

Fourth Session – Forty-First Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

| Member | Constituency | Political Affiliation |
|--------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| ALLUM, James | Fort Garry-Riverview | NDP |
| ALTEMEYER, Rob | Wolseley | NDP |
| BINDLE, Kelly | Thompson | PC |
| CLARKE, Eileen, Hon. | Agassiz | PC |
| COX, Cathy, Hon. | River East | PC |
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| CURRY, Nic | Kildonan | PC |
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| GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon. | Steinbach | PC |
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| GUILLEMARD, Sarah | Fort Richmond | PC |
| HELWER, Reg | Brandon West | PC |
| ISLEIFSON, Len | Brandon East | PC |
| JOHNSON, Derek | Interlake | PC |
| JOHNSTON, Scott | St. James | PC |
| KINEW, Wab | Fort Rouge | NDP |
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| WHARTON, Jeff, Hon. | Gimli | PC |
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| WOWCHUK, Rick | Swan River | PC |
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 21, 2019

The House met at 10 a.m.

Madam 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.

Please be seated.

Speaker's Statement

Madam Speaker: I have a statement for the House.

I am advising the House that I have received a letter from the Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) indicating that the government caucus has identified Bill 240, The Elections Amendment Act, as the second of their three selected bills for this session.

As a reminder to the House, rule 24 permits each recognized party to select up to three private members' bills per session to proceed to a second reading vote and requires the House leader to provide written notice as to the date and time of the vote.

The Government House Leader has therefore advised that debate will commence on the second reading of Bill 240 this morning, May 21st, 2019, at 10 a.m., with the question to be put at 10:55 a.m.

Should a recorded vote be requested, as per rule 23(7), this will take place on May 23rd, 2019, at 11:55 a.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 240—The Elections Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: As announced, then, the House will now consider second reading of Bill 240.

Mrs. Sarah Guillemard (Fort Richmond): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma), that Bill 240, The Elections

Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi électorale, be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Guillemard: It is a pleasure to share some background on Bill 240 today, and I hope that it sparks a conversation around honesty and transparency.

I have had the opportunity to speak with quite a few people about the merits of this bill, which aims to provide factual information to Manitobans before they head to the polls during an election. One of the most common responses I received was surprise the voluntary disclosure of criminal convictions was not already a part of The Elections Act. Equally surprising was that political parties are not obligated to share this information if a candidate has disclosed it to their organization.

Madam Speaker, I was asked by media if I believe that people can change. My answer to that is I absolutely believe that people can change, but change is not evident when a person hides from their past.

Every person in this world makes mistakes. We don't all make the same mistakes, but we are all given the opportunity to become better or to become bitter from our life experiences.

Today I don't want to focus on individuals who have broken the law, Madam Speaker. That is not what this bill is about. Instead, I want to focus on survivors: those who never asked for or deserved the burden that they carry each and every day of their lives.

Madam Speaker, survivors are faced with the opportunity to become bitter or to become better, but the difference for them is that they haven't broken any laws to earn their sentence.

I was 11 years old, Madam Speaker, when I was sexually assaulted by a stranger in broad daylight. I have spoken here before about this experience and the court process that followed. I had people around me during the court case that used encouraging words through the ordeal, such as, you are so brave to testify against him or I can't believe how

courageous you are and even, you're such a strong fighter.

Madam Speaker, I wasn't brave. I was not courageous, nor was I a fighter. I was a terrified little girl who had found herself in a whirlwind of adult choices and was helpless to rewind time in order to prevent the attack so that I could avoid having to face my monster face-to-face in court.

Madam Speaker, if you speak to survivors of assault, they will tell you that court proceedings can, in many ways, seem just as traumatic as the event that set the process in motion. The courts are focused on determining if the individual is innocent or guilty. So a survivor or a witness has only one role and that is to testify and have their account of the ordeal scrutinized, every detail questioned because no one wants to send an innocent person to jail. I can remember the questions asked of me 30 years ago.

I can remember how they made me feel. I can even hear the mocking tone in the defence lawyer's voice and the smirk on the face of my attacker. That was my experience. Not only did I have to look my attacker in the face to identify him in the courtroom, but I was subjected to multiple questions that were aimed at picking my experience apart, in hopes of setting him free.

So, yes, Madam Speaker, I do believe that people can change because I am no longer that scared little girl who looks over her shoulder every time I leave the house. I no longer experience paralyzing fear when I see men who have similar facial characteristics of my attacker.

I am standing before you as a healed, determined survivor who recognizes that I have a responsibility to be a voice in this time and this space, for those who have not yet reached their peace.

Madam Speaker, this bill is about giving survivors reassurance that if those who have harmed them seek to run in an election provincially, they will not be able to set aside their past and hide it from those who will grant them this position.

We can't take away the memories of the trauma for survivors but at the very least we can make sure the responsibility is not on their shoulders to alert the public about those who have been found guilty of harming them. The responsibility will be placed in the hands of voters to decide whether their candidate has truly changed for the better, with full disclosure of facts.

I believe this strengthens democracy by holding us, as elected officials, accountable for our actions and words and building upon the transparency that voters demand of all who wish to serve them.

Madam Speaker, my constituents value and appreciate authenticity and honest dialogue. There are important elements—these are important elements when forming relationships and building trust. We have a lot of work to do to dispel some of the assumptions made about politicians. I believe this bill will help us move in the direction that will help voters make informed decisions at the polls.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to hearing feedback on this bill from my colleagues in the Chamber. This is a non-partisan topic that I hope will be supported by all parties so we can continue to work towards openness and transparency. Voluntary disclosure is required in many workplaces, and we have an even greater responsibility as elected officials to demonstrate leadership in this area. We are even required to voluntarily disclose our past when crossing the border. Everyone is subjected to this. Thank you.

* (10:10)

Questions

Madam Speaker: A question period of up to 10 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the sponsoring member by any member in the following sequence: first question to be asked by a member from another party; this is to be followed by a rotation between the parties; each independent member may ask one question; and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Would the member for Fort Richmond please explain her reasoning for only including criminal and certain financial offences, but exemption—exempting many others such as conflict-of-interest laws?

Mrs. Sarah Guillemard (Fort Richmond): I appreciate the question.

This bill is a starting point, and I look forward to continued dialogue and potentially in future having amendments made to this particular act. But we need to start somewhere, Madam Speaker, and we are focusing on the elements that matter most to voters, and that is knowing fully what your past is and what you've been involved in and then it's up to you to demonstrate that you have changed.

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): I just want to once again take the opportunity now publicly to thank the member for bringing forth this legislation. I think it's important to reflect on our role as Legislature—as legislators and the need to have a higher standard.

So my question for the member is, can she please inform this House if this legislation will forbid or ban anyone from ever seeking or running for public office?

Mrs. Guillemard: I thank the member for the question.

No, this bill would not exclude anyone from running for public office. It would simply be asking them to be transparent about their past, and it is up to them to speak to the voters who they are asking for their trust to demonstrate that they have turned their life around and that that no longer is a factor in their decision making, that they do respect the law and they will continue to demonstrate that if they are elected.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (Leader of the Second Opposition): I was wondering, had you—had the member contemplated other kinds of violations, civil law, whether there were people—if people had been sued successfully in the past, whether that would be something that would be—should be disclosed as well.

Mrs. Guillemard: I appreciate the question from the member.

I think, again, that this is an opportunity for us all to discuss what we would like to see in future in terms of requirements for candidates running and seeking to serve citizens in the—in Manitoba. I would never exclude adding more transparency, but at this point we're at a starting point, and what we do know is that if you have been found guilty or pleaded guilty to criminal charges or financial misdeeds, that that is public knowledge. And what we are doing is providing an easier access to voters so they can make informed decisions before casting their vote.

Ms. Fontaine: We know that court records are already public records. You can go down to the law courts and find out things that you are attempting to seek. So why is this legislation necessary, according to the member for Fort Richmond (Mrs. Guillemard)?

Mrs. Guillemard: I know that these are publicly available court records, and, absolutely, the member is right than anybody could go down to the

courthouse and look up these details. However, voters expect us to be up front with who we are, why we are running and what we hope to achieve in terms of representing our constituents, and when we withhold this public information it can be perceived as being dishonest. So, Madam Speaker, this is movement towards transparency and honesty and voluntary disclosure of facts.

Thank you.

