

On we go to Manitoba's next provincial election: Whither the NDP?

K A R I N E L E V A S S E U R

*"But it's a dead end, and money's tight
And it's been a long time of this
Something has got to give
Everyone here is ready to go
It's been a hard year with nothing to show
From down this road
It's only on we go, on we go"
"Up We Go" by Lights*

I. INTRODUCTION

In her 2014 hit song "Up we go," Juno Award-winning musician Lights evokes the image of a tough year, little money and the need to find ways to move onwards and upwards. In many respects, she could have written this song about the painful year endured by Premier Greg Selinger and the New Democratic Party (NDP) as we head into the next provincial election set for April 19, 2016. In previous editions of this journal, I argued that Manitoba's stability was beginning to wane. That theme continues in this edition, albeit slightly differently. The dominant source of instability in previous years was economic with a small pocket of political turmoil after the sudden announcement to raise the provincial sales tax (PST). The dominant source of instability this year is political given the serious leadership challenges facing the ruling NDP government, I argue.

To that end, this article provides an overview of the key political and economic developments over the past year. It begins with the 2014 mayoral election in the City of Winnipeg. Some readers may question why I place so much emphasis on one mayoral race particularly for a journal that concentrates on provincial public policy. My justification is

straightforward: analysis of the mayoral election provides context to understand the next steps in Manitoba's political history – Greg Selinger's leadership crisis. The article then describes the events that led to the March 2015 Leadership Convention and analyzes what this means for the state of governing. It concludes with a brief overview of the 2015 budget which was developed at the height of the leadership crisis.

II. MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS AS FORESIGHT INTO THE NEXT PROVINCIAL ELECTION?

It has been suggested that the October 22, 2014 mayoral election in the City of Winnipeg is a precursor to the next provincial election. Readers will recall that Judy Wasylycia-Leis lost by a landslide to Brian Bowman—a relative unknown, first-time candidate.¹ While Wasylycia-Leis commanded a significant lead throughout much of August and September 2014, her support evaporated in the last few weeks of the campaign. What occurred in the last days before the election was nothing short of stunning with Brian Bowman – described as a moderate conservative – gaining momentum and winning the election at the expense of Wasylycia-Leis.

With strong NDP and Progressive Conservative (PC) ties respectively, some have speculated that her loss may be due to the negative feelings towards the provincial NDP after it increased the PST by one percent in 2013. Political scientist Chris Adams agrees and states, “This election ... signifies the NDP might be in a little bit of trouble in Winnipeg ... Ten years ago to brand her as an NDP person would not have caused that vulnerability” (cited in Forlanski 2014). Selinger also subtly hinted that the increase in the PST may have contributed to her loss: “It’s a very important election and we know some people felt jolted by the raising of the PST by one point, and I take responsibility for that” (Forlanski 2014).

The real question to ask is to what extent this result was a backlash against the provincial NDP or whether there were other factors at play. Did voters prefer Bowman's campaign platform that encouraged voters to “dream about what their city could become” compared to Wasylycia-Leis' campaign platform that has been described as “small ‘c’ conservative” to avoid being labeled as a spend-thrift? (Santin and Welch 2014). Did voters

¹ Brian Bowman won the mayoral election with 111,504 votes compared to 58,440 for Judy Wasylycia-Leis.

select Bowman because of intrinsic values such as his enthusiasm? Or, can other variables such as gender, age and race explain this outcome to suggest that voters possibly preferred Bowman's youth and appreciated his inexperience in politics?² Or, was this less of an anti-NDP momentum and more related to vote splitting that occurred particularly between Robert-Falcon Ouellette and Judy Wasylycia-Leis coupled with the collapse of Gord Steeves' campaign that favoured Brian Bowman? Or, was this stunning victory less about ideology and more about the mechanics of an election with Bowman's effective use of social media and political branding?

Assigning blame for Wasylycia-Leis's loss on the Selinger government is not entirely well supported by logic I suggest. If Wasylycia-Leis lost the election because of backlash against the NDP, how then did she command such a significant lead throughout much of the campaign?³ If there was a backlash against Wasylycia-Leis and the NDP, we would expect to see her struggle throughout the entire campaign, but her numbers were strong at the beginning and the middle of the campaign. To be sure, there may have been some backlash, but to assign heavy weight is speculative particularly when one considers the multitude of factors described above that may also explain her loss. For some, however, the events of the City of Winnipeg's mayoral election are thought to foreshadow the next provincial election.

