

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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<i>Vacant</i>	Morris	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 20, 2013

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Good morning colleagues. Please be seated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Are we ready to proceed with Bill 205?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: I hear a no. Are we ready to proceed with Bill 208?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: No. Are we ready to proceed with Bill 207?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: I hear a no. Are we ready to proceed with Bill 201?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: Are we ready to proceed with Bill 200?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Speaker: No. Are we ready to proceed with Bill 210?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: We've got it, good.

**DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS—
PUBLIC BILLS**

Mr. Speaker: We'll now call Bill 210, The Seniors' Rights Act, standing in the name of the honourable

Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade (Mr. Bjornson), who has one minute remaining.

Bill 210—The Seniors' Rights Act

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade): I must say, it was quite timely when this bill was brought forward for the discussion that we've had in the Chamber, because in my constituency there's a lot of celebrations that celebrate our seniors.

And, actually, after we had this debate for the first time with this particular bill, I had the opportunity to attend yet again the Petersfield community club celebration of seniors. And it's something that they've been doing for over 30 years or maybe 40 years, if I'm not mistaken, in the community of Petersfield, and it gave me an opportunity to talk to them about all the things that we have been doing for seniors and, of course, I heard the same message that I had started to deliver when we last had this debate. The message was that things that are important to seniors are affordability, and we talked about all the things that we've been doing to make things affordable for seniors. And we talked about health care and how important health care is for seniors in Manitoba and, certainly, it was an opportunity to remind the seniors in my community that members opposite think that two-tier health care is desirable, which it certainly is not in this province and it certainly would not benefit our senior community, Mr. Speaker.

So I see my time's already expired, but I thank you for that opportunity.

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): I'd like to thank the member from Spruce Woods for bringing this bill forward, Bill 210, The Seniors' Rights Act.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and put a few words on the record regarding this important bill to ensure that government provides seniors in this province with the programs, services and supports that they need to live their life in dignity, with the rights and freedoms that they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, this bill states that every senior in Manitoba has the right to freedom, independence and individual initiative in planning and managing his or

her own life. No one could disagree with this statement.

In Manitoba, much more needs to be done to make certain that this objective and all the points outlined in this bill become true in Manitoba. Manitoba seniors who have contributed so much to our way of life—raising their families, building our communities—deserve the best in their later years.

Mr. Speaker, we all know seniors. Seniors have played an important part in our life, whether it be our fathers, grandfathers, grandmothers, people who have just—we've gotten to know over the years, people who have mentored us. Mentoring is an important part of what they've done. They've passed the torch down to us and we need to make sure those seniors have every availability to continue to live their life in dignity.

There are a few items that we must maintain for seniors: health care—health care is a very important part of growing old; housing—if people cannot afford housing, that can set seniors back; and elder abuse—elder abuse is something that happens to our seniors. And sometimes it happens not even realizing that people are doing it, but seniors, because of what they've done and where they've come from, they don't always like to rock the boat or do things maybe upset people, so they're very vulnerable in a lot of cases because they're trustworthy. They've grown up all their lives with being very trusting of people, so people take advantage of that.

Our health-care system—we need to make sure that our health-care system is there to provide services for these seniors no matter where they live. And, Mr. Speaker, I have to state here—go over a story that I can tell—it's not a story, it's a true fact about having to do with the closure of the ER in the Vita hospital. There are a number of people that live 40, 50 miles away in—say, in the Sprague country, that last year were looking for housing in Vita because the housing in Vita is a little bit more affordable, they wanted to be close to a hospital.

Mr. Speaker, being close to a hospital was very important for them. They could not afford to move to Steinbach, they could not afford to move to Winnipeg, they wanted to move to Vita. Now, with the closure of the ER, these people are having second guesses of, well, what do we do now? Like, we want to be close to a hospital, we want to be close to where there's doctors, but yet we can't afford to move to Steinbach.

So these are the kind of things that this government really needs to take a serious look at and make sure that we provide these seniors with everything possible to make sure they can continue their lives in a very respectful way.

Mr. Senior, like—or Mr. Speaker, the seniors in this province—it's not only health care—my apologies for that comment, Mr.—it was a slip of the—anyways, I'd like to continue on by—the health-care system, it's very important. Not only is the health care, but the housing. We have to make sure we provide proper housing for seniors.

And I'm going to go into another story that not only talks about housing, it also talks about elder abuse, how people can be taken advantage of. Last October in Vita, we had a major fire. People from the Shady Oaks home in Vita, the low-rental, were evacuated out because of the danger of the fire. They just got back to their homes and we had a major snow storm—major snow storm that cut off hydro. These people all of a sudden are found that—they're in their homes, they're back in their homes, they're happy, their stress level is down, and all of a sudden they realize, well, we have no power.

*(10:10)

And being seniors, of course, there's a 1-800 number to phone. So they phone and, well, they need help, the—you know, the—what had happened is a funny situation, because hydro is out in most of the whole southeastern province—hydro came back on in Vita. But about four hours—it was out for about four hours in Vita. The hydro came back on, but hydro didn't come back on fully at this low-rental. Having three-phase power, there was only one-phase power that was working. So seniors were—had no heat. They had no, you know, part electricity, but their stoves wouldn't work. Like it was sort of random all over the complexes as to what was working, what wasn't working.

So of course they phoned the 1-800 number and, of course, well, they're asking for help; we need some help here. And nothing happens. They phone different people. We have no water. So somebody—I don't know who it was—sent over 10 cases of water there so they'd have water. But they were told you can't flush your toilets. You can't do this, you can't do that.

Now, these are seniors who deserve a little bit more than that. I'm not blaming anybody or whose fault it was, but here these seniors are, and nobody's

listening to them. Finally, the municipal officials, the reeve and some councillors and myself, went over there around suppertime and started making phone calls, and all of a sudden things started happening. Whoever from Manitoba Housing came down there and started, you know—well, what's going on? Got a hold of Hydro and the EMO wanted to evacuate them again. So the stress level for these seniors was extreme, having been evacuated once that week, now they're going to be evacuated for a second time.

So, of course, start making some phone calls and getting things done. You know, all of a sudden now people from Manitoba Housing were coming down and they were going to look at it. But they had all day to do it and nothing happened. During the daytime absolutely nothing happened until some people got involved and make things happens. As it turned out, it was something very simple. The fuse on the transformer outside the building had popped. So it took Hydro about five minutes to fix it, and everything was back to working again.

But that's elder abuse. When the elders phone for something and they can't get help because nobody—you know, it's a snowstorm—just—well, they were told not to flush their toilets. How can they go from Friday 'til Monday without flushing their toilets? I mean, EMO had come down and says, we're not going to let this happen. So that's a form of elder abuse and it's part of the system that needs to be fixed. So this bill, I think, will try to make sure a lot of these things don't happen. It will help our elders continue their life in dignity.

I mean, we also hear a lot of stories about elders being, you know, their money being taken from them by some con artists. Well, there are a lot of these con artists in there and I think whoever is convicted of abusing elders in this way, the fines and the penalties should be a lot harder on them.

I mean, this government says that—I know somebody's going to stand up next and say that they're doing a wonderful job for the seniors. They're going to do a—say a bunch of things. But the facts are different. The facts show the health care, the housing, there's a number of things that aren't happening that should be happening. And I feel that it's important to look after our seniors, especially for me. I know that seniors made me what I am today through their mentorship.

This bill, if passed, would enshrine seniors' rights into law. It also requires that the minister report on how the Province is progressing to ensure

that all seniors have access to these rights as set out in this bill.

I would think we should feel strongly about our seniors because they're the ones who created what we have today. If it wasn't for them, we wouldn't have what we have today.

And, Mr. Speaker, I don't want to get cut off by the Speaker again today, as I overspent my time yesterday. I know there's several other people that are interested in speaking to this, so I'll let them speak. Thank you very much.

Mr. Dave Gaudreau (St. Norbert): It's great to stand up and talk about seniors' rights today. I'm a big proponent for seniors' rights in my community and, you know, I celebrate seniors all the time. We have a great group of seniors in St. Norbert called—there's a group that is called PAL, Pembina Active Living. It's a 55-plus community that they do a lot of activities that keep seniors healthy. They have, you know, everything from Zumba to playing chess and stuff in the community and, actually, I'm involved with them really heavily. I helped co-ordinate a bus trip. Every few months we take the seniors to the mall and they go shopping, they socialize, and they do all this stuff. So I think that it's really important that we talk about seniors and how we're going to help them.

Now, I know the member opposite from La Verendrye was just talking about how he says that things aren't happening—he feels that some things aren't happening that should be happening. I mean, I find that interesting because the suggestion from the members opposite is 1 per cent cuts across the board. Whereas, on our side, you know, we've committed to 1,500 social housing units and building another 500 more in this budget that we just announced, and they're obviously voting against it.

You know, they're talking about how we're supposed to help people on one hand, but they want to take away the money and the funding on the other. It's very interesting that—I guess it's easy—it's easier to be in opposition because you can just say things, right, Mr. Speaker. I mean, you can talk about how you want to help seniors but we're going to slash the budgets and we're going to cut 1 per cent from everything and we're going to take away from those very organizations that they're talking about supporting. How would we build social housing with 1 per cent cuts across the board? How would you build social housing and affordable housing for

people if you're slashing all of the budget that comes through?

You know, it's very interesting that they talk about those kinds of things, because I'd like to see a policy on how their 1 per cent cuts are going to actually build more housing. I'd like to see a paper on how that's going to happen. You know, we're talking about respecting seniors, Mr. Speaker.