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): I noticed in a couple of times, some of the answers we've heard the word transparency mentioned, and, I mean, I certainly have a reason why I believe transparency is so important throughout not just the lives we serve, but all of our life transparency is so key. And the member has mentioned it a couple times, so I'd like to ask the member why she feels that Manitobans in general believe transparency would be a key element in understanding who is running for any public office.

Mrs. Guillemard: I appreciate the question.

I think transparency has always been an important element when you are asking for the public trust, and we are in a position of immense—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: —responsibility that requires a higher level of that honesty and transparency in order to earn the trust of the public, and I think that they've been—they've felt maybe deceived multiple times in the past by previous governments that say one thing but do quite another.

So I think transparency is a key element for all elected officials to be honest with who they are and what they hope to achieve for the constituents.

Mr. Lamont: Of course, we also have laws governing how we run elections. There are a number of instances in—over the last years where political parties and candidates at the provincial and federal level have been charged and convicted of election overspending or in the case of the in-and-out scandal at the federal level.

Why is it that those are not considered? These are essentially—did not at—crime such as being under the Criminal Code, but they are offences against democracy. Is there some reason why these would be left out?

Mrs. Guillemard: I appreciate the question and I think that there's—there absolutely is an importance to being very succinct and clear in terms of the amendments to this act. I think that various political parties, opposition parties, the media, do quite a bit of digging, actually, and these elements and the actions of the past—whether it due to Election Financing Act or other areas do come to light.

This is not about exposing every single thing that everyone's done in their lifetime. It's very specific to criminal convictions because these are elements that do take quite a bit of digging. You can access them but it does take effort. This is to make it easier to access for voters.

Ms. Fontaine: In the context of—as the member for Fort Richmond (Mrs. Guillemard) has put on the record here—being more transparent and allowing more information for voters, would she agree then every single candidate who is running to be an MLA in this Chamber then disclose their tax returns?

Mrs. Guillemard: I appreciate the question. I would say that I am not opposed to more transparency and all around. However, when you speak to constituents and voters, they're not so concerned about your tax receipt, aside from knowing how much income you are making, and if you have breached the tax laws, that, too, would be considered a guilty—or a conviction or pleading guilty and would be made available under this law.

Mr. Teitsma: Once again I want to take the opportunity to thank the member, especially for sharing, once again, the difficulties that she had to face when she was a young child. It's something that—I think it's hard for anyone else to imagine and that she brings that into this House is something that I think is brave. She might not think so but I think it is. It's courageous and I'm very grateful that she is willing to do that, and I think it speaks to the kind of legislation that she wants to put forward.

Now members here would know that quite often legislation does not get voted on and so—but this one will be. I was pleased to hear that at the beginning from the Speaker.

So I just want to give the member an opportunity to explain what steps—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mrs. Guillemard: I believe the member was getting at what next steps will this legislation follow and following the vote, obviously today—and hopefully

it's supported by all parties—it would go to committee, where we could then hear from the public, that they could give feedback about the merits of this bill and what they would like to see, either included or amended in it, or if they simply would like to support it as a step towards transparency.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Fontaine: Like many private members' bills that are brought forward in the House, you know, I've 'ofside' asked the question, why bring forward, you know, said bill—whatever bill it is—in the form of a private member's bill, if it is such a huge concern and priority of the Pallister government. And so I would pose that question to the member for Fort Richmond.

Why is this not a government bill if it is, in fact, so important to the Pallister government?

* (10:20)

Mrs. Guillemard: The truth is that all private members' bills absolutely could be put forth by the government, but we work as a team and we really encourage each other to speak to the bills that are most important to us. I felt it was necessary to put a voice to survivors. I think that a lot of the debate when we're talking about criminal records has been focused on the offender, and I think that it's time that we give voice back to survivors in this discussion.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The time for this question period has expired.

Debate

Madam Speaker: Debate is open.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I'm pleased to get up and put a couple of words on the record this morning after our long weekend.

So I think that this—particularly this sitting, we've had quite a discussion. I don't know if it's been robust or comprehensive because I think that there's been—we certainly need a lot more conversation. But we certainly have had a bit of conversation or debate in this House in respect of election fairness and the ability of individuals to participate in the electoral system in an equitable way—[interjection] Miigwech.

And so I think it's important to highlight this morning in respect of the member for Fort Richmond's Elections Amendment Act some of the things that have occurred in the last three years.

And, you know, in the very short time that I have to put words on the record, I think it's important to put these words on the record, juxtapose what is the priority of the Pallister government in ensuring that individuals who may not necessarily have the opportunity or the support to be able to run for political office need and require and, certainly, the measures that the Pallister government, including the Premier (Mr. Pallister) himself, have put in place to ensure that certain people actually never get a seat in this House.

And so, you know, as I've said, I'm very proud to be a part of a party that put in an electoral infrastructure here in Manitoba that—actually, you know, we were one of the many provinces across the country that ensured that there were fair election processes and that individuals were supported in their right and desire to seek political office.

And so, in the context of the member for Fort Richmond's (Mrs. Guillemard) bill, you know, I would suggest that—I mean, I would also suggest on the timing of this bill. We know—you know, if we want to talk elections, we know that the Premier is about to, you know, pull the trigger on breaking the Manitoba fixed election date law that we have here. We know that that's about to happen and so—and, really, that is breaking the law here. And so I would suggest that members opposite are picking and choosing which laws that they want to adhere to.

So—but as we move a little bit forward here and we look at this bill, I would suggest—I would question the timing of this bill, and I would suggest to the House that it is married with the timing of the Premier about to break Manitoba law, right, so that we see these two actions put together and married. And so, you know, I am very hesitant and loath to publicly shame individuals for mistakes that we have all made.

And, you know, I—you know, Madam Speaker, when I was first elected there was a woman who—I don't know who she is. But she actually went to the court, law courts, and she actually took the time to go to the law courts—as I mentioned, that you can find out anything on individuals—and she actually posted stuff about me. And she actually posted the fact that I've been divorced twice. She posted that. She posted what my house sold for. She posted that I have a custody agreement on my youngest child, and it didn't occur to this woman, who I wish I actually would have known we were debating this, this morning; I would have named her and, unfortunately,

I can't remember her name, but she publicly posted again that I have been divorced twice, not realizing that, you know, I'm blessed to have a really good relationship with my first ex-husband. We are best friends. We've raised the boys together. We even adopted Chilly Dog together, even though we've been divorced for 15 years.

But not all marriages end like that and, actually, what this woman ended up doing, publicly recording my divorces and details of my divorce with my second ex-husband, she actually put me at risk and in danger. And I know that, you know, it was a very public shaming that I was divorced twice, and this woman has no idea why I've been divorced twice. This woman—or anybody in this House or any other citizen knows why I chose to divorce twice—but actively sought to publicly shame me for divorcing. And so I'm really hesitant, and let me just put it on the record, I'm not ashamed to be divorced.

Nobody, when you get married, you know, thinks, okay, yes, in a couple of years I'm going to be getting divorced. Nobody wants that. Unfortunately, life happens and I'm not ashamed of it. I always talk that—I do say that I've been twice divorced. Marriage is probably not for me, Madam Speaker. That's okay. I'm not ashamed of it. So I really loathe to publicly shame people for their private lives and certainly for mistakes that have been made.

And so, you know, I would suggest, in respect of trying to ensure that we have an equitable electoral system here in Manitoba, there are other things that we could do to put measures in place so that constituents are fully in—aware and feel confident in the folks that they are electing.

One of the things that I would suggest is that this government could reverse the bills that they've put in place that actively work against indigenous people, people of colour, marginalized people, economically marginalized people in Manitoba that want to have a say, that deserve to have a say, that should be able to have a say in this House by seeking office. But the measures have been put in place so that actually those people will never be able to sit in here because of what the government has done, because of what the Pallister government has put in place in respect of a legislative framework and regime here.

So, you know, I would suggest that anybody that gets up in this House and talks about, you know, their commitment to electoral equity, would perhaps want to go look back at the legislation over the last

three years that has actually ensured and entrenched that people will not be able to get elected in this Chamber, which, as I've said, Madam Speaker, in the past, is a shame because you cannot look at this Chamber—the composition of the MLAs that are elected—and think, in any way, shape or form, that this is Manitoba. It's not.