III. THE CRISIS IN LEADERSHIP BEGINS...

Over the past year, public opinion polls have shown sagging support for the NDP following its sudden announcement in April 2013 to raise the PST by one percent and forego the referendum requirement. As outlined in table 1 below, public opinion polling by Probe Research Inc. indicates that support for the NDP fell to 26 percent in December 2013 with the PC and Liberals gaining support of 48 percent and 20 percent respectively. Table 2 illustrates the results from Angus Reid's (2014) survey

² See Tolley's (2014) op ed in which she suggests that race mattered in the mayoral election particularly between Bowman (Metis) and Ouellette (Cree).

³ There is speculation that perhaps there is so much electoral volatility that polls did not catch the decline in Judy's campaign earlier or perhaps she never held such a commanding lead if there were methodological concerns. It may be that a growing number of voters are undecided until the final days of the election making elections matter even more so. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

on approval ratings for Premiers. It also indicates declining support for Premier Greg Selinger from a high of 48 percent (August 2012) to a low of 26 percent (June 2014) just prior to the start of the leadership crisis.

**Table 1: Public opinion polling:
Support for each political party in Manitoba**

	NDP	Liberal	PC	Other or Undecided
Apr 2013	35%	15%	42%	8%
Jun 2013	28%	17%	46%	10%
Oct 2013	29%	20%	43%	8%
Dec 2013	26%	20%	48%	6%
Apr 2014	28%	23%	46%	3%
Jun 2014	32%	16%	45%	7%
Oct 2014	30%	20%	42%	7%
Dec 2014	26%	19%	48%	8%
Apr 2015	29%	20%	44%	7%
Jun 2015	29%	19%	46%	5%

Source: Probe Research Inc.

Table 2: Public Opinion Polling: Premier approval ratings (%)

	Premier	Aug 2012	Dec 2012	Mar 2013	Jun 2013	Sep 2013	Dec 2013	Mar 2014	Jun 2014	Sep 2014	Dec 2014
AB	Alison Redford	55	47	29	29	34	31	23			
	Dave Hancock								39	29	
	Jim Prentice										5
BC	Christy Clark	28	31	25	45	44	42	38	37	32	34
MB	Greg Selinger	48	46	38	31	26	28	28	26	30	17
NB	David Alward	47	35	41	28	27	31	28	29	27	
	Brian Gallant										40
NL	Kathy Dunderdale	39	37	25	26	20	24				
	Tom Marshall							49	59	52	
	Paul Davies										34
NS	Darrell Dexter	26	31	30	28	28					
	Stephen McNeil						57	59	66	53	48
ON	Dalton McGuinty	32	23								
	Kathleen Wynne			36	43	39	35	36	33	41	39
QC	Jean Charest	32									
	Pauline Marois		41	33	27	39	32	36			
	Phillippe Couillard								59	50	41
SK	Brad Wall	66	66	64	67	68	66	66	67	66	65

Source: Angus Reid (2014) and Election Almanac (2015).

These public opinion polls have contributed to the speculation about whether Selinger will remain as leader heading into the next election. While it is natural for some party and caucus members to speak privately about the need for a new leader from time to time, what is surprising

about this situation is the number of voices that have publicly called for Selinger to resign. On October 26 and 27, 2014, such voices were heard. In total, five cabinet ministers including Swan (Justice), Oswald (Jobs and the Economy), Selby (Health), Howard (Finance) and Struthers (Municipal Government) and a former cabinet minister and current vice-president on the NDP executive, Becky Barrett, publicly asked the premier to consider resigning.⁴