You know, you're looking at a—the—this is the party that not just two weeks ago, the leader was on the radio suggesting two-tier health care. So when you're retired, on a fixed income, and now you need to get, let's say, a knee replacement or a hip replacement, but you can't afford to pay for the two-tier health-care system. You're going to wait longer because the rich people will jump the line. So we're talking about a party that wants to create a two-tier health-care system, slash social housing, you know, and affordable housing. You know, I find it interesting that they talk about stuff like that.

On the other side, on our side, we announce programs like we did last year where we're going to be bringing—we're going to have doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, physiotherapists, chiropractors. All of those services are going to be available in a mobile setting. So they can actually go to the person's house so the senior doesn't have to, you know, necessarily leave their home if they don't want to, letting them stay at home longer.

We're also increase the tax credit for seniors this year to \$1,100 and eventually we're going to be taking away the school tax credit from seniors, so that'll allow them to stay in their homes even longer. So we want to talk about things that are going to, you know, give seniors the rights and give them things in their lives that they need. It's certainly not two-tier health care; it's certainly not slashing the budget to building affordable housing.

You know, we talk about affordable housing. In my area, last—this year, we had—the Minister of Housing was with me, and we opened—it's called La Charrette. It's affordable housing complex that is fully accessible to people. You don't have to be in a wheelchair, but it's accessible to everybody in a wheelchair and seniors can go there. And there's affordable rent that is rent controlled, and it's run by—it's funded by the Manitoba government.

You know, the member opposite also spoke about how it's—you know, that seniors are supposed to be provided with things and they deserve the best

in their life when they retire. It's interesting because his party obviously doesn't feel the same way federally, because they cut the OAS. They've extended that now to 67, which is the most vulnerable seniors in our society. The people who are at 65 years old who do not have pension plans and they do not have the money to retire, are the people who are going to draw OAS, but now we're forcing them to work two years later.

So if you look at the actual reality of things, Mr. Speaker, they talk a big game about things, but they're going to reckless cuts across the board. Their party forces people to work two years longer, and those people who are working two years longer are 'ju'—are usually in jobs that are not easy jobs. We're talking about people who work really hard for a living. You know, they're not desk-work jobs, they're really jobs that are physical labour, the ones that don't have pension plans, and it extends them two more years. And it's funny, too, because that actually has a cost to the Province.

It's going to cost us \$20 million more a year for people who cannot actually work anymore because they're physically—their bodies are done. So they're going to now go on the rolls of the Province for the EIA system at 65, when they normally would turn over to the OAS system. We're going to be funding that for an extra two years.

So when they talk about all of the—you know, all their 1 per cent cuts and how we're recklessly spending, if you look at it, Mr. Speaker, we're not doing anything like that. We're actually—we're funding programs like our EIA program, taking over from the federal government. It's—you know, they want to talk that we're complaining. No, we're not complaining, we're doing what needs to be done.

We're making things happen. We're going to continue funding our EIA program so that way those vulnerable seniors can have a good place to live, an income, and that they don't have to be put out on the street. We didn't see that federally, and that's fine, that's their decision. They want to raise it to 67, but you can't have it both ways. You can't say that we're going to slash and burn 1 per cent from everything but we're going to build housing, we're going to build an \$80-million bridge, we're going to build a highway—\$266 million worth of requests from this side—from the opposition side of the House during the first few days of the budget, which is equivalent to the PST. Yet they're against the PST and they're going to slash 1 per cent from everything.

* (10:20)

I'd love to know—I would like to see, on paper, I would like to see them do up a spreadsheet on how they're going to pay for all this and not affect seniors because I really don't see how it cannot affect seniors if you're going to cut, cut, cut, cut. You're going to cut from health care; that's 700 nurses. Well, what are seniors—what is—what happens when you get older? My dad had both of his hips replaced, and, thankfully, we have a great health-care system that isn't two tier, and he's fine now and he's able to get around. But we could go to—with their system, we could have their system of two tier, and he'd probably still be on a waiting list because he's not rich. He's not rich. He doesn't have a seven-car garage. He doesn't have the million-dollar mansion so he can afford to jump the line on health care. So, he would still be—probably bedridden by now because he was in so much pain.

We want to talk about supporting our seniors, Mr. Speaker; well, we support them. We put our money where our mouth is. We actually put the programs in place and we do things for seniors that actually matter to them. I look at, just—and this is just a personal experience—I look at the bus trips that were created years ago by the Minister for Housing. She started off 'bous—bus trips with my predecessor, Marilyn Brick, and we, you know, we—I've continued on to that. And when we ran into some funding challenges, you know, I didn't just give up and say, we're going to—oh, that's it. The program's done. We're going to recklessly, just—oh, we're going to cut it. You know what I did? I looked for—from people to help us fund it through the Fort Garry's resource centre and Age & Opportunity. So, what we did is I went out and I actually went knocking and talking to people—say, look, this group needs to get this bus running. And I made sure that that bus continued.

It would have been easy to suggest what they're doing, just—oh, you know what, forget it. We're going to cut it. We're just going to—that's it. That program's done because it's hard to find the money. Well, you know what? We decided not to do that on this side of the House. We decided to find the money. We're going to fund health care. We're going to fund building of more social housing with this budget. But, you know, they voted against that. They also voted against, in 2010, the primary tax credit.

They voted against that budget when we—the tax credit that gives people, caregivers, out-of-pocket expenses and helps get—seniors maintain as long as

possible in their homes. Well, in that budget we put—we tabled that. It's a nice tax credit for people at \$1,275 a year, and they voted against that.

So, you want to talk about what we're doing for seniors? We're actually doing for seniors. We're not cutting. We're not making OAS people wait 'til they're 67. That's their party. We're not cutting social housing; that's their party. We're not cutting health care by 1 per cent and firing nurses and firing people. And you know what another one is, is health practitioners, nurse practitioners, Mr. Speaker, zero when they were in power. There was zero in this province. Now we have a nurse practitioner program which is helping people get health care.

So, if you want to look at the contrast, I find it interesting that they bring this up and that they talk a big game, but there's—if they were to support our budget, then, you know, maybe I would say that there's some credibility to this bill because we could look at funding things and working together with them. But it always seems like they just want us to slash and burn and cut but still fund things. It doesn't happen that way, Mr. Speaker. I mean, you have to have the funding in place to do all of these programs, and that includes all of the infrastructure funding that they ask for. It includes all of the social programming that they ask for. If we're going to do that—*[interjection]*

I hear the member opposite talking about reallocation. Reallocation from where? We're going to take it from health care and put it into building homes? They have no idea. They really don't have a clue. I would love to see them put up a spreadsheet that actually shows where the money goes, but they don't have a clue.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): And it gives me great pleasure to rise and speak to this bill put forward by my colleague from Spruce Woods, Bill 210, and it's The Seniors' Rights Act. And after listening to the member for St. Norbert (Mr. Gaudreau), and he's worried about a 1 per cent cut that we had talked about, that we would be able to save the 1 per cent PST, and we put forward a budget. The budget was clear, and yet, now, he—what he wants is, I think he wanted a spreadsheet. But he—I'm not sure that he would understand the spreadsheet. He's part of a government that has caused the problem for seniors, a big problem for seniors.

And I might point out that in the past election, in 2011, they promised, when they walked from door to door—and whether that was in a seniors home, a personal care home, a hospital or a 55-plus, they said, we will not raise taxes—we will not raise taxes. And when asked about the PST, they said, of course not, that's nonsense—nonsense. We will not raise PST.

Well, Mr. Speaker, immediately following the election, they broadened the PST to cover many things that seniors use, many things that cost money for the seniors, who—many are on fixed income. There is no question about that. So they broadened the PST to cover hairstylists, manicures, pedicures, home insurance, car insurance was raised and, in some cases, some of the seniors still have a business to try and subsidize their savings and, of course, they have to pay the PST on a business insurance as well.

Mr. Speaker, we're talking about 8 per cent damage, 8 per cent that it costs the seniors more under this government in the last two years, and the member from St. Norbert is worried about 1 per cent inefficiencies. They don't look for efficiencies. If he was really concerned, and when—and it sounded as if he was a one-man government, that I do this and I do that and I do this and I do that and I've made these changes and this is what I do. Why doesn't he do the things that are right? Why doesn't he stand up in this House today and say, I will refund the \$5,000 that I'm going to get every year on a vote tax, and they can put that towards seniors? Why doesn't he do that? Wouldn't that make sense?

That would be a man standing up saying, I don't need that; I'll give it to those that do need it. But, no, no, he won't do that and nor will any of his colleagues do that, Mr. Speaker, because what's happened is the NDP government has turned out to be a lazy, lazy government. They can't finance their own political party today without doing something like this, taking it out of the pockets of Manitobans without asking. Without asking at all, they pass a referendum or won't call a referendum on the PST that has caused a lot of hurt to a lot of seniors in this province.

Too many seniors today can't afford to buy the food that they need. They can't afford the housing and the—that's necessary. But we, on this side of the House, have said that we would see that the housing rental rates were brought into line where they should be today. That hasn't been addressed at all on the

other side of the House. They've had many, many—many, many opportunities to do that.

The bill states that every senior in Manitoba has a right to freedom, independence and individual initiatives in planning and managing their own life, and that's true, Mr. Speaker. All of our ancestors, our parents, our uncles, our aunts have built the communities that we live in. They weren't easy to do. Some of them had to leave their communities to work other places, leaving their family behind to manage whatever they had for—whether that was a farm or a small business or just a home in a small community.