* (10:30)

When I go to schools, that's who I see; that is, when I look at the children and there's a vast variety of different cultures and—that is Manitoba. This Chamber does not represent Manitoba at—in any way, shape or form. It doesn't represent Manitoba in respect of its diversity. It does not represent Manitoba in respect of the complement of women versus men. It never has. And it certainly doesn't do it now. It does not represent Manitoba in respect of the LGBTTTQ community. It does not represent Manitobans in respect of Manitobans with disabilities.

So, if the members opposite—if—really care about electoral reform or infrastructure, I would suggest that that's where they start.

Miigwech.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (Leader of the Second Opposition): I would mention that this bill is being brought forward at a time that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is contemplating ignoring a fixed-date election law. The Premier made a commitment to myself as well as to the leader of the opposition that he would—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamont:—give 90 days notice and then said that rumours and speculation would be enough to count as 90 days notice. There is another law, not just the law on fixed elections, but there's a law on communication blackouts for 90 days prior to an election. But the Premier and this government are still spending public money on making announcements.

So, if the Premier had wanted to have a snap election, he—and ignored a fixed election date, or if he has issues with the fixed-election-date law, he's had three years to change it, and he found the time to amend The Elections Act several times in this period.

So, when it comes to this bill, we have to consider what this bill is asking for. It's actually pretty minimal in terms of disclosure. The 'disclosure' of a—the disclosure of a criminal

conviction is a pretty basic disclosure in terms of what we expect of elected officials. We do need to recognize that, you know, that people do have—people can change. We—this is a fundamental belief we—I think we have to have as a matter of justice, that people can grow and they can change and they can redeem themselves.

But we do live in a society where there is a CFS-to-prison pipeline. The number of—while the number of people being jailed, generally, is going down, the number of indigenous people being jailed is on the rise. And the statistics show that if—for every step of the justice process, that indigenous people face harsher treatment for being charged, convicted, sentencing, facing time in solitary confinement and applications for parole.

There were study—there was an article in Maclean's which showed that in Saskatchewan the same crime committed by an indigenous person and a non-indigenous person, the non-indigenous person might get one tenth the punishment. So we need to recognize that our—one, that our justice system is not always as just as it should be.

The other is the fact that this is—we're talking about criminal convictions when there are other—many other kinds of laws that are relevant. One is civil laws, that whether people have been sued and have lost a lawsuit. That's also an issue of trust as far as a candidate is concerned. But the other is that there's a long history of violations of electoral laws, as I mentioned in my questions, where the misdeeds are unearthed, are brought to light, but nobody actually ends up being—paying a personal price.

And one example is the vote splitting of 1995 where it was discovered that PC Party donors and PC Party—and people working in the Premier's Office at the time actually paid candidates to run for a party—another party—in an effort to split the vote. There was an inquiry into this, and it was—you know, there were donations that were sort of secret donations—it was a big—and it was deemed by the judge, the presiding judge, that there had been a violation of the law.

But, as it was, nobody actually ended up being prosecuted or convicted because one of the things that also happens with people who are in high places or people who are powerful is that the embarrassment of being charged or the fact that—just the fact that people know that they had participated in this thing is deemed to be punishment enough.

The other is in 2006, there was a scheme called the in-and-out scheme. It was an extensive—which took—[*interjection*] Yes. That was one that—yes—I—the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) mentions Adscam when I was, I believe, a university student.

An Honourable Member: Last year?

Mr. Lamont: No, 1995, I believe, that was.

So the in-and-out campaign was—it was—involved one in five Conservative candidates across Canada. It involved \$1.2 million in illegal overspending and it was unearthed when Conservative campaigns asked for \$700,000 in government rebates they weren't entitled to, using forged invoices. And four prominent Conservatives were charged: Senators Irving Gerstein, Doug Finley, National Party Director Michael Donison, and Interim Party Director Susan Kehoe.

After years of denials, advance to 2011, the Conservative Party of Canada pleaded guilty and agreed to pay \$52,000 in fines and in 2012 they dropped the appeal and agreed to pay back \$230,000—a hundred and—\$230,198 of the \$700,000 for which they had submitted fraudulent invoices.

And, as a result of this plea deal, no one was found personally responsible. The—no one person was found personally responsible for a scheme that involved one in five candidates and, at the time, Senators Gerstein and Finley were never even suspended from the Conservative caucus or from the Senate, and Senator Gerstein, in fact, continued as the party's main fundraiser throughout that period.

And, in fact, there is a Manitoba story that this is—that—it's Don Plett, who was president of the Conservative Party of Canada and is now also a senator, sent an email in December 2005 to several Manitoba Conservative campaigns to contribute to be part of the scheme. Only one did in Winnipeg north. Says—and it—quote: In a series of emails dated December 9th, Mr. Donnis [*phonetic*] exchanged comments with Mr. Don Plett concerning the involvement of Manitoba campaigns in the media buy. Mr. Donison asked Mr. Plett to, quote, call the Manitoba campaigns right away. Get back to me as soon as you can. We'll try to bring them in if we can.

And, my point here is that there are other very serious kinds of offences which people should be aware of and people's involvement should be disclosed. If we're going to talk about criminal

convictions, we should certainly be talking about people's offences when it comes to elections and electoral acts, campaign overspending. There are other examples where I believe the former MP for St. Boniface—St. Vital and actually the current member for Interlake (Mr. Johnson) MPs had—were nearly suspended for—from Parliament because they failed to—they had overspent on their campaigns in 2011.

So the thing is that there are all sorts of other kinds of offences which people are aware, but it seems to me we only take—we—that criminal offences are the only ones that we're talking about, the only ones that people seem to take seriously when there are much other very serious issues.

But the other is simply that sometimes there's—is that—that there are no laws well. There are no rules governing these things and part of what's happened over the—is that we see people don't get charged. People don't get caught because there actually are no rules and there is no enforcement. And that's one of the things that's been frustrating is that, as a member of a third party, but also is that basically people—that because there's a lack of enforcement, there's a sense of impunity, in terms of what people will do in running campaigns, at which point they can then essentially—one way or another—break rules to get into power and once into power, there's nothing that anybody can really do about it.

So these are things that are worth knowing. There are elements of—questions of character and integrity that—there's a baseline that the only thing that matters is whether somebody's been convicted of a crime or not. There are more important and there are more—and there are other higher standards to which we should be considering and which people should be willing to disclose, Madam Speaker.

Thank you very much.

* (10:40)

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): I will keep my remarks brief, but I did want to stand on the less. First of all I, once again want to express my thanks to the member from Fort Richmond for bringing this important bill forward. I think it is important. It is timely, as has been referenced by members opposite on a number of occasions this morning. And it's important because, as elected members, I'm convinced that we're held to a higher standard of accountability and that we need to elevate this office. We need to elevate the conduct of people who aspire

to this office and the people who perform this office. We need to hold each other to higher standards, and so I appreciate very much how this bill will enhance transparency, how it will enhance accountability, how it will enhance the integrity of those who are seeking for office. Quite frankly, it's also going to make it harder to dig up dirt, if you want to call it that, and the negative sides of campaigns that we—none of us look forward to, I think. And this is an opportunity to just simply be upfront, be open about it, be transparent about it.

So I do want to, once again, thank the member and, you know, as I was listening to the members opposite, the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine), for example, and as she was speaking, it called to mind a friend of mine who—her name is Audrey Gordon, but I hope soon to not to be able to name her in this Chamber because she's running as a member—running as a candidate, rather, in Southdale, which is just adjacent to the Radisson riding that I represent. She's a woman of colour, and I hope that we can welcome her here into this House in due time in the next election. And I just, you know, I don't have to ask her if she can imagine what it's like, as a woman of colour, to run against a candidate who's failed to disclose things from their past. I'll have to imagine because that's what happened in the last election. Thank you.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): And I'm pleased to speak today on Bill 240, which comes forward at a strange time, and I believe that my colleague the member for St. Johns and also the Leader of the Liberal Party have pointed out the strangeness this bill coming forward, even as we have a Premier (Mr. Pallister) who's openly musing about driving a truck through the terms of The Elections Act which provides that the next election in Manitoba should happen on October 6, 2020.

You know, I was driving into the Legislature this morning and heard an Elections Manitoba ad running on the radio. Clearly, whether they've been directed or whether they've simply been concerned of what they've heard, it now appears that everybody is gearing up for what is, frankly, an illegal election.