The fact that five cabinet ministers—dubbed the “Gang of Five”—and in particular Howard and Oswald, who are seen as political heavyweights within NDP circles, have spoken publicly suggests there is serious discontentment within the NDP cabinet, caucus and party overall. It may also illustrate a lack of adherence to the concept of responsible government, especially cabinet solidarity. As a constitutional convention, cabinet solidarity requires ministers to remain unified in public regardless of their disagreements over decisions made privately (Malcolmson and Myers 1996). By remaining united, this allows cabinet ministers to speak openly and honestly about issues knowing there is a level of trust to support each other once a decision has been reached. It also keeps government accountable so when a decision is made, the public can hold government to account as a whole and not allow cabinet ministers to deflect blame and thus erode the opportunity for answerability, responsibility and accountability. When cabinet solidarity breaks down, however, the result may be a mutiny. Lett (2014a) agrees and states, “...perhaps the clearest sign that you have lost the ability to lead is when members of your cabinet come out in public and do everything they can to avoid defending you. In politics, not defending your leader when he is under siege is a clear sign the mutiny is on” (A5).

Their motivation for breaking solidarity is twofold. First, the Gang of Five and other supporters purport that Premier Selinger is driven by power and is unwilling to listen to their advice. Selinger’s unilateral decision to increase the PST with little regard for caucus and cabinet is evidence to support the complaints leveled by the Gang of Five. However, Paul Thomas (2014a) indicates there were problems associated with Selinger’s leadership prior to that event:

⁴ A sixth caucus member – Clarence Petterson (Flin Flon) – also suggested the Premier should consider resigning.

The premier's unilateral action on the PST increase was the most dramatic episode, but on other politically sensitive issues there was seen to be a lack of responsiveness to the opinions of key cabinet ministers. There have also been public complaints that the caucus was not kept informed and its opinion was not sought on important developments. An early warning signal of caucus unrest was the fact that its policy subcommittees stopped meeting. Instead an all-backbencher committee of caucus (with no ministers included) was created, and eventually that committee produced a document called a Backbench Manifesto. The manifesto set forth a series of substantive and process concerns. The premier politely accepted the document, but his critics allege that he did not change his unilateral leadership style.

Second, the Gang of Five and their supporters justified their actions based on Selinger's inability to win the next election. This is perhaps most clearly articulated by Becky Barrett who suggested that "the polls have been consistent over the past year...people feel betrayed and feel that he has lied to them about the situation and it hasn't gotten any better over last 18 months" (cited in McNabb 2014). However, this claim is somewhat problematic. In reviewing table 1 above, we see that in the following months of April, June and October (2014), support for the NDP was slowly increasing. The NDP increased its support slightly to 32 percent (June 2014) while support for the PCs fell by six percent between December 2013 and October 2014. These public opinion polls show some positive news for the NDP. Disaggregating the data further shows that the NDP was slowly on the upswing and this is a crucial point because Winnipeg is seat-rich so elections are often won and lost in the capital. The October 2014 poll conducted by Probe Research—the last poll conducted before the beginnings of the leadership crisis—contained good news for the NDP on this front. The poll concluded that the NDP was retaining support within the City of Winnipeg:

Thirty-eight percent of Winnipeg voters would cast ballots for the NDP (up slightly from 36% in June), while 35 percent would vote for a PC candidate (–6% versus June). Slightly more than one-in-five Winnipeg voters would support the Liberals (21%, up from 17% in June) (Probe Research Inc. October 2014: 3)

At this same time however, it was reported that an internal poll conducted by the NDP showed more dire outcomes to the point whereby the NDP could be annihilated in the next provincial election. The result, then, is conflicting polls with one suggesting one outcome for the NDP and another poll suggesting another outcome. There may be important

methodological explanations for these conflicting polls, but what is important for this discussion is what the dissenters saw, rightly or wrongly: public opinion polling showed a trend whereby the NDP was losing support that was presumed to be irreversible under Selinger's leadership. This is what sparked the leadership crisis.

IV. CABINET RESIGNATIONS AND A LEADERSHIP CONVENTION

After several days in seclusion, and presumably judging his support, Selinger called a press conference on October 28, 2014 and announced his intention to remain as leader through the 2016 election. With only fifteen of thirty-three members of the legislative assembly (MLAs) standing behind him (Chura 2014), Selinger indicated that he conversed with the five cabinet ministers who spoke publicly against him and admonished them for their actions. His decision ultimately was done to call the bluff of the Gang of Five, but his decision is unprecedented too. Most leaders resign when signs of a revolt occur, but Selinger dug in his heels and argued that he had a mandate to lead from both the NDP Party and the people of Manitoba who elected him back into office in 2011 with a majority government (37 of 57 seats, which is the highest ever number of seats for the NDP).