And when the individual that was making the money had to go to northern Manitoba, and at one time that was a possibility. Today, most of them leave the province. Most of them leave the province to go make money in Saskatchewan, Alberta, BC or Ontario, bring the money back to finance their family operations in Manitoba.

But what's happening, Mr. Speaker, what's happening is we're not looking after our seniors. We don't have the facilities that are necessary in our communities. We don't have the forethought and the planning that was necessary, and my idea is that if we're going to have an assisted living, it should be attached to a PCH. When a couple have to move into an assisted living then they should be able to just walk down the hall. Not everybody ages at the same rate and we all know that. We know that from what's happened to our parents or our grandparents and probably what's going to happen to us too in the future. And so if some—if one of the spouses needs to have the PCH facility and the extra care, then it would be very nice if the other spouse with assisted living would be able to just go down the hall.

* (10:30)

But, as it is, in many cases now throughout Manitoba, we find that whoever needs to go to a PCH goes outside the community and perhaps 40, 50, 60 miles away, which leaves the other half of that family not able to drive there. In many cases, as people have aged and lived much longer, we have people that are 84, 85, 86, 89 who aren't driving anymore because they know they don't have the ability, not because government has to tell them, they just know. But they aren't able to go and see their spouses or their family, and it could be a brother or a sister, could be an aunt or an uncle, but they're not able to drive those distances.

We have to see PCHs located close to our communities, and it was pointed out by my colleague from La Verendrye what had taken place in the community of Vita. Had—it had a hospital now for well over 75 years. The hospital was rebuilt under the PC government, a beautiful facility. The Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) hasn't been able to put doctors in there. Why are there's no doctors? Why is the emergency closed? Why is that? That's senior abuse.

But we've spoke about this from time to time, the member from Seine River and I about senior abuse, and this is definitely a form of that. And she's guilty of that in many, many hospitals throughout the province that the PCH—the emergency are closed, 17, 18, they're on a rotational basis now. We'll—we see them in Teulon being closed many times on a weekend. We see them in Beausejour being closed, in Whitemouth, in Vita, and I can go on and on Mr. Speaker.

But we need those. We don't need those for our seniors. Our seniors want to move to the communities that are close to a hospital because their needs are greater than most of us when we're younger.

The other thing that is happening is if they can't move there or if the hospital—what's happening if there's no PCH and no available space, the hospital beds are taken up by seniors that could be in a PCH. The nursing staff is there then, if there is nursing staff available.

We have PCH beds in southeastern Manitoba right now that are empty because there's no staff. There are no nursing staff, and we know that the money is there. The money and health-care system is there, has been there for a long time. It's been a mismanagement of this NDP government, the mismanagement of them that has caused the lack of nurses in this province. The lack of doctors in this province is because of the mismanagement by this NDP government, and to further add to the misery what they've done now is amalgamated the RHAs, moving the offices farther away from the people that really needed them.

And so, Mr. Speaker, with those few words—in fact, I'd like to ask leave to speak longer, but I'm sure you won't be able to give me that—so with those few words, thank you very much.

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak on this topic because this topic is very close to my heart.

And I think when opposition raised this question about how PST will affect the seniors, and because of their propaganda some seniors phoned me and they want to talk about it. So I ask, yes, come to my office. Let us—we'll talk about it.

So a senior came; how are we going to vote and agree on PST and we are on a limited income? I said, well, if I am a senior I will be in the same boat you are. I had—think about it. How much money, I don't know how much money you spend in about a month. I hardly spend \$2,000 per month and the majority of that will be food which won't be under tax, PST tax. So under a thousand dollars, maybe, I spend a month, and—by dollar 1 cent. How much that money will it be? That will be only \$10, but on the other hand, the way PC want to do those—cuts, and we may—we can balance the budget; that's not the problem. We will—can cut all the services in the hospitals; we can cut all the services of doctors. What you will do, what I will do? We have to pay when we go to the doctor. We have to pay when we want to go for an operation in the hospital. Can we afford that? I come from the country where money talks, and an ordinary person cannot go—I born in that country, in India, and where an ordinary person cannot have an operation. They just die of whatever the problem they have. How lucky we are, everybody being taken care of. So that's more important. It's not important to just to look at the propaganda. It's very important to look through it, how many services ordinary people get.

Sure, it will hurt the rich people who can spend \$160,000 for a year. Maybe they might have to pay \$1,600. But ordinary persons don't have to pay. Look at how much cuts we have—exemption; we have a school tax. We have a \$700—and when PC was in power, they have \$250. Even if you count your \$10 and multiply by 12, \$120 added to \$250, still it would be far less than—still, you will be ahead of the game.

So, but also a senior has a special exemption. It used to be \$1,025 and now it's up to \$1,100. It's up to \$1,100, and that 1 cent per dollar won't hurt you that much as compared to you will be getting those benefits.

So, but keep in mind we are going to exempt the total school tax for the seniors, and I think the House

that I have, you have, you might be saving another \$2,000.

Okay, now, tell me—PST will hurt you or the money PC will cut, that will hurt you. And, at the end, he said, well, I have not thought about that. I said, just think about that. Don't empower that propaganda. Think logically how ordinary people can be served. Like—it's not a problem. Anybody balances a budget—just cut, cut, cut—budget will be balanced. But ordinary people will be left as their own, and who will take care—what will we—difference between this country and the Third World country?

So, considering that, you know, about two, three years ago, I introduced one bill that was granny suites should be incorporated in the houses but, at that time, because of a bylaw, city bylaw won't allow it, and now even the city's under pressure. They have allowed it. So seniors will be able to stay in their houses and also they will be independent in the houses, and they will be taking care of their families and, at the same time, they will be providing valuable advice to their grandchildren.

So we will be saving money on the both sides. Emotionally, we will be better off.

I really thankful to the minister at that time for Housing and Community Development. She allowed a kind of a—for a forgivable loan, up to a maximum of \$35,000 and 50 per cent of the total cost to—for granny suites. So that will allow to—especially for different cultures who want to keep their parents a little bit—them—like East Indians and Filipinos and all those ethnic groups that will be. But look at the ethnic groups, how much the opposition care about. How much pressure if seniors think about that? When I die, what will be—happen to my cremation? Where my ashes will be scattered? How—and that pressure of that, that's going to become a pressure will make seniors, that are alive, more worrisome.

I brought that resolution about a couple weeks ago, but you know opposition was worried about that much—a small amount of ash will pollute the water. I—they—small amount—they don't care about the—although I said the problem is not that. That we have consent first, and after that regulations can be developed, but that's not a big deal. If there is a pacemaker inside the body, we can always ask funeral services, that we can make the regulation to be able to take that pacemaker out. Then they will grind those ashes. So it was just to postpone—postpone—delay the wishes of the minority group.

* (10:40)

I think we have to be very careful because this country is already known to take care of the minority groups, nobody should be left out. But—and society should be inclusive. But I hope opposition can understand that this is a country which is on the basis of being inclusive and one of the best countries in the world. It will stay one of the best countries in world if we will take care of our seniors and our people who are—left their country, who came into this country, made this one their new home, and they don't feel rejected.

So, similarly, sometime, I—they will say it will hurt the seniors, that—they call it a vote tax. I will say it's a democracy advancement fund—democracy advancement fund—because I come from the country where you can buy votes by money, and money speaks. Ordinary persons don't have a chance to apply to the election to get elected. If you have some funds available, and that way you can get—ordinary person will get elected—that they will not understand the problems of the ordinary person—\$6-million house, how—that person would not understand an ordinary person. So he can spend money and he can get elected, but an ordinary person won't be—get elected, therefore it's important we have democracy advancement funds. I will tell the opposition, change the name of vote tax to democracy advancement funds, and I'll repeat this mantra so that we can keep democracy intact.

So we are very—I think I can speak a lot about that, how many programs the NDP government have brought in, but we don't that much time. I think I will give this time to speak somebody else. Thank you very much.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Speaking to Bill 210, The Seniors' Rights Act, brought in by my honourable colleague next to me here, the member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Cullen).

And we certainly owe our seniors our gratitude, we continue to seek their mentorship, and it's most important that we give our seniors our respect, and it's the respect they deserve. And somehow that seems to have escaped this current government and—about respect.

And I'm certainly glad—I was very interested in listening to the comments from the member for Maples as he was giving his comments to Bill 210. And he was talking about his constituents coming into his constituency office and asking about the PST

increase. Now, I'm sure that he had an explanation for them, why the NDP didn't mention the PST increase during the last campaign. And I'm sure that he was able to explain to them why the NDP lied at the door when they said, no new tax increases, and then promptly turned around and increased taxes, which hit seniors—many who live on fixed incomes—perhaps, the hardest.

I'm sure that the member from Maples was able to also explain that—about the vote tax. How each one of the NDP, including the member for Maples, is going to take \$5,000 out of those seniors' pockets so that he doesn't go out and fundraise.

And the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) is shaking his head—I'm sure he's giving it back. I hope he's giving it back. I'd like to see him stand up this morning and say, I'm not taking the vote tax. But apparently they don't have that kind of pride, or else they're just too lazy to go out there or maybe they're afraid to go out the door.

In fact, I was at the doors in Riel the other night, and talking to seniors of all people. And I was talking to these seniors and they were—most interested in talking to them. They said, why do we have a PST increase? Where are they spending it? And I didn't even have to prompt the seniors to ask me these questions. They were just coming to me with these and say, where are these—why do they need this? Where are they going to spend it? And I think the real catcher on that one was, why don't they just control their spending like we have to in our houses. Why is it that this NDP government sees quite fit just to spend money and spend money and not be accountable for their spending?