And so we have Bill 240 that we are now debating just two weeks before the spring session ends, and what does this bill do? Well, it would require disclosure of convictions under certain laws: under Canada's Criminal Code, under which most of Canada's criminal provisions are included; the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, which

includes most of the drug offences in Canada; the Income Tax Act; and then, strangely enough, the way the bill is worded, in addition to the Income Tax Act, it says, and I quote, "any other law related to financial dishonesty," end quote. But there's not an obligation to disclose any other convictions under any other laws, whether here in Canada or elsewhere. That only kicks in if Cabinet decides to make a regulation adding in other laws, a violation of which would result in disclosure.

So it is strange, indeed, that the member has apparently decided that it would be important for somebody who's been convicted of financial dishonesty to not be treated in the same fashion as someone who's convicted of many, many other offences unless, of course, Cabinet decides that they're going to include that. And, of course, Cabinet meetings aren't public. They never have been public and we're not expecting that they would be public but how are those regulations made? Well, they're made by them being drafted up and then being passed around the Cabinet table. We don't know what the discussions are, and those are then reported—not widely—but reported in a way that has happened for some time by simply issuing an order-in-council.

So it would be a little bit—I think we'd be a little bit suspicious, frankly, Madam Speaker, if we are now told, well, this is great. This law will deal with any violations, any convictions, under any law anywhere in the world that deals with financial dishonesty, but only if the current Cabinet decides that that is a law which would be included and then be required to be disclosed. And that seems strange.

I want to put on the record the fact that—I know we've heard the member for St. Johns and the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont) talk about some of the differences in the way our legal system works. I can put on the record that those comments are absolutely on point. Not everybody is able to deal with a criminal charge against them in the same manner. Someone who has unlimited means or at the very least is very comfortable may be more likely to challenge a charge against them and as a result may be more likely to take a case to trial and be successful, or simply by the nature of the evidence they're able to put forward make it more likely that a Crown attorney is more likely to stay the charges.

Someone who has less means, someone who may only have access to a Legal Aid lawyer—and nothing against Legal Aid lawyers; some of my best friends are Legal Aid lawyers. But they do not have

the same ability as a lawyer who may be given an extended retainer to unturn every stone and provide whatever evidence may be there. That is one of the reasons why even though Legal Aid helps, even though there are other measures to try and equalize the playing field, I think we have to be very, very honest and realize that there is no level playing field.

You know, I was listening carefully to what the member who introduced the bill had to say, and she's very brave relating on the record her own experience. And I think that somebody who is a victim of crime—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Swan: —certainly has the ability to bring their stories forward. I think it takes a lot of bravery, frankly, to stand up in the Legislature where Hansard is recording every word that's said—I think it's very brave to come forward and to talk about those things. But I'm not sure, with all due respect to the member, that this bill actually is of benefit to victims.

What this bill will actually do is result in more victims being contacted, more victims being asked about their stories. Some victims may be quite happy to do that. And they may tell you, yes, I don't want that person to be elected to the Legislature; it would be gravely difficult to me to have that person ever serve in a public role, and that's where some victims may be.

I do want to put on the record, though, that not every victim may feel the same way. There may well be victims who say, you know, I've moved on. I've moved on and I've put this behind me, and I'm a survivor and I'm not going to go back to that place. This bill would actually make it more likely that the media or a political party or somebody would actually start digging through documents, would start trying to contact those people. And, frankly, that may be, for some people, the last thing they want.

I'm not going to suggest that that is everybody's experience because it's not my place to say that. But I think that has to be understood. And to suggest that the protection of victims or survivors, however you want to describe them, is the reason for the bill actually has some concerns and I think it's very important that this House remember those things.

I also want to put on the record that there are many people who are bound by codes beyond the Criminal Code and Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

I wonder why—*[interjection]*—I wonder—well, and, yes, the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko) says, ethics. And, yes, if it is a doctor who's been removed from practice, or if it's a lawyer who's been disbarred, or if it's a priest or a minister who's been defrocked or it's a teacher who's lost their licence, I don't know if that's something the member thinks should be considered in the same way or whether it's going to continue in the normal way which is if somebody happens to learn of that, then it becomes an issue.

There are many cases where professionals or regulated tradespeople can lose their right to even practise their profession or their trade because of their own ethics and morals and decisions that they make, even if it never turns into a criminal charge. And this bill, of course, makes no reference to that.

* (10:50)

The other thing I want to put on the record is that the bill does provide that if someone receives pardon, then they are not required to disclose, yet, if they don't go that far and there's simply a record suspension, then they are required to disclose it. It actually doesn't say that in the bill; it just says that in the preamble.

Well, just as I said, the likelihood of someone being convicted has something to do with their station in life. So too does getting a pardon. The Stephen Harper government actually made it more difficult, more expensive, and there was a longer period of time for someone to actually be able to get a pardon even if they had done everything they were asked to do by society and had stayed out of trouble.

So I know that the cost of a pardon is actually an issue for people of limited means. As you can expect, people who have a criminal conviction, unless they're extremely lucky, may have difficulty finding work.

I also wonder whether there should be a question of those who actually are senior advisers to the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and who choose to advise Cabinet—whether there should be some disclosure of their past. I wonder if that's something that should be considered.

So we have some—we understand there are some valid reasons for the bill. We also understand that there are some concerns with this bill, and I think it will be interesting to hear what Manitobans have to say. I don't think this bill is a priority for anybody outside of those who think they may be able to score

some quick political points. We think that's what's more important is actually following not just the spirit of The Elections Act, but the letter of The Elections Act. So I would hope this member can go back to her caucus room and tell the Premier (Mr. Pallister) that she does believe in the importance of elections being fought fairly, and she'll be one of the voices telling the Premier not to break The Elections Act and to have the election on October 6, 2020, as is provided for in the laws of Manitoba.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to proceeding with oral questions, we have some guests in the gallery that I would like to introduce to you.

We have seated in the public gallery, from Willow Grove School, 8 grade 6-9 students, under the direction of Stephen Isaac, and this group is located in the constituency the honourable member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko).

On behalf of all members here, we welcome you to the Manitoba Legislature.

* * *

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Logan): I thank my colleague from Fort Richmond for introducing this private member's bill, The Elections Amendment Act.

From my understanding, this bill would amend The Elections Act to require candidates to disclose offences that have—that they have pleaded guilty to or been found guilty of. Those offences, as well, for which a person received a record suspension under the Criminal Records Act must also be disclosed, as well as youth offences and those offences for which a person was granted under the Criminal Code are excluded.

I agree with the intent of this Elections Amendment Act, however, I would caution that consideration be given quite widely. We all know human nature. People can make mistakes, you know, in the heat of the moment, when emotions ran so high or when situations get so fraught with challenges that it would seem the earth would be crumbling down on you. Decisions or even thought process might be compromised or even clouded—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

In accordance with rule 24, and as previously announced, I am interrupting this debate to put the

question on second reading of Bill 240, The Elections Amendment Act.

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

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Madam Speaker: All those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Madam Speaker: All those opposed, please say nay.

An Honourable Member: Nay.

Madam Speaker: In my opinion, the Ayes have it.

I declare the motion carried.

* * *

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Would you please canvass the House to see if it's the will of members to call it 11 a.m.?

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to call it 11 a.m.?
[Agreed]

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 12—Removing Educational Land Tax on Farm and Agricultural Land

Madam Speaker: When—the hour is now 11 a.m., as agreed by the House, and time for private members' resolutions. The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on removing educational land tax on farm and agricultural land, brought forward by the honourable member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon).

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): I move,

WHEREAS agriculture is at the heart of Manitoba's economy; and

WHEREAS the value of agricultural land in parts of the province has increased drastically in recent years, yet the provincial rebate has not been indexed in any form to match these increases in property value, thereby asymmetrically increasing the educational tax burden on farmers; and

WHEREAS the rising cost of agricultural land in this province means that farmers are paying far more than their fair share of education taxes; and

WHEREAS the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba, through a resolution that was passed by its membership, called on the province to eliminate school taxes on agricultural land; and

WHEREAS large corporations in this province who build massive development projects such as Investor's Group Field, Bell MTS Place and True North Square are not required to pay education taxes; and

WHEREAS the current Minister of Agriculture, the Member for Lakeside, the current Minister for Growth, Enterprise and Trade, the Member for Midland, and the current Minister of Justice, the Member for Spruce Woods, are all on the record of being in favour eliminating school tax on agricultural land; and

WHEREAS fairness when it comes to taxation is paramount, as everyone benefits from a well informed population and a well funded education system.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to take immediate steps to remove the education tax on agricultural land.