Subsequent to his announcement to remain as leader, the Gang of Five resigned their positions on Monday, November 3, 2014 stating they were unable to continue as Ministers in an environment in which their advice was ignored. In response, Selinger made an unusual decision. Rather than remove them from caucus entirely, which would be the expected course of action, he punished them by allowing them to remain in caucus with the expectation that they vote along party lines, but not be allowed to participate in caucus meetings. Ministers rarely resign so the fact that five have resigned is surprising and unprecedented, or as Charles Adler (2014) surmises, a "political obituary."

With the swearing in of the new cabinet ministers on Monday, November 3, 2014 (see Table 3 below), and the subsequent cabinet shuffle on April 29, 2015 after the leadership convention, two observations can be made. First, some departments have experienced significant ministerial change. Recalling that Selinger "re-set" his government vis-à-vis a cabinet

shuffle on October 18, 2013, six departments have endured several ministers. One of these departments includes Housing and Community Development, which has had three ministers over the period of 18 months. I have referred to this situation elsewhere as a “revolving door of cabinet.” Short durations in leadership generally do not support the development of large-scale or meaningful public policy change because “it takes anywhere between six and 12 months for a new minister to become acquainted with the various files and build trusting relationships with stakeholders. Getting up to speed and understanding the complexity of public policy problems takes time, so the ability to invest considerable energy and resources into large-scale public policy change is generally limited” (Levasseur 2014).

Second, some of the new cabinet ministers lack experience and yet were assigned major portfolios. Greg Dewar, for example, has been the MLA for Selkirk since 1990, but never served in cabinet. In the cabinet shuffle on November 3, 2014, Dewar was appointed as the Minister of Finance. While he served as the legislative assistant for the Minister of Finance since November 2009, he has no experience in cabinet. Legislative assistants “allow MLAs to gain experience associated with cabinet positions and to have input into government decisions while also providing support to ministers and valuable contact with citizens and communities” (Government of Manitoba 2008). To be sure, as the legislative assistant, Dewar was in a position to learn about the processes and challenges facing the Department of Finance.

Sharon Blady is another example. She had one year of cabinet experience as the Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs prior to her appointment to the Department of Health. It is surprising that Selinger did not draw more on his experienced colleagues for this important and demanding position. Lett (2014b) suggests this is a “hastily assembled coalition of the-willing-and-possibly-able,” but the introduction of inexperienced individuals into high-profile portfolios may also be deliberate. If, as the Gang of Five purport, Selinger is driven by power—not principles—then appointing someone like Dewar and Blady into crucial posts may promote compliance and, in turn, reduce conflict and tension. However, as Lett (2014b) points out, someone like Dewar has little to lose since he was passed over for cabinet by both Doer and Selinger and with nothing to lose he may be able to speak out and act as a check and balance on the premier. Only time will tell how these

inexperienced ministers perform, but their ability to undertake big policy changes may be limited in the short term.

Table 3: Cabinet Ministers, 2013–2015

Department name	Pre-October 18, 2013	October 18, 2013	November 3, 2014	April 29, 2015
Infrastructure and Transportation	Steve Ashton	Steve Ashton	Steve Ashton*	Steve Ashton*
Innovation, Energy and Mines	Dave Chomiak	Dave Chomiak (Department name change to 'Mineral Resources')	Dave Chomiak	Dave Chomiak
Conservation and Water Stewardship	Gord Mackintosh	Gord Mackintosh	Gord Mackintosh	Thomas Nevakshonoff
Aboriginal and Northern Affairs	Eric Robinson	Eric Robinson	Eric Robinson	Eric Robinson
Local Government	Ron Lemieux	Stan Struthers (Department name change to 'Municipal Government')	Drew Caldwell	Drew Caldwell
Housing and Community Development	Kerri Irvin-Ross	Peter Bjornson	Kerri Irvin-Ross	Mohinder Saran
Family Services and Labour	Jennifer Howard	Kerri Irvin-Ross	Kerri Irvin-Ross	