Of course, we know that this NDP government continues to reduce the Pharmacare deductions, costing seniors more every time. Now, they don't do it on election years. They're smart enough not to do that on election years. They're hoping that people will forget in between. But the seniors that we have the respect for, they—that—they don't forget about these things.

And these tax increases, the fee increases, the—I'm sure the member from Maples was explaining to the seniors who came into his office about how the increase and the expansion of the range of the PST last year, they are now paying PST on their home insurance, how that \$35 per vehicle is now going into general revenues. It has nothing to do with MPI rates that they increased last year and the broad expansion of the PST, and then now another, a

14 per cent increase in PST. And you combine those fee increases, the PST increases, before the increase in the sales tax right now it's costing the average family of four \$1,600 per family, per year.

Now, even assuming that there was only two seniors in the house, that's \$800 that they have to come up with. So where are they going to cut the \$800 out? They don't—government is going to take that money from them. They are not going to have that money to spend. So they're going to have to—what are they going to do? Decide not to visit some grandchildren living in another province? Are they going to have to not—cut back on the food. He talks about the food purchases of seniors. Are they—there's many times when seniors are living in low incomes that the month come—the end of the month comes long before the end of the money. So—or the end of the money, pardon me, I had that wrong—*[interjection]*—month—*[interjection]*—end of the money comes before the end of the month. I'll figure it out yet. So that's good.

So—but, Mr. Speaker, this is a real problem for seniors and we—this is why this bill came about, The Seniors' Rights Act. We feel that they should have the respect, they should have their rights. We want to make sure that they are not experiencing elder abuse, and how do we prevent that and how do we assist them to make sure that these things don't happen.

And, Mr. Speaker, I know this government uses their 192 communicators in overtime to talk about these housing initiatives, low-income housing, affordable—whatever affordable means—housing initiatives for seniors. I know of one unit right now that it's had the headlines three times, that they've announced this three times that they're going to rebuild this seniors unit. And yet, to date, there's no contracts let out for the renovations of this seniors home. And yet, the seniors, residents keep asking me, where is it? They said they were going to do this—and it's about trust and it's about respect.

And these seniors, rightfully so, don't have trust in this government, because this government says one thing and then does something else, and it's usually when they do something else it's at the expense of seniors in Manitoba.

And so we know that the health-care system is not—is under stress. It is not being managed properly. We know that seniors—because of seniors that they have—their point in life that quite often they do require more help from the health-care system and

yet, the long wait times, the inability to access a doctor.

And the home care is so terribly mismanaged in this province. And I know that from my family's experience of the home-care situation in this province is just abysmal and it's mismanaged. It's—there is so much management and so little home care is what happens in the home-care system. And so we want to—we know that our hospitals are—have a lot of seniors waiting placement in our hospital systems, waiting placement for personal care homes.

* (10:50)

One of my communities in my constituency has now begun plans to build a new personal care home, and they will work at the community building it because they know this government is not capable, not able to do this, and it's been shown from other communities that they can build it much more affordable on a community basis than government building, and so we want to encourage that. We want to make sure that the communities have the assistance they need to be able to do that.

And certainly housing is such a big issue with our—in our local communities. We have a shortage of housing throughout our local communities, and if there was—we know that there are seniors living in their homes that really have trouble coping with life in their homes, and yet they really don't have any alternatives. They don't want to move out of their communities. They want to stay in their communities. Quite often they do have family, they have friends that—this is a community that they've lived and they've worked and they've helped build these communities. In their later years, they don't want to move out of these communities where they have their roots, but yet we have so little housing options for them.

And again I relate back to this assisted-living facility in my—in one of my communities that is supposed to have renovations and yet there is no plan there at all right now. The contracts are not there. The press releases are there, but press releases don't do renovations, Mr. Speaker.

It's about—this bill, it's about seniors' rights. Let's give the seniors the rights they want. Let's support this bill. Thank you very much.

Ms. Melanie Wight (Burrows): Always happy to get up and speak about seniors. I have all kinds of amazing organizations at work in my community.

I did want to just mention briefly a couple of the things that were said by the opposition just to correct them. The member from Emerson mentioned something about us being responsible for less doctors and nurses. I'm kind of confused by that. I believe we've added 500 doctors—is that not correct?—and thousands of nurses to the system and nurse practitioners and all kinds of people that didn't exist before. I don't know. So that's very mystifying to me.

When it comes to the costs for seniors, which we always want to keep reasonable, having, I think, the lowest package of electricity rates and home care and all of those things is absolutely key. If the opposition were to get in and the seniors all had to pay double market rates, that would be a problem. And by 2022 they would be doing it in the dark because they wouldn't have built the hydro projects we need to keep them having them.

So—but what I really wanted to speak about was connection. I can't spend my whole 10 minutes correcting the errors put on the record today, because I would just be speaking for hours on that.

But I want to talk about connection, Mr. Speaker, because I believe that connection is really what makes a difference when it comes to elder abuse, which is what I believe this bill was about, was elder abuse, and reaching our people and reaching the seniors with the initiatives that we have is key to being able to keep them safe from elder abuse.

And some of the things that we're doing, Mr. Speaker, in that area—our Aging in Place initiative, for example, which supports our older people—older adults to age in place by providing supports and housing options throughout the housing continuum from independent living to personal care homes. So, under our government, we have provided more options and more choices for seniors in this province than they have ever seen in the history of the province, and I'm proud to be a part of that. I'm proud that our seniors have many options about where they can be living and the kind of care that they can be receiving.

The home care that we provide, Mr. Speaker, in Manitoba is one of the best in Canada, if not the best in Canada. So I'm very proud of those things as well.

But, again, getting back to connection. In my own area, I have a number of groups that work with seniors to help them keep that connection, because if our seniors have people that they can talk to, if

there's people there that they can reach out to, then that is one of the key things that is going to help in elder abuse when it does occur, is them knowing where to go. So getting that information out to them is key, of who they can speak to, who's in their community, who's around them, where can they go when they do need that help. Because I know that on both sides of the House, we're both horrified at the idea of elder abuse. I'm absolutely sure of that. So, we want to make sure that those connections exist.

And I have a group, for example, called KINRC who works with seniors in the Keewatin-Inkster area, and they provide services like having someone phone every senior, every morning; meal programs where the people can come and get together and eat.

We have men in the kitchen program that teaches men to cook, but what it really provides for those men is connection, is somewhere to go where they can have, you know, friends and people who care about them and it helps them, certainly, to learn the skills they need to deal with, things like cooking, but it also gives them the skills to deal with stress and with anger and with so many of those things that can contribute to elder abuse.

We also have the Seven Oaks links in our area, and again, they do all kinds of work with diverse communities in our area, reaching out to them to provide that connection that people need in order to be able to help be safe. We also have a 24-7, province-wide seniors abuse line so, I'm not sure, maybe members opposite weren't aware of that, so that's a really important factor, really important. *[interjection]* Oh—since 2002, well, that's really good, and it's excellent, and that's what you want to have, right?

So, those are really important, so, offered through—it's being offered through Klinik Community Health Centre and Age & Opportunity.

We also have hired an elder abuse consultant who co-ordinates all of the seniors' services and a province-wide Manitoba peer support line to assist older adults affected by elder abuse so that they have people who are their peers who they can contact. Other people who know what it's like to experience abuse because like any kind of abuse that occurs, the person being abused feels the shame. It's always been a sad piece of abuse to me, that the—it's the victim always that feels the shame, not the offender.

So, being able to reach out for that peer support for others who have experienced it, who can say to

you, it isn't your fault, you aren't the one to blame, you know, it's the other person's issue, is really key because so many people remain silent because of that. So I think that's one of the key factors and so important to helping fight elder abuse.

Creating regional elder abuse response teams, as well, is something we did with the Regional Health Authority, so, again, I think it's a key item in ending elder abuse and the development of an elder abuse safe suite initiative to provide a safe haven for older adults leaving an abusive relationship. So just like, you know, women's shelters, we have an elder abuse shelter so that there is always somewhere for them to be able to go in order to find somewhere safe.

I know the members opposite were talking about Pharmacare and there's 3,000 new drugs to Pharmacare, including palliative drugs and a new drug for Alzheimer's patients—again, very key, because Alzheimer, of course—Alzheimer's is, of course, a factor involved, I think, in elder abuse, and so helping people with that and helping people understand how to work with people who do have Alzheimer's rather than them getting frustrated at the person, they can get supports for that.

We also make cancer treatment wait times the shortest in the country, so we cover 100 per cent of the cost of approved cancer drugs, relieving the stress, you know, from the elders and from the elders' families. And, again, stress is a factor in elder abuse. So, as we reduce stress on the families by covering the cost of those kinds of cancer-care drugs and helping people find the right kind of care for their family members, that's what will—another thing that will really help reduce elder abuse.

I also wanted to mention that in 2011 we announced a long-term care strategy. So that was \$200 million to build hundreds more personal care home beds. Now—

* (11:00)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. When this matter's again before the House, the honourable member for Burrows will have two minutes remaining.

The hour being 11 a.m., it's time for private member's resolution, and the resolution we have under consideration this morning is the one sponsored by the honourable member for Agassiz, and the title of the resolution is titled "Forced Municipal Amalgamations".