Motion presented.

Mr. Graydon: During the last provincial election the government went door to door, farm to farm, assuring Manitobans that taxes would not increase; however, year after year educational land tax has increased on agricultural land.

The government talks about leaving more money on the kitchen—Manitoba kitchen tables while simultaneously taking more money out of the pockets of Manitoba farmers.

Agriculture is the backbone of the Manitoba economy with 5.7 per cent of Manitoba's overall GDP directly from agriculture. Furthermore, for every dollar of farm-earned income generated in Manitoba, almost \$2 is generated through economic linkage, most of which stays in rural Manitoba.

Mr. Dennis Smook, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

The continued application of education land tax on farmland is a direct attack on both farmers and rural Manitoba.

The rising value of agricultural land has resulted in that farmers are paying far more than their fair share of education taxes which are double the municipal rates. Hanover School Division, for

example, is 15.16 per cent; Border Land School Division, 14.75 per cent; Red River school division, 13.57 per cent; and the mill rate in the Emerson municipal taxes is 7.28 per cent.

Both Alberta and Saskatchewan have adequately funded their education system for years without disproportionately affecting farmers. Saskatchewan land—taxes arable land at 1.4 per cent of 55 per cent of its assessed value and range land at 1.4 per cent of 45 per cent of its assessed value. In contrast, Alberta taxes agricultural land at a low rate of 2.56 per cent.

Large corporations in this province who build massive development projects such as Investors Group Field, Bell MTS Place, True North Square, are not required to pay education taxes.

It's clear that Manitoba farmers are paying far more than their fair share of the education taxes. Under both the NDP and under the Pallister government there have—they have allowed massive developments to be exempted on paying their fair share while putting the burden on farmers, and that's not right.

* (11:00)

The Midland PC Association put forward a resolution in 2018 Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba convention calling the Province to eliminate school taxes on agricultural land. Members, many of them farmers and producers, told this government how they feel about their tax increases.

The resolution passed, and the current Minister of Agriculture, the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler), the current member—Minister for Growth, Enterprise and Trade, the member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen), the current Minister of Justice, the member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Cullen); and the former minister of Education, the member for Portage are all on record as being in favour of eliminating school tax on agricultural land. All of these members were in the convention hall that day and stood up to say what they truly think but at the same time, have not acted upon it; and when they are in a position of power to not only raise the cap but eliminate the education tax on farmland.

In 2019, Keystone Agricultural Producers' annual general meeting, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler) characterized the way by which the current tax is levied on farmland as flawed. We know that agriculture is the vital part of Manitoba economy, however, unlike the rest of society,

farmers do not have a traditional pension plan and their land is their pension plan. Manitoba does not tax pension plans or on investments. Therefore, the continued use of educational tax on agricultural land creates undue hardship on farmers.

The Pallister government has never shied away from the fact that they want to lower taxes. They want to make life easier for their friends in Tuxedo, in Lindenwoods, in Charleswood, in St. Vital. However, it appears that there's a strong support of—rural Manitoba is taken for granted. But I can assure you that the free ride is over. Agriculture represents 5.7 per cent of the provincial GDP, and it doesn't take an entire enterprise team to realize that ag drives this province forward.

Having said that, the Pallister government has never shied from promoting lower taxes.

And why would they not want to support this resolution and proceed to eliminate education tax on agricultural land immediately as was passed at their last AGM—November, 2018?

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): Before we move on to question period, I would just like to remind the House that, given the House agreed to call it 11 o'clock at 10:56, the hour will end at 11:56.

Questions

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): A question period of up to 10 minutes will be held. The questions may be addressed in the following sequence: the first question may be asked by a member from another party. Any subsequent questions will follow a rotation between parties. Each independent member may ask one question, and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Well, it sounds like the member for Emerson has brought forward a bill that he spent quite a bit of time on, something that it looks like he's done some research on, but I would imagine this is also something that his party has supported in the past, and I would imagine has been a discussion point at caucus.

So I'm wondering if he could just tell us a little bit about how that discussion happened and why is it that he's bringing it forward as an independent member, rather than the government.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): I want to thank the member for that question and that's a question that I've asked in this resolution today, as a matter of fact.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, I wonder if the member for Emerson could tell us what the view of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities is on this question.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you for the question, and the Manitoba municipalities are in favour of removing the school tax on agricultural land and they have been for some time now. Thank you.

Mr. Wiebe: So I would imagine that, as I said, probably a robust conversation in the caucus room. The member obviously is very passionate about this. Maybe he could just talk about those members in that caucus that I'm sure would support him if they weren't so muzzled by the Premier (Mr. Pallister). He could just describe which members and just name some of them that would be, I'm sure, willing to support him on this bill that he's—resolution he's brought forward.

Mr. Graydon: Well, thank you for that question, and I'm not sure that anybody is muzzled, but at the same time, at the annual AGM, I had pointed out the ministers that were there and that were in favour of removing it and also that the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) has said that the system is flawed. He has said that at the 2019 Keystone Agricultural Producers' annual meeting.

And I'm sure that he has probably brought that forward. But, to date there is no action, and since they were elected—since we were elected in 2016, provincially the tax has gone up 47 per cent—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The member's time has expired.

The member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe)—oh, sorry. [*interjection*] The member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), my mistake—[*interjection*] No. Oh, okay. Sorry.

The member for Dauphin (Mr. Michaleski).

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): Well, it took a while.

I want to just—Deputy Speaker, I acknowledge what the member from Emerson is talking about. There's some ag producers, ag land—are concerned about this issue. But they're also—you look at the changes that are going on around the world, and they really—the—what I hear is they really appreciate our approach to the agricultural review.

So I'd like to ask the member, can he explain the need to remove the education taxes on farmland at

this time while we are undergoing a thorough review of the education system?

Mr. Graydon: I want to thank you for going around the table to find the question, Sir, and I appreciate that.

And the reason to remove this is because there's no other pension plan that's got an education tax on it, and we've talked about this when we were in opposition. In fact, we sat here clamouring: raise, raise, raise the exemption to the 80 per cent; don't cap it at five. We said remove it. And so when we were elected, we didn't do that and we never raised it either. We haven't raised the exemption at all—and the exemption was brought in by the NDP. It wasn't brought in by the Conservatives.

Mr. Gerrard: I note that the member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) is causing—calling for tax fairness, and he's concerned about large corporations getting tax breaks. One of the things that's been raised with me is that there are some international corporations that are now—get involved in agriculture and farming. Are you proposing that they get this tax break to these big international corporations?

Mr. Graydon: Thanks very much for that question.

The—there are large corporations involved in many, many businesses in the province. But, at the same time when they're involved in the agricultural, it is the producers that are on the land that are producing to make these corporations do the rest of their business here. That corporation doesn't own the land. What they're doing is buying the product that the agriculture producers produce here.

Mr. Wiebe: So, again, it sounds like another broken promise by this government. Apparently, even the ministers in government were all for this. I see the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler) is intently waiting for his turn to put on the record how he supports this. But I guess I just wanted to get a sense, then: who exactly is muzzling or stopping this from moving forward in the Conservative caucus? Was it the Premier (Mr. Pallister) directly? Was it the Minister of Agriculture who's had a sudden change in the way that he thinks taxes should be collected? Who, exactly, stopped the member from Emerson from bringing this forward when he was in government?

Mr. Graydon: Well, I wish that I had an adequate answer for the individual's question, but at the same time it was discussed in caucus. But decisions are made at Cabinet; they're not all made in caucus.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): I would like to ask the member for Emerson a question. I know his memory goes back a long ways, and he would recall, I think, along with many other folks in the House that this has been a problem for many years and certainly an issue under the previous government. And this is one of many problems that they kicked down the road simply by putting a bandage on it and not really dealing with the problem. So I would—wondering if the member wanted to put forward any sustainable funding ideas for the funding of education.

* (11:10)

Mr. Graydon: Well, I want to thank the member for the question. But, again, those decisions are made when you're in power, and they're made by the people that are in Cabinet. They're not made by the caucus members. Yes, we did put forward different ways, but at the same time what did happen was the NDP raised the exemption to 80 per cent and then capped it at five. We never changed that cap. That cap is still at five after three years of being in power.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The member for river—sorry, the member for The Maples—no, Tyndall Park.

