will actually work. Doing it at gunpoint and saying, you must get married to this municipality next door to you, has never worked out very well, and shotgun marriages have fallen by the wayside some time ago, and I don't want to see them brought back by government or anyone else.

But this type of agreement is certainly the best way to approach this particular problem and actually has yielded much better results, and I think that that's a model that other jurisdictions should be looking at, and I know some others certainly have followed down this road. And so it is certainly the best way to do this.

Now, in terms of value for dollars—and the member for Agassiz (Mr. Briese) made this point—I don't know anyone that is better at getting the best value for their dollar than municipal councils are. They watch their dollars very carefully because they have to answer to the guy at the coffee shop about

where they spent those dollars. And, believe me, with the press that you get—coverage in most communities, people actually do get asked, well, why did you spend so much money on that? Why was it necessary to spend those extra dollars?

And I think that they are real experts at getting the best value for dollar, and I think that's, frankly, something that other levels of government should be looking at a little harder, is trying to get that best value for their dollar.

And, as I mentioned earlier, in the flood situation, they were just expert at getting things, not only best value for their dollar, but actually getting it done, right away, when it needed to be done, not having to go through the tender process or go try and bring someone in from out of the area. They knew who in the area had the resources, who would have the time and the capability to help them and to get things done on a much more timely basis. And comes to organizing the volunteers, there was simply no one else that could do that.

So we need to stop and think very carefully about whether we're headed in the right direction at this. Certainly, there are, as I said, some municipalities and towns that probably should look at learning to work together a little better, and that's always been a problem in any community. Can't—it's not that many years ago that Winnipeg went from—was it 11 jurisdictions?—down to one with the forming of Unicity, simply because it was—same reason. They were competing for resources. They were competing with each other for businesses. What they needed was a revenue and service sharing agreement, but they chose to go a formal amalgamation; that's their choice. But it was certainly a contentious issue at the time. But what it left people with is no identity other than the city of Winnipeg. You certainly hear comments from people in St. James or Transcona or East K that they have lost their identity in the Unicity that is now Winnipeg. So, certainly, we see great opportunities.

Now, the reality of the time frames that we're dealing with here, frankly, given how long it takes to do this, I don't think there was ever any opportunity

to have the amalgamation process realistically in place in time for the next municipal elections, which is less than 18 months away, formally—because you have to have the voters lists and everything out well in advance to that. So I don't really see that this was ever practical and certainly well beyond the point of realistic timelines now.

So I would certainly encourage the government to do something that would either amend this bill—or to actually withdraw it is probably the best way to do it. Go back, do a proper consultation with the people that are most impacted, and I'm sure that given the notice that they've had, the government has had some radical thoughts on amalgamation and is prepared to push, there'll be a lot of people prepared to talk about how this could be done right.

Now, over the years when I was working in other areas, either with commodity groups or farm organizations, I worked a lot with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities. We would get resolutions coming through our system that really were municipal resolutions, and they would get material that was actually agricultural in content. And rather than fight about who did what, we would sit down a couple times a year and work out, okay, this one really applies more to you; we'll turn this over to you. This was our thinking, but we'll certainly follow up with it, and if we can be of assistance, we can.

And the same thing was done in return—a very constructive working relationship, very positive. It helped us grow and move ahead and actually avoid a lot of problems that some other jurisdictions and other provinces have had with that back and forth between what's good agricultural policy and what's good municipal policy and where do the two actually meet.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart) will have 20 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, September 3, 2013

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