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 18—Forced Municipal Amalgamations

Mr. Stuart Briese (Agassiz): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Midland:

WHEREAS the provincial government, through The Municipal Modernization Act, will force Manitoban municipalities with fewer than a thousand residents to amalgamate; and

WHEREAS the provincial government did not consult with or notify the Association of Manitoba Municipalities or local governments of this decision prior to the Throne Speech announcement; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has imposed unrealistic deadlines within which municipalities must amalgamate; and

WHEREAS local governments are concerned that forced municipal amalgamations will fail to address the serious issues currently facing municipalities, such as deteriorating infrastructure; and

WHEREAS local governments are concerned that forced amalgamation will result in a loss of local democratic representation; and

WHEREAS local governments are concerned that forced municipal amalgamations will fail to provide any real improvements in cost savings; and

WHEREAS local governments deserve to be treated with respect; and

WHEREAS any municipal amalgamations should be voluntary in nature and led by the municipalities themselves.

Therefore be it resolved—BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to take no further action on the issue of amalgamation until it has properly consulted with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities and all municipalities in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: It's been moved by the honourable member for Agassiz, seconded by the honourable member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen),

WHEREAS the provincial government, through—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mr. Briese: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and speak on this resolution this morning. It's a resolution that principally deals with respect, and I'm pleased this morning to have several municipal officials in the gallery including the president of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, Mr. Doug Dobrowolski.

This is a resolution that is all about respect and it's respect for another level of government. The municipalities are the level of government that's closest to the grassroots in the province. They're the ones that deal with the people face to face and deal with the issues that are brought forward. It—the way the whole issue of amalgamation was brought forward showed a definite lack of respect for that third order of government. The municipalities and the association of municipalities found out in a press release a day or two before the municipal convention that the amalgamation issue was on the table and it was going to be a forced amalgamation.

There'd been all sorts of speculation about the reasons and the rationale for that. It's felt by many that it was a misdirection. It was to try and take the minds off the things that are really critical to municipalities, such as infrastructure shortfalls and infrastructure funding from other levels of government. I think that is probably one of the main reasons that that forced amalgamation was brought forward. It—and it did its job. It did take the thoughts at the convention off a lot of the infrastructure issues and put the attention onto the forced amalgamations.

You know, I've been around municipalities for a long time. I was 20 years a municipal councillor and I served on the old UMM board and then the Association of Manitoba Municipalities and, over that time, we dealt with several different ministers in government. Originally, I think, when I was first there, Mr. Len Derkach was the minister. And Len Derkach was the one that put forward the new Municipal Act in the mid-1990s, and with culmination in about '97, which gave municipalities considerably more discretion over their own affairs, gave them more powers and allowed them to act more on their own. That was a fairly brave move, I think, at the time, probably not supported by everyone. But when you talk about consultation, there was a committee put together by the government of the day that travelled to every corner of this province, consulted with municipalities, actually—actually—consulted with municipalities on what should be in the new act. It was a very good document when it was finished. There's been some things that, obviously, as time went on, required

some change in it, but I think it was a process that was started by a minister that really did care about municipalities, really did want to consult with them.

When I became involved with the AMM, the minister—the government had changed when I became president or vice-president of the AMM, and Jean Friesen was our minister, inner-city person from, actually, the constituency of Wolseley. What Jean did was go out and make sure—she had very little experience with municipalities. She went out and made sure she understood municipalities. She didn't go out with a heavy-handed approach and say: you're going to do this, you're going to do that. She went out. She attended their meetings. She talked to the people. She dealt with them. She showed respect for the municipalities, something we don't see in this present day and age. And she—if she had one fault it was probably her speeches usually exceeded the time frame that she was allowed, or was given. But she was very caring about municipalities and it showed, and she worked very well with them.

We've now moved into an era where there's a very heavy-handed approach on municipalities, going out and saying—we have the minister of the day calling them insolent children, going out and saying this is going to happen. It doesn't matter what you think. We're not really concerned about your concerns. We're going to make this happen.

And, you know, I understand the charge to the bottom of the heap on PST. We're No. 1 west of Québec in personal income tax and we are trying to be No. 1 in PST across the country. Now, in the Prairie provinces we already have that course, but the NDP want to lead the nation by a wide margin. What I don't understand is the all-out attack on municipalities. If the residents of a municipality believe in amalgamation they have the tools to make it happen.

Mr. Speaker: I'd like to remind our guests that are visiting with us in the gallery this morning that it's very difficult for our members to continue with the debate here in the Chamber this morning if cellphones are continuing to ring or other electronic devices. And I'm asking for the co-operation of all of our visiting guests this morning, please ensure that your electronic devices—*[interjection]* Please, if you would, remove the electronic devices from the public gallery. I thank you for your co-operation.

The honourable member for Agassiz, I regret to have to interrupt you. Continue with your comments.

Mr. Briese: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The underlying drive of the government is more money to feed their spending addiction. They haven't showed how they expect more revenue from amalgamation, but there's obviously a plan and that plan is slated to raise its ugly head probably in the next budget, and we'll wait and see. There's got to be a second phase of this. There's got to be a gain for the provincial government out of the amalgamations and they're not disclosing what they expect that gain to be, but we know there will be. What they're doing is not unlike what is happening in some other areas where the—they force—by underhanded methods, force their will to be served. They talk about administration costs, and if the residents of a municipality are satisfied with the status quo, why are the NDP so concerned?

* (11:10)

Most ratepayers' concerns about expenditures are brought forward in the larger municipalities, not the smaller ones. And in this case they using a criteria of a thousand population, which—*[interjection]* Actually, I hear somebody chirping on it, that it was our criteria. The actual legislation says no new municipalities will be formed with less than a thousand population. It did not say all municipalities will have a thousand population, so read the legislation.

Most ratepayers' concerns about the expenditures are brought forward than the larger municipalities, and there's so many other criteria that—and or in—to operations of municipalities. Those services of municipalities remain the same, the infrastructure needs are the same. This leads to concerns that there's another shoe to drop and this is just the first step in this exercise, and I'm convinced that's what it is. This is another attack on a small 'speg'—segment of this population, similar to other attacks that have went before, such as the hog barn moratorium and waste water ejectors.

In a recent survey recently released by the Rural Development Institute, small mart—municipalities 'dop'—dominated the top-10 list of municipal—healthy municipalities.

You know, I could go on and on. A recent Brandon Sun article said, there must be some strategy, a local—and logic employed by the Province, not to mention a more consolatory attitude, before these kinds of amalgamations take place.

Now, you know, the Premier (Mr. Selinger), in responding to a thing on the federal transfers in December 21st, 2011, said, well, I think there's a big concern, just about the way it has been done—just dropped on people without consultation or discussion. He was obviously upset by what the federal government was doing to the province, and then turns around, does the same thing to the municipalities—no consultation, we'll just drop it on them, force the amalgamations.

As I said to begin with, this is about respect. There has not been very much respect shown on this file.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): It's a great privilege to have an opportunity to speak on behalf of the amalgamation bill brought forward.

First of all, I'd like to acknowledge a good friend of mine, president of the AMM association, Doug Dobrowolski. It's always a pleasure to have him around and dialogue, and to anybody else that I may not know or recognize that's here on behalf of the bill.

But I do want to acknowledge Doug. Doug and I worked together on the AMM association for two plus years, and great staff and great morals of the association for the betterment of the economy of the province of Manitoba. So I just wanted to make that known, Mr. Speaker.

But I also want to acknowledge the fact that the previous speaker, member opposite, also was president of the AMM at one time. And I do recall certain commentaries he made when he was president, about amalgamation. And he really felt that it was a great idea, so I'm glad to see that he still somewhat believes in that concept.

But as we move forward into the betterment of the economy of the province of Manitoba, you know, being in municipal council, reeve for four years of the 20 years I was in municipal council—I think the commentaries by the previous speaker said he also was in council for 20 years. I'm sure he could somewhat relate to what he did 20 years prior to when he started and what he did 20 years after he was on council, did not remain stagnant as far as administration being effective in the operation of the municipal government.

So I'm sensing there's a bit of a stigma here that members opposite choose not to have some efficiencies, some changes in management as far as the betterment for the ratepayers they represent in the municipalities. So this is not an understanding, this is a kind of an understanding that we need to move forward in this amalgamation proposal.

And, you know, for the betterment—I have to give you some examples, Mr. Speaker. When you have municipalities in localized areas where they are looking for candidates to run in their local municipal elections and they can't find candidates, it's a true sign as—things have to change in the municipal efficiency boards. And we know of a number of them—I'm not even sure the members opposite know about it. In fact, when you have municipal officials are representing 30-some-odd individuals, they are somewhat challenged of being efficient in the betterment for their service of the ratepayers.

But I also want to indicate the amalgamation started years and years ago, Mr. Speaker. We talk about conservation districts. We talk about planning districts. We talk about veterinarian district boards. There're a number of amalgamations took place years and years ago. We've got the circle three quarters completed as far as believing in a true amalgamation for the betterment of the ratepayers. And all we're asking for today is to complete a business plan that will serve the ratepayers to be very efficient down the road. We're talking about duplication of machinery between small urban centres and municipal governments. So why do we not have the opportunity for that to happen?

But I want to assure you that we are talking about efficiency. We are talking for the betterment of the 'municipin'. You know, that's why the 2013 budget will bring forward 14–\$415 million in funding support for municipalities, including more than one point of the PST that was dedicated for the local infrastructure through Building Manitoba Fund. You know, this is the beauty of the amalgamation of—we're talking about.