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): I just want to know, to dovetail to the question raised by the member from Portage la Prairie, where will we get the money to fund those schools and those institutions that rely on the funding from the taxation that we impose on land?

Mr. Graydon: Well, I don't want to propose that we tax everybody's pension and/or any of their investments, as what they're doing with agriculture today. And I would suggest that that is a Cabinet decision, and they should have been working at this a long time ago. Both parties should have been working at it, but at the same time, the cap has been held at \$5,000, and it should have went up to the 80 per cent that the NDP did at one time.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I would like to indicate to the member that there are some international corporations, large international corporations which do own farmland. It's not exclusive and some own it in partnership.

What I—question would be now would be, there is a balance here. If you're going to take the tax off—education tax off farmland, other people will have to pay more and that has been a problem that others have complained about; making up the tax gap from

the savings that are accrued when you take the tax off farmland.

So how do you propose to get the balance right?

Mr. Graydon: And thank you for that question. There's other provinces, the Prairie provinces here that are involved in agriculture, and I'm sure then if corporations own farmland in Manitoba, then they probably own farmland in the other provinces, and they have a way that does not hold back agriculture the way we're being held back here today. And I did point out in my speech to begin with how they do their farmland taxing.

And so this here is an opportunity to learn something from the people that are already doing it, and that will still be a Cabinet's decision.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The debate is now open.

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): This is a proposition that I can support because it will alleviate some of the hardships that our agricultural producers are going through at this time, especially with all the canola issues that the Chinese have tried to block.

The member from Emerson, I think, has very good ideas that should have been introduced in the government of the Conservatives when they got in because they promised to do something about it. And it's always a matter of being able to at least follow-up and at least try to prick the conscience of those who have proposed it and go through with it.

Agricultural producers, in our province especially, are the only ones who can claim to be the lifeblood of our economy. The agricultural producers are the only ones who can say, well, if we don't feed you, then guess what happens to all of you? It's not really—it's a very direct relationship between ag and—meaning agriculture—and our way of life.

It's one of the reasons why I chose Manitoba as the—my—as the province of my destination, because of the vast land that we have. It's—I call it a magnificent piece of heaven on earth, our province is, and it's one of the reasons why all of my brothers and sisters came, because of the agricultural promise. Coming from the Philippines is also a plus for me because I can appreciate the beauty of the plains.

And we—what we have are those wheat fields that are really amazing when you see them all golden, especially before harvest, and those yellow flowers that are the canola, and, of course, there's the violet flowers. What are those? I seem to not even remember how they're—

Some Honourable Members: Flax.

Mr. Marcelino: Really? Wow.

And my real problem is that some of those small agricultural producers are still hurting from what could be a long but temporary condition we're in. We are in a trade war, and I appreciate the member from Emerson putting this in. His sincerity is—it cannot be questioned.

I thank you.

Hon. Ralph Eichler (Minister of Agriculture): It's a pleasure to stand in the House today and clear the air for the member from Emerson in regards to his resolution.

We did talk a lot about farmland tax in opposition. We talked about it since we've been in government and we've been taking steps. This farmland tax review is something that needs to happen.

Of course, before we do the dollar amount, we need to look at the K-to-12 review and actually what that does in order to get better results for Manitoba students and, of course, education for our children. And then we have to be able to formulate what that looks like. How many school divisions will there be? Will there be more? Will we they—less? How many students are going to be attending schools in different areas? Will it be comprehensive schools? What is it that we need in order to make our education system that much better? Then we'll formulate on how we're going to pay for it. It's just that simple. But, certainly, we have to get a handle on better results for Manitobans.

Of course, the Province of Manitoba is reviewing the 2018 assessment on all property classes, including farm property. Farm property owners are eligible for tax relief through the farmland tax rebate, and that still works. That stays as the same as 80 per cent and the school taxes remain the maximum of \$5,000. We have increased provincial funding by \$1.2 million to meet the school tax rebate program, which this year will work out to \$45.7 million.

Also, Manitoba is one of the few jurisdictions—that member talked about—education funding is tied to property values and we feel that we need to have a look at that as well.

But in this K-to-12 review we're looking at improvements to the education system. This review is about creating a system which achieves better outcome for students and reflects on the economy and, of course, the social needs of Manitobans.

* (11:20)

And I want to spend some time in regards to hope for our farmers. Even though we're not able to, the—because of the financial mess that we were handed, we can't do everything that we wanted to do in our first three years. But, certainly, we have attracted some business that does help our farm families.

Some of those are HyLife pork—invested \$105 million just in their plant in Neepawa, so it gives those farm families the opportunity to market their pork product right here and processed right here in Manitoba, create those jobs in Neepawa. That is good for that town and that community and, of course, all Manitobans, whether it be the feed that they feed, or the processing, the jobs that it creates. They spent another \$79 million on upgrades to a new feed mill built in Killarney. As a result of that and the hog barns built, there's 41 new students started school in Killarney—41 new students. That's significant and we're going to see more of that.

We know that western part of the province is phosphorus deficient, and actually hog barns is a nice fit for them. It's all natural; it's a renewable resource that we can put back on the farmland in order to make it better, and, of course, still maintaining the environment that we need to ensure that we have a sustainable agriculture now and into the future.

Another one of those investments that will help our farmers is Simplot. It was a \$460-million investment by Simplot. That works out and equates to 18,000 more acres of potatoes in the province of Manitoba, which will make Manitoba the largest potato processor in Canada. It's significant.

And besides that, there's that ripple effect that comes into play for the farmers that actually have to increase those—there's 18,000 acres of potatoes that need to be grown in Manitoba. That's close to another \$500 million. There's storage sheds, there's machinery, there's jobs that's going to be created as a

result of that as well. So, certainly we know those are critically important, and a lot of that will be benefitting the education system as well.

Maple Leaf Foods—Maple Leaf Foods just recently invested \$24 million in upgrade to their facility in Brandon. Certainly we know that's going to come as a result of creating more jobs, more value added and, of course, helping our farmers.

MDI Holdings, a new company that come to Winnipeg, takes dairy milk, invested \$100 million, 80 new jobs right in the city of Winnipeg, takes dairy milk, puts it into a powder, stores it and sells it to consumers around the world. Certainly we know those investments help our farmers.

Also, I want to talk about the Richardson Innovation Centre that's going to be opening early next year, another significant investment for our agriculture people in regards to research and innovation. This is a facility that's going to be adding more value added to our farm families, again giving the farmers hope in—and market their products.

I'd be remiss if I didn't talk about Roquette. Of course, Roquette was our major announcement when we first formed government and been seeking investment for a number of years. We were able to get that job done, but I can tell you that the piles are all in the ground. They're hoping to move in their office by July of this year in Portage la Prairie, which will be up and running, and certainly we hope that this helps our farm family. We know that peas are going to be a major crop input for our farm families now and into the future.

So, also the news—good news just keeps coming. McCain Foods, one in Portage and Carberry—they spent \$40 million in Portage la Prairie upgrading that facility and \$35 million in Carberry, certainly creating a more modernized processing line, helping our farm families, again getting more value for them to help them pay those taxes. We know this is not going to solve all their problems, but certainly it will help.

We've seen an increase in our chicken producers as well. We had the opportunity, as government, to kick off breakfast all day for McDonald's. We did that in July of 2016. As a result of that breakfast going all day for McDonald's Canada, resulted in 9 million more eggs per year. Manitoba's known for its cage-free, range-free laying operations. It's a fantastic entitlement that we've worked hard to get at, and as a result of that we've seen 16 new barns—

16 new barns being built just for the poultry people. That helps us, helps our farm families. They were locked in, if you will, when the building codes was brought in by the previous government. They were—actually worked out to \$100 per hog, more than any other jurisdiction across Canada.

We fixed that, as government. As a result, that's why we've seen 16 new barns just for the chicken producers. We've seen eight new dairy barns being built. There's six new chicken barns being proposed for this year yet, and there's four new dairy barns that are being proposed. We have 20 new hog barns that are going to be built within the province of Manitoba, certainly making us more competitive, and, of course, we know that being an export province, we need those jobs in Manitoba to keep Manitoba sustainable.

Thirty per cent of our income in the province of Manitoba is derived through our farm families. We seen an increase last year. Our farm cash receipts at the gate was the highest in the history of the province of Manitoba coming in at \$6.52 billion, certainly, an impact on our economy.

So, when we look at the taxation, we certainly are committed to getting it right. We're not going to rush into this thing—whether the member of Emerson wants it. We've met with the Keystone ag producers on a very regular basis. I would not say it was monthly, but, certainly, semi-monthly or sometimes four times a month depending on what the issue may be. But we have a great relationship with them. They understand that they have to be patient. Government just don't wave a wand and raise taxes to meet the needs of our changes, has to be done in a way that's going to be sustainable not only now, but for the future.

But, also, these companies that I've mentioned are a small part of our investments. Also, we've seen about \$150 million being invested by private companies, whether it be upgrades to grain facilities, small mom-and-pops, but certainly all part of our agricultural community.

So I want to thank the member for bringing it forward as a reminder, but, certainly, there's the time that we need to do this but it's certainly not now.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I'd like to begin my comments here by paying tribute to the farmers of Manitoba who've contributed a great deal over many, many years to the well-being of our province. They have contributed to our economy. They have

contributed to our nutrition. They have contributed to our health and they have provided exports which have helped all of us by bringing in wealth. They are the foundation, the producers are of agri-food industry which includes, now, a great deal of food processing and that food processing also contributes a lot of jobs, and so it is important that we recognize the importance of the agricultural industry in our province.

I want to note that the assessed value of agricultural land in a number of areas of Manitoba has been going up. That is a sign, actually, that things are healthy, by and large, in the agricultural community. That is to say that people are investing more and paying more for land because they recognize that the value of agricultural products is strong and that there are pretty good markets.

We have some concerns about the canola market right now. That's for sure, but—and there certainly have been times in the past when we had BSE problem and at other times when prices have been low. And we have to recognize that the prices can be cyclical and whereas the education taxes tend to not go up and down like that, but other taxes certainly do reflect that.

I think it is interesting that we heard from the minister. He said that he was talking about this and he was talking about that and his party was talking about this and talking about that, but they haven't actually done anything about this yet. And we understand that the Conservative Party likes talking, but we look for outcomes as well as talk.

* (11:30)

I note in the 1990s there was—when there was a Conservative government, the education tax on land was not lowered. In fact, it was only when Liberals started raising this that the education tax should come off farm property that the NDP finally acted when they were in government between 2000 and 2016. So we have had some reduction in the tax on farmland. It's a significant reduction but it's not all the way.

And from our perspective, we are looking, as indeed the member from Emerson is looking for, a level of tax fairness: tax fairness for farmers, tax fairness for others.

The situation now is different than it was 20 years ago. There have been a lot more major international investments in Manitoba than there were then. There's more corporations—large

corporations, some international partners who are operating farms as well as family farms and we would like to make sure that people who are operating family farms, which is many, many farmers, have good opportunities to do well in this province but we want to make sure that large international corporations are paying their fair share of education taxes and other taxes.

So, we believe that there needs to be, in this instance, a wider review of taxation and not just education taxes, that this review of taxation looks to, fundamentally, a question of tax fairness and how people are affected. It should look at the increased assessments of farm property and the impact this has had on farmers and the impact that it is having today.

So, with those comments at this point, I'm going to conclude my remarks but I'm pleased that the member from Emerson has brought this forward because—an important issue which need to be discussed and which, you know, will need action. We haven't had that much in the last three years but it needs action, but it needs action which is fair.

And, certainly, you know, sometimes under the Conservative government, we are concerned about the way that taxes are applied. That people, when the government 'wented' to reduce the—use the money from the carbon tax to increase the exemption—the personal income tax exemption—the problem is that people on the lower end, people who are below the exemption were not getting any benefit at all, but people on the higher end of the income scale, partly because of the increase in the cost-of-living adjustments in terms of the taxes, were actually getting a lot more benefit.

And we believe that you need to have a situation under those circumstances where everybody is treated more fairly and where we make sure that those who are less well off are helped significantly as well as supporting those who have large businesses and those who are farmers who have family farms.

So thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to put a few words on the record. Merci. Miigwech.

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): It is always great, again, to get up and talk about the world of agriculture and I appreciate the member from Emerson for bringing up this topic about school tax on ag land and I think just from some of the comments that have taken place already, it is a very—it's not a clean issue; it's a very complex issue that has very, very many moving parts.

I know the member talks about, he used the word, eliminate the school tax and also to take immediate steps to reduce the education tax, but I would argue all day long that from day one, this PC government has taken steps to address this issue. It is an issue again that includes the whole of government, and I think the member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) has raised it as a Cabinet issue because it is something that covers all departments.

So, I, again, I would argue that the PC government has taken steps, right from day one and continues to take steps on this thing. It's a good government manager's response but—and I think from what I—the feedback that I get from my constituents and the member from Emerson and I are in the same boat. I think we're pretty connected to the farm voice that's out there and the farm community and those that affect and have ag land. And what I hear most is not so much that the tax is high. They understand the tax is disproportionate and there's problems with that system but what they did not appreciate was how that money was being spent.

And I think the first, you know, when you talk to Agriculture and you talk to producers about important systems of government, I think they would all conclude that education is probably the most important thing that we can do for our kids and it's important to agriculture. But what they did not like and what they did not appreciate is really 17 years of unfocused mismanagement of the education file by the previous government and really a neglect on the rural issues, the rural demands, the demands being called for by business, by municipalities, by everyone.

Really, the NDP was off on some other tangent, building their own empire, and that's really what rural landowners and farmers that I've talked to were angry about. It's not that they have anything against Agriculture. They see incredible value in the education system but they just did not appreciate the abuse and the neglect and the lack of focus of the previous government.

So, again, I would say, again, it is a complicated issue. I did go to two of the reviews. I know Mountain View School Division in Dauphin held their own review, and it was attended by a wide range of stakeholders. And I thought that review, in preparation for the commission review that was coming through Dauphin, they did a pretty good job of getting a wide field of opinions on what the education system should look like. And many of

those people that were in that room have very strong agriculture roots and agriculture ties and part of the agriculture committee heavily invested in it.

But the one thing that didn't come up during that meeting was the issue that the member from Emerson raised. What did come up is, get it right. This is too important to the future of Manitoba. It's too important to agriculture. It's too important to the constituency of Dauphin. It's too important to the province of Manitoba. Get it right.

So coming out of that meeting, we had a very, very constructive meeting of what the agriculture or what the education system should look like and I do think that the people in rural Manitoba—again they're pretty in tune with what's going on with the broader economy, broader politics. And they have some pretty good insight at what an education system needs to look like.

Like, they're very much, in part, in a changing—a very fast-changing economy, and their demands—they see the demands on the education system changing in real time. Now the NDP chose to ignore these changes that were coming, the signals that were there, 10—over 10 years ago. They chose not to do anything about it.

* (11:40)

So I think the most important aspect of what our PC government is doing, is doing a full K-to-12 comprehensive review and getting a wide range of stakeholders having a—at a very good discussion, flush out all the issues of what that education system needs to look like in five to 10 years' time.

Now, the member from Emerson and others have brought up the point that this changing ownership of agriculture, who's going to own what in five, 10 years' time? Now how does that play in to how education is funded? Technology, the Internet, all these things are bringing—are delivering education in much different ways than they have been since education I can remember. So these are real changes that the people in rural Manitoba are dealing with.

The education system needs to respond—and I heard this term the other day. It needs to respond at the speed of business and it has to. If it doesn't, we will be left behind. And what's needed is a comprehensive review of the stakeholders and that's, in fact, what our PC government has been doing not just on education, but we've done it on multiple departments trying to make system work better to get better outcomes. That's smart

management and this PC government has been doing it from day one.

So in closing, our government has been working on this very complex issue, and I do acknowledge the member from Emerson raising that this is an issue that is—that makes agriculture producers and landowners a little bit angry, the disproportionate share of having to pay for this. But I believe the government—the PC government and the ministers and the Cabinet have been working directly and indirectly on this problem and, again, it's going to be an ongoing problem. But what is key to finding the solution for where we need to be headed and what that education funding needs to look like, is this K-to-12 review.

There's been wide-spread use of Internet. It is—that technology is merely emerging, and since the Internet technology and resulting globalization have greatly impacted nearly every aspect of life in the 21st century including schools and classrooms.