I also wanted—compare situations in other provinces, Mr. Speaker. Unlike Alberta where the provincial funding for municipalities will decrease by \$200 million, we are increasing fundings to municipalities here. Our provincial funding for municipalities will total \$414 million, which is an increase of approximately \$8.5 million. This is our government's commitment to work with municipalities to provide service to the local

municipal governments. Our financial support to the Manitoba municipalities is \$52.6 million, more than our neighbours to the west, Saskatchewan. British Columbia has froze their funding for local governments.

Let's use some examples, Mr. Speaker. We've already started the amalgamation years and years ago. The town of Shoal Lake, the RM of Shoal Lake recently went through amalgamation. By amalgamating, the council has projected a cost saving of \$60,000 per year in operating and administrative cost. Governance of the new municipality will make it simpler and more efficiency.

In 2007 the town of Killarney and the rural municipality of Turtle Mountain amalgamated. The mayor from Killarney-Turtle Mountain, His Worship Rick Pauls, stated: Since our amalgamations, residents of Killarney-Turtle Mountain are seeing the real benefits of joining communities together, including more efficiency in government. We have the ability to act with significant infrastructure needs and to grow our community by having new developments that would not happen—that the rural and urban communities did not work together. So there's a—some prime examples.

Another example, Mr. Speaker: 2005, the town of—the town side of Pine Falls and the village of Powerview went under a tailor-made amalgamation that saw a single council vision as an opportunity to be in a better position to plan for the future and enhance the community's presence in the region.

In 2003 the village of Garson and the RM of Brokenhead amalgamated to form the new RM of Brokenhead. The RM of broken—has committed to its neighbours and believing merging would maintain the strength of the region as a whole.

The new RM of—council of gill—Gimli as was formed in 2003. By working together the community leaders found efficiency solutions to the local challenges, and I'm sure the MLA for Gimli will share that commentary as well.

Research has shown Manitoba's economy base is not based on current municipal boundaries. Instead, it's based on activity in the regional bases.

Mr. Speaker, what we do see, the benefits—but I'm sensing that because the members opposite choose not to go down that avenue, when we talk about the sale of MTS, was that an efficient way for the economy of the province of Manitoba? Was there

any consultation to that? None whatsoever. So when we talk about efficient, we want to work on behalf of the—work with the municipalities, and we are.

Our MLA and our supporter—of local government, Minister from Local Government, has been quite diligent. The staff have been quite informative to work with the local municipalities and become a new government to represent all taxpayers in the province of Manitoba.

The new municipalities will provide more opportunity to attract businesses and economic development—development that will reduce red tape, common regional regulations and, as well, infrastructure and services. This will be able to find savings and efficiencies through our economic scale. More efficiency municipalities mean more money invested into services that families count on. Yet today one quarter of Manitoba's municipalities spend more than 20 per cent of their budget on administration costs. Communities work more closely through amalgamation will mean reduced costs of administration and investing in savings through better service for the local municipal governments.

*(11:20)

We need to set some examples, Mr. Speaker. Sharing assets like water-treatment facilities, recreation centres to reduce operational costs, realizing the savings and efficiencies through the economies of scale, recruitment and retraining of skilled staff and sharing their expertise to better meet the local challenges, attracting more businesses, more local development, and reducing the red tape common to regional regulations and infrastructures and services. The reality is, the broader pool of care—candidates for elections office will provide a long-term renewal and succession, more efficiencies in provincial investments and regional infrastructure.

As we talk about the Building Canada Fund and an opportunity through the amalgamation process is an opportunity for the newly formed amalgamation territories to enhance provincial dollars, to advance provincial Building Canada funds for the betterment of small communities in partnership such as sewer and water infrastructures as far as lagoons. As we all know, and I'm sure the members opposite know, the urban centres are somewhat challenged, probably, with some major decisions down the road towards sewer and water infrastructures. Here's an opportunity based on per capita funding through Building Canada Fund, provincial government

funding, to enhance minimizing additional tax increases for the local residents and the local governments by enhancing the government grants that will be available in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, in my closing comments, I honour the opportunity to speak on this resolution, and I look forward to further discussions with the local municipalities in my jurisdiction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Oh, good morning again, Mr. Speaker, and I certainly want to speak in favour of this resolution brought forward by my colleague from Agassiz.

I also certainly look forward to comments from the Minister of Local Government (Mr. Lemieux) so that he can explain his insolent-children example to the good folks that are in the gallery today and how he treats them like insolent children. I look forward to the member from Interlake standing up and reinforcing that dysfunctional comment that he made about municipalities. So it'll certainly be an interesting hour as we discuss this resolution. And certainly the minister—member from Swan River, with his municipal experience, I am sure I look forward to how he's going to explain the unreasonable timelines and the bullying nature of this proposed legislation, Bill 33, coming forward.

And, certainly, I, you know, I welcome Mr. Doug Dobrowolski in our gallery today. I also want to mention we have some representatives from the RM of Edward that have come a long ways today to show how their feeling of disrespect—how they've been treated disrespectfully by this government. I know that there are members from the RM of Blanshard here and the town of Plum Coulee.

And the town of Plum Coulee now is just an excellent example of how flawed and poorly thought this legislation really is. Here's Plum Coulee with 900 and—I don't know whether it's 35 people—and growing every year. They asked the Minister of Local Government, we're growing; we're going to be over this imaginary threshold of a thousand people within year—within a year or so they expect to be over that. Minister of Local Government comes to their—to the district meetings, the municipal district meetings, pretends to listen and then says, amalgamation's going to happen, get used to it, and he scurries out the side door after them before—at the June district meetings, actually, he only took a couple of questions, and then scurried out the side

door because he didn't want—as I understand, the mayor of Plum Coulee was up next to the microphone, but, no, that side door was closer than the microphone, apparently. So he didn't take any questions from the town of Plum Coulee.

But—and we know that—I know from back in the meetings in the winter, there was some rather large meetings, and I was at some of those. The meeting in a cold day in January—cold evening in January in Hartney, where I think there was something like 35 municipalities at that meeting, including the Town of Plum Coulee that drove half way across the province to be there. And they expressed their dissatisfaction with the—with just the lack of consultation, the lack of respect that this government has. They have not been able to explain—they talk about cost savings. When asked, when the minister was asked, explain the cost savings. Well, he couldn't really explain that one. And, in fact, at the meeting in Hartney in January, the mayor from Killarney stood up and said, yes, we did amalgamate, voluntary amalgamation, and it took us six years to accomplish it.

I know I've heard from people in Gimli that that amalgamation is—while it's done, there are still issues, outstanding issues in terms of assessment and in terms of taxes. And I know the minister from—or the member from Gimli may not understand assessments and tax rolls, but believe me, it's out there.

The great thing about this government is their 192 communicators—and they're over a million dollars a month, mind you, that it's costing the taxpayers of Manitoba—is their ability to put out misinformation. In fact, it even came from some of the ministers here this morning sitting here. The Municipal Act, changed in 1997, says that any new municipality formed must have 1,000 people. It does not talk about existing municipalities. And I urge them, I urge the 192 communicators, maybe they can just slow down the press machine a little bit for a while and actually read The Municipal Act. It's not hard. It's right there in black and white in the existing Municipal Act. So why is it so difficult for these people to under—for this government to understand what they're—that they are actually out there with misinformation.

The timelines on this are totally, totally unrealistic. If you're going to consider amalgamation, and many municipalities have, as been pointed out, municipalities have—and if you're going to encourage

municipalities to amalgamate in the future, they need time to do this.

One of the just absolute gems of a comment from the Minister of Local Government (Mr. Lemieux), he said—and it was in Arborg—and I believe the member from Interlake was at that meeting. And the minister said, well, you know, don't worry about the details, just sign the amalgamation, worry about the details after.

The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn) knows better from his municipal experience, it doesn't work that way. And I guess it's just a lack of business acumen on a part of the Minister of Local Government. You don't sign a blank piece of paper to exchange assets and conglomerate assets and work on that and work out the details later. You have to have the details in place first. You can't do this on a whim later.

And, you know, certainly, the lack of consultation, the bullying, the lack of disrespect, it just goes on and on. This government does not understand what they've tried to do here. And it's just—they—I guess they just don't care. They're—and, you know—and I've been to a lot of municipal meetings in the last six months here, ever since the Throne Speech when they dropped the hammer on the AMM meeting that they were going to push forward with amalgamation. No prior consultation, typical of this government, no prior consultation. In fact, at the AMM meeting it was very successful. What they did—the purpose of their announcement on—just prior to the Throne Speech—or just prior to the AMM meeting in the Throne Speech was to deflect the talk away from timely flood compensation, from infrastructure needs, and they were actually quite successful at doing that. Because anybody who was at the AMM meeting, the talk was the forced amalgamation. And apparently this government doesn't listen. They don't care. They continue to bully their way through this. We have communities—look, each and every year, municipalities balance their budgets. Now when's the last time we had a balanced budget in this province?

So here we are, we've got a government that continues—*[interjection]* Classic. I hope you get up and say that you've balanced your budget—that's a real classic. Because the municipal people here and the municipal people across the province will certainly—it'll be like reading the comics when they read the comments from the government here. It's just how distorted—how to distort facts. In fact, I

guess—I'm sure the 192 communicators will get the story somewhat straightened out from them as they put it out there.

* (11:30)

The Minister of Agriculture knows full well, with his municipal experience, that this is the wrong approach. He would've never been happy with this when he was on—if he was still on municipal council. He would've told the government this is wrong, you're not going about this. If they would've—if the government—all the government had to do on this was put out the offer; if you want to amalgamate, how can we assist you? And some municipalities probably would've taken it up. But no, this government figures that they know best, that they're going to put the hammer down.

So I—Mr. Speaker, I certainly look forward to the comments from the other side and they will—and perhaps they will have a—see the light today. Maybe—perhaps the minister will stand up today and say, you know what? We made a mistake; Bill 33 is wrong. We're going to withdraw it.

In fact, I believe the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) has some thoughts still to give on Bill 33 on a hoist motion. It was our—you know, we brought in a hoist motion to give the government time to rethink this, and so I—you know, down the road I look forward to the member for Arthur-Virden—again, I've got a couple of files I can share with him when he speaks to the hoist motion, and I know the municipal people in the gallery today, all they're looking for is for respect, and that's what it's all about. It's about a lack of respect from an arrogant government out of control.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Before I recognize the minister, I want to remind our guests who are with us here this afternoon, and we're pleased that they're able—or this morning—we're pleased that they're able to join us, but there is to be no participation in any of the Chamber activities, and that includes applause.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade): Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise to speak to this resolution today, and for a number of reasons.

And perhaps I'll start by talking about my—I mentioned how my dad had turned 80 years of age just recently, and my dad was a schoolteacher which inspired me to be a schoolteacher. But when my dad

taught, he taught in a one-room schoolhouse which was one of 1,100 school districts that we had in the province of Manitoba at the time. Now—*[interjection]* Yes, I hear the member from Arthur-Virden saying, thank you, Duff Roblin, because Duff Roblin and the Minister of Education, from Gimli at the time as well, Dr. George Johnson, who actually had performed an appendectomy on my dad—I know it's all quite circular, how we're going here—but, at any rate, he was the Minister of Education responsible for working with the Roblin government, to take those 1,100 school districts and consolidate them into school divisions, which made a lot of sense. It made a lot of sense, and we, of course, took it a step further with the school modernization act when we took those school divisions and reduced them from, I believe, 58 to 36 because times change and we need to change with the times.

Now as a history teacher, Mr. Speaker, shortly after I was elected, a very good friend of mine who'd worked in my campaign, volunteered in my campaign, brought me a map of Manitoba as a postage stamp province and it was a map that was reproduced to celebrate the centenary of the company that was printing the maps. And I looked at that map, and it was really quite telling because, when you look at that map, the municipal boundaries from the 1880s have not changed—in many areas, have not changed at all. And we also had the unconsolidated and unorganized territories that made up some of the municipalities within the Interlake region of—where I'm from, but those boundaries changed over time, as populations grew.

But now, Mr. Speaker, we have seen populations shrink in our municipalities. In fact, 54 of the municipalities that we're talking about being less than 1,000 people, three of them actually had achieved their highest population in 1900. The boundary hasn't changed, but the population has been going down since 1900. Of the remaining 51 in that group of which I speak, they had all achieved their highest population in 1931 and the remainder of the municipalities that we're speaking of in this particular piece of legislation had achieved their highest populations in 1941. So, yes, rural depopulation is something that we've seen right across Canada, and we have to change with the times, because times have changed.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm looking at this as—through the lens of a history teacher, through the lens of a politician, but also through the lens as a politician who happened to be part of that historic

merger as a member of council in the RM of Gimli. And that was a very good process to undertake, and we took three years to do it, I admit that, but we took that time because that's how much time we had. We had the time to do it before we met our next municipal elections, so we took our time and we did it right, and I believe it was the right thing to do. And I still believe that it's the right thing to do today, is to look at these municipalities that have not changed in size of boundary but certainly have changed in size of population. There are a lot of efficiencies that can be realized in this process, and we certainly realized a lot of those efficiencies in the town and RM of Gimli when we became Gimli, one municipality.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's been a rather interesting journey, because when we introduced this legislation, I remember meeting with a number of officials when we were up in Swan River as a caucus. And I happened to be sitting at a community luncheon with a representative from Swan River—or from one of the municipalities. He was a municipal councillor, so I thought, I see he's a municipal councillor; I thought I'd engage him on the bill and the fact that we're working towards amalgamating the municipalities. And I said, well, what do you think of this initiative? And he said, well, it's about time. He said, I've been thinking about the valley district, the Swan Valley district, and he said, in our Swan Valley district, we have more municipal councillors than the entire city of New York. He said, I think we can find ways to be more efficient. So, yes, he was engaged in that discussion. He thinks it's the right thing to do, and he's prepared to work with his neighbouring communities, roll up his sleeves and get the job done in the time that has been given to do so.

I also know there was a former candidate from—who ran in the Interlake for the Conservative Party who's actually on the record as saying that a thousand is too small a number, that we should be going even further. And he was talking about the fact that perhaps Arborg and Bifrost and Riverton should all amalgamate or perhaps look at his municipality as another potential partner to amalgamate with a neighbouring municipality.

Now, times have changed; the boundaries haven't, but the realities in many of these municipalities has changed. And I know I have concerns when I have a municipality in my constituency that spends an inordinate amount on administration. There are a lot more ways that we can find efficiencies by working together.

In the case of the Gimli amalgamation, it was an example where we had been working together on a number of initiatives. When I was first elected to municipal council, we were already in our second go-round to negotiate coming up with a regional waste water treatment plant. And unfortunately, part of that discussion was us and them.

We had a bit of a loggerheads over some of the issues around the development of that waste water treatment plant. But I was sitting there thinking, there's no us and them when it comes to the health of our lake; we should be working together to make this happen. And it took a lot longer having two different municipal entities at the table to talk about how it is that we develop that infrastructure that's necessary and important and critical to the health of our lake, Mr. Speaker. There were other examples where we had shared service agreements with neighbouring municipalities, where we had tried to enhance recreational opportunities for our community but we were at loggerheads over what was the best way to do that.

Now, those boundaries are gone. There are no political boundaries now separating the RM of Gimli from the town of Gimli. We are one community working to a common goal, and we've found a lot of efficiencies in that process, Mr. Speaker.

And I know that it's not without controversy, because when I ran, I actually was living in the town of Gimli at the time even though I was from the rural municipality. Well, I didn't even know that until I was about 20 years old, because I never thought of a boundary between the town and the RM. But I knew that running on the amalgamation ticket was not going to be an easy thing to do in the rural municipality because there were some people who had some trepidation about that, some concerns about that, but we worked through it, we worked together and we got it done.

And that's been one example in 2003, and there are several other examples that my colleagues have referred to with Killarney-Turtle Mountain, with Pine Falls and Powerview, with Garson and Brokenhead. These are all examples of how it has worked and will continue to work, Mr. Speaker.

* (11:40)

So when they talk about timelines, it's—it has—you know, the timelines are not insurmountable. We have the technology, as we can say. We have the expertise. We have the experience. This is not

reinventing a wheel, Mr. Speaker. We have the supports through local government to get everyone to the table, to work it all out and make it happen.

Now, you know, one of things when I was first elected, I used to go to AMM conventions and I did participate in the bear pit sessions and what not as a delegate of AMM. And I was only that one term before I ended up coming into provincial politics.

But when I was sitting as Minister of Education, I remember an individual standing up and really going after me as Education Minister for how inefficient the education system was. So I found out where this individual is from and discovered that there were 36 voters per elected official for that particular municipality. And I was thinking, how inefficient is that? Can you imagine if that was the measure by which we elected officials in the province of Manitoba, how big this Chamber would have to be?

An Honourable Member: Meet at the stadium.

Mr. Bjornson: We'd have to meet at the—yes, my colleague the Minister of Justice (Mr. Swan) said we'd have to have our meetings at the new Investors Group stadium.

I mean, there are ways that we can work together and become more efficient, and that's the whole notion behind this piece of legislation is working together. And I know that members opposite have done this before, they've done this before. They've brought in legislation. They brought in ideas. They've left them high on the shelf because they don't want to rock the boat and they don't want to change things. That's the way they operate.

We recognize when these recommendations come forward, when ideas are brought forward of how to modernize and become more efficient that, yes, it's not going to be without controversy. But it is the right thing to do, Mr. Speaker.

So we will work this out with the AMM. We'll work with all the municipalities that are captured within this legislation and we'll make sure that we move this province forward and create more opportunities, better opportunities for rural Manitoba, more efficiencies for rural Manitoba and a better—

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

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to recognizing the next member to speak to the private member's resolution, I want to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today from Windsor School 21 grades 3 and 4 students under the direction of Sally Robin. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Education (Ms. Allan). On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome our guests here this morning.

* * *

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Riding Mountain): With that introduction, Sally Robin was a classmate of mine in the Major Pratt collegiate, so it's a pleasure to see her.

Back to the resolution, amalgamation is a very serious matter and has a direct impact on every ratepayer and citizen in our province. And the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) said something that I agree with, that we—amalgamation is a very important issue, that it takes time to do it right. He also indicated that he ran on an amalgamation ticket. So he actually ran on allowing the ratepayers to make a decision whether they wanted to amalgamate or not, Mr. Speaker. So isn't that interesting—isn't that interesting?

For the people that are here in the gallery today and the people that are outside at the respect rally, they would find that rather interesting that the member for Gimli has actually put on record exactly what these municipalities are asking for, Mr. Speaker. And I know that Mr. Dobrowolski who's in the gallery today would find that interesting as well, and I think that's something that municipalities across the province should be made aware of and are looking at this government to support that.