So ripping the band-aid off, like, is being suggested, speeding this up. It might feel good to me. It might feel good to a lot of agricultural producers in this area and landowners, but I know the constituents that I've talked to, the agriculture producers that I've talked to, they know this is an important, important issue and it is more important to them that this department, this—such an important part of a government's responsibility is done right, and we do it right for the kids of Manitoba and for agriculture.

And we need to do a good job of making sure the people's voices are being heard, the stakeholders are being listened to, and that's exactly—exactly what this PC government is doing. They're taking the right approach to education review.

Once we figure out what this thing looks like, then we'll figure out how it needs to get paid, and that's way more refreshing than the old prehistoric way of throwing money at it and sticking like the NDP tried for 20 years and got no results. That was bad for Manitoba.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The member's time has expired.

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): I appreciate the opportunity to rise and put a few words on the record regarding the member for Emerson's (Mr. Graydon) resolution.

This is a subject, as he well knows, that has been debated for many, many years in the agriculture

community and others. It's all about the fairness of the tax situation. If you look backwards, virtually every government in the history of Manitoba has had the opportunity to deal with this problem. Actually, the attachment of education property tax is actually part of The Homestead Act of 1893. So any of—any interest—any party has had many opportunities in the past to deal with this issue.

It's been an ongoing thing, and if you look at other jurisdictions, they use this method of funding education at one time or the other. And not every province ever used property tax. Certainly, when you get to the Maritime provinces, they never used this format whatsoever, in terms of funding education. But most of the western provinces did in one form or the other, at one point in time.

And it's always been a very difficult issue because the property values for land, or housing, or businesses, never seemed to rise in tandem to one another. They always seem to have one spike or the other, and depending on assessments and other forms of property tax calculation for education, there have been times in the past where one portion of the—or the other—one sector or the other of the economy has probably played disproportionately in terms of fairness of taxation.

And, of course, we're seeing that now with the very significant increases in assessment for farmland that have been going on, really, since the '70s in one form or the other, and that was actually the last time there was any change in the agricultural portioning thereof. So, it's been an ongoing problem.

And, if you look at assessment increases, they've been averaging over the last 20 years or so about an 8 per cent increase per year. So that's a very significant rate of increase, and, of course, the school boards themselves have much appreciated that this has happened because, of course, it gives them an increase in revenue stream on ongoing basis, and they certainly appreciated that.

But the whole issue of the funding of education and what education needs to do is something our government is prepared to work towards. We have, of course, initiated the K-to-12 review, with its focus really on better outcomes and better results for the students in the system. I think it's very important that we get that right. We have a 37 school division—school divisions in the province of Manitoba. Whether that's the right number or not, as has been brought forward by the member from Dauphin, is something that we're having a good look at, and I

know I was—attended the K-to-12 commission review in Dauphin and we certainly heard comments about the right number.

And we heard some comments about funding from people; we've heard that at almost every one of the commission meetings, but we have also been very clear that this isn't really something that we're dealing with as a commission. This is something the whole of government needs to deal with, and I think that's a very fair assessment because, back in the day, around 2000, the cost of education was around \$780 million, \$800 million per year. Now, it's 3.2, almost 3.3 billion dollars. So it's a very significant bill.

And, when you look at where the costs or the revenue that comes from to fund that—it actually comes from four different directions, if you include the education tax credits which were put in for good reason, in many cases. They were certainly in there to help seniors, for instance, maintaining a home.

And so all of this has to be part of the calculation. It is something that I know government has done some analysis on already, and it's continuing to do so.

So, when we feel that we have gotten the education system on track for the future—and we've had some discussion about where the future was going—it's been very interesting, actually. There's a lot of groups that come to the commission meetings and talk about the Internet and the changes that they see—that it might do to the education system here in Manitoba. And many, many of the boards, the school boards, have been involved in delivering Internet services—high-speed Internet services—to their schools in the community, and some have worked very co-operatively with the local—other local jurisdictions, whether they be municipalities or First Nations communities, to make sure that they shared those services in the community—the whole community benefited.

And others have done it almost in isolation, at considerably more cost, in some cases, so—because they had no real guideline as how best to do it and it was all a question of how much do you want to invest in the time of partnering and the work around that when you have a specific goal, which is education. So that is certainly a point of discussion, but it does open a lot of doors, in terms of the potential.

* (11:50)

That said, students in a classroom need more than just good Internet connections. They need a good, well-funded education system, teachers that are well trained to deal with issues and we hear an awful lot about the training needs for teachers. In particular, we've heard from several groups about mathematics training and improvements in that area that are really needed to arm our kids adequately for the future because we, in education, we talk about training kids for jobs of the future. Jobs that may not even exist yet because the industry actually continues to move at such a rapid pace.

So, certainly, I appreciate that the member has brought this forward. I know that this often comes up in rural communities, and it's really all about tax fairness because there's been a bit of a shift with the increasing farmland assessments, especially in some rural areas where housing values haven't gone up very dramatically, if at all. We're seeing quite a significant transfer away from residences to farmland, in terms of the revenue for school boards. A little less so in the city of Winnipeg, where property values continue to rise on many residences, but there are some gaping holes in that.

Some divisions that have an awful lot of commercial property have extremely high assessments per student as compared to some other divisions and that too is an equity issue and something that should be part of this discussion. I think if we're going to make changes, we have to keep that in mind as well.

And the member also, in his WHEREASes, mentioned tax incentive financing, and that some large developments have a period of tax grace involved with tax incentive in terms of development work—and the relative fairness of that, when these businesses don't pay education tax for a period of time and, frankly, aren't even consulted in the decision-making process.

Municipalities are usually very much front and centre in that, along with the provincial government, but the school board is really informed, after the fact, that there has been a change or that this development has taken place. And very often they feel a little left out of the circuit—of the decision-making procedure and accordingly, have expressed some concern about that. But they do get the long-term benefits in terms of increased assessment. When a community does well, everything in the community does well. So we certainly see some level of fairness in that.

But it is part of that discussion. There are—as are said—there are four different ways money comes into education. We certainly need to, as whole of government, be very aware of this argument and discussion going on. We need to try and get some fairness and equity into that process moving forward, but I think it's very important that we get education performing as well as possibly can be the case, within the current system and make the changes to the system moving forward.

We hear a lot from post-secondary: the students and also the schools themselves, that we are not doing a good job in terms of preparing students for post-secondary. We've also had some discussions with the trades and training, which was a system that had fallen into some degree of disarray under the previous government and we're now getting back on track. And we're having a significant increase in numbers because of that, and we've been able to contact a number of people that are involved in trades and training that had been lost in the previous system. And that's very positive in terms of getting us back on track, making sure that we have enough tradespeople now and into the future.

Knowing what right—knowing what is the right tradespeople to have and the opportunities that—and translating those opportunities so that high school students can see a path forward for themselves in that case.

I see my time is also run out here and I've only touched on a handful issues I wanted to bring forward, but it's certainly—appreciate that the member from Emerson has brought this forward. I know that this government is actively involved in this discussion.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm honoured to come in here today to talk about the resolution that was brought forward by the member from Emerson about the tax credits for farmers and I—when the member from Dauphin had spoke, you know—like I agree with everything that he had said. He actually may have really summed it up really nicely but the big thing is—was that, you know, we have to look at this review of the K-to-12 review of the comprehensive review because it's so important.

Being that I was coming from the agriculture industry, when I was—actually grew up on a farm, a dairy farm and also being in the investment industry,

the more—most important thing we have to look at is the demographic trends, our social trends and our economic trends.

And right now, as an MLA in a rural area, I see a lot of trends where, even in the last 25 years when we actually had the last review, our agriculture has changed so much, and when we do this review, we've got to do this right.

And I find, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when it comes to our demographics, I find now that farmers are getting bigger and bigger, getting more acres, spending more money on land, and the thing is, when it comes to education tax—education taxation, we've got to make sure that we do it right so that, you know, there's—we've got to look in the future, the

trends that are going to be the demographics, where the population is going to be. The other thing was our social trends.

Our cultures are changing, too. We've got to look at that. Our economic trends are changing.

So we've got to look at this whole comprehensive plan here when it comes to the review.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Piwniuk) will have eight minutes remaining.

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

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Tuesday, May 21, 2019

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