Because talking to municipalities, they are not against amalgamation, but they are against a forced amalgamation where they are being told that this has to happen within a very short period of time. Like, we're coming into a 'provin'—or a municipal election process within the next few years, and I believe that to do this right they need the time to do it right. They have to have the buy in from their municipalities, from their ratepayers. They have to have agreement within their communities on how to best do this process.

And I believe that when I debated this recently I shared with the Minister responsible for Local

Government the issue of mill rate discrepancies. We have two municipalities, one that will circle the other, so that would be, sort of a no-brainer municipality amalgamation. But what I shared with him was the mill rate 'defic'—discrepancies, and the minister at that time says, well, you know, we can look at that and not have to implement right away, that they can look down the road. I said that can't happen, look at the massive discrepancy in a—of the amount of tax that one of the municipalities are going to have to see an increase in. And that's not fair, Mr. Speaker. And I believe that the minister was quite surprised at it. So, obviously, this is an issue that is not—that doesn't come—that has come to the minister's attention and to his department as something that they need to look at.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's why they need time to do this right. The municipalities are looking for this government to provide the supports that they need to do this process. Like, I know a number of municipalities who are going forward, who have signed on, but are saying: We're signing on with our fingers crossed that this government will actually do what it says and provide some supports, because they haven't seen them yet.

You know, we have, you know, the RM of Blanshard here today, who's a small municipality, who manages their dollars, who work hard for their ratepayers, and these municipalities are asking the government: What exactly will a larger municipality do for us? What will it save us? What will it do in the best interests of my ratepayers? And the government hasn't provided those answers. And that's the big question. What is to be gained by ratepayers and citizens from a hurried and poorly planned—as I've indicated earlier—amalgamation attempt by this NDP government?

The municipal system is the most efficient and accountable form of government that we have in this province. They know their neighbours. They know who their—the issues—or they know what the issues are. They manage their road systems. They actually manage the government road systems, the provincial government road systems, as we've seen in different municipalities, like Shellmouth-Boulton, who, when Highway 83 slid, the municipality took on the responsibility of managing the roads—their municipal roads and some of the provincial roads.

So, the municipalities have come to the table over and over and over again and have supported the province when they needed. And now what do we see? We see a minister and a government who's

turning their backs on them, not allowing them to have a say in this process, and I believe that we are in very serious times, Mr. Speaker, when we have a government that dictates what has to be done without consultation, without discussions with the municipalities.

So, on the record, I just would have to say that I support this resolution. I do not support the NDP government on this decision, and I think ratepayers of Manitoba deserve better. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): And I'm very pleased to speak to this resolution today for the member, and I think that the most important issue that the municipalities have to look at over the last—over the next 10 months, in fact, will be the 2014 Building Canada 2 funds, where the federal government will be indicating that there's another Building Canada Fund which we plan to, as a province, plan to take full advantage of. The Building and Renewal Plan, which includes increasing the PST by 1 per cent for 10 years, is very much integral to Manitoba being able to take full advantage of the federal fund.

So, Mr. Speaker, what this means is if amalgamations were to take place in advance of April 1st, 2014, these amalgamated municipalities would have a greater and better chance of applying for infrastructure funds to complete projects within their jurisdictions. These funds are usually tied to participation by multi-levels of government on programs, and members know or should know that that's how most infrastructure is built in this province. The fact of the matter is that either it's the city and the province involved or the city, province, and the federal government in many, many projects.

So, if you're a small municipality, the chances are you've been bypassed by infrastructure opportunities from the federal government, from the provincial government, over the last number of years because you don't have the fiscal and financial abilities to participate in that program, and we want to change that. That's part of the program here, to change that to allow the municipalities to be able to leverage those funds and get those projects that they need.

* (11:50)

Now, one of the statistics that have been used here by a number of our speakers that I find very interesting, as the—and the member for Gimli (Mr. Bjornson) just, you know, alluded to these and he

gave some very important statistics here dealing with the rural municipality population declines, and what he said was based on historical census information.

The rural municipalities of less than a thousand people in 2011—I have to explain this very slowly to the member for Emerson because he has difficulty picking up on some of these concepts. Now, municipalities with less than a thousand people in 2011, 90 per cent saw their populations begin to steadily decline more than 70 years ago. Now, Mr. Speaker, 15 per cent reached their largest population in 1941—and I hope the member for Emerson is taking careful notes here, because I don't want him to be asking me questions about this, which I'm sure he will over the next week or two—30 per cent reached their largest population in the 1931 census, 19 per cent reached their largest population in the 1921 census, 13 per cent reached their largest population in 1911, and for the member from Emerson, who I believe was a teenager then, 12 per cent reached their largest population in 1901.

Now, you know, any sort of investigation of the facts would indicate that amalgamations are, more or less, long overdue, Mr. Speaker.

So now, you know, let's deal with their leader. Their leader talks about reducing red tape. Remember that famous promise that he made that he was going to reduce 3,000 pages of red tape? Never happened. The fact of the matter is the Leader of the Opposition's actually promoting red tape in this province by promoting duplication by keeping their RMs as small as they are.

Mr. Speaker, there are many, many arguments that can be made in favour of amalgamations, and I am encouraging the members opposite to pay close attention to the minister who will be speaking on this matter in just a few seconds. Thank you.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak to this resolution that's brought forward by my colleague from Agassiz, who has spent many, many years in the municipal government as well as five years as the president of AMM. He understands what municipalities are and what the challenges are that face the municipalities. And I think he was right on the mark when he said that at the last AMM meeting that the minister stood up and announced this, with no consultation, announces this Bill 33 which would force municipalities to amalgamate, no consultation whatsoever, and it was done purposely to be a 'diversive' action.

If, Mr. Speaker, if they had consulted with municipalities, if they had said to the municipalities, there is an opportunity for some efficiencies—and I heard them talking about efficiencies over there. I heard the member from Gimli saying, oh, there's efficiencies for the municipalities. This is coming from a government that can't find any efficiency in their own government. Instead, they raised the taxes right after an election where they promised they would raise no taxes, right after an election where they said, we would not touch the PST, that that is nonsense. The fact is they lied to the people of the province of Manitoba and then come in this House and say, look, we will look for efficiencies in your government. They have off-loaded on the municipal governments. Here we have the big, big hand of the provincial government standing on the backs of municipalities, downloading onto municipalities, charging them tax on everything they do.

Mr. Speaker, it's double taxation for all of Manitobans. If they would take one good look out in the country and take a look at the efficiencies that the governments, the local governments, the municipalities in this province employ, the efficiencies that they employ and work within their budgets which they file and balance every year, by law. They obey the laws of this province.

Mr. Speaker, we know that this government doesn't care about laws. We know that we have two members in this House right now that are charged with conflict of interest. Laws don't mean anything to them. We see that they will raise the PST and break the law, the law that they were fully aware of. And they stand up and say, we will show you efficiency; we will force you into efficiencies.

We have the member from the Interlake that says they're all dysfunctional out there. I'd like to hear him go out into his municipality and say that to the municipal officials in Arborg, go in there and say that. What he did say to them though was, to a number of his ratepayers, you just built in the wrong place, you built in the wrong place; you shouldn't have built there.

And why would he do that? Why would he not stand up the same as we do on this side? We stand up for the people of Manitoba. We stand up for the municipalities of Manitoba. We work for the people in Manitoba. We don't tax them out of existence here. We don't chase small businesses out of the province. Sixty-eight per cent of the businesses in

Manitoba would not recommend to start a business here, Mr. Speaker.

And they talk about efficiencies. They have no efficiencies. They have run this Province into the ground.

So, Mr. Speaker, what I would like to do is ask you to canvass this House for leave to call a vote on this very important resolution today. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: There's been a request to see if there's leave for the House to consider the motion.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: I hear a no, so the debate will continue.

The honourable Minister of Local Government, I believe, had been rising to his feet.

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Local Government): Mr. Speaker, many on our side have spoken passionately about the reasons why, and the main message really is that we're working together with 'mani'—municipalities to strengthen our communities, enhance the services offered to Manitobans, collaboratively tackle some of the issues we all face together.

Modernizing will see municipalities become stronger, more efficient. Municipalities will be able to reinvest administrative savings into better services. They will be able to reduce operational costs of sharing major assets, like water treatment, recreation facilities. They'll be able to recruit and retain skilled municipal staff.

The new municipality will be able to provide more opportunities to attract business and economic development and reduce red tape, common regional regulations, as well as infrastructure and services. They'll be able to find—

An Honourable Member: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member for Emerson, on a point of order?

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, I think it's my duty to stand in the House today and report the words that I just heard from the member from the Interlake. Those were unparliamentary words that are not to be

heard in this House, and I would ask you to censor him. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: I'm unclear on what words the honourable member for Emerson is referencing and so I—[interjection] I am not—just give me a second here.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on the same point of order?

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): On the same point of order, I might suggest if you're able to review the tapes from this morning to hear if you can find the words that are unparliamentary, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: That's—was going to be my intent.

And in comments to the House, I know that there's quite a bit of interest in debating this matter. And since there has been a point of order raised here for comments that were apparently attributable to another member of the Assembly, I'm going to

review Hansard proceedings of this morning's proceedings and then, if necessary, bring back a ruling for the House, depending on what I might be able to determine or glean from Hansard.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Local Government, to continue his comments.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, part of what we're talking about was that the reeve for the RM of Bifrost made those comments that the min—the member from Emerson was trying to attribute to the MLA for Interlake, which is absolutely incorrect, and just is to clarify, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 12 noon, when this matter is again before the House, the honourable Minister of Local Government will have eight minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 20, 2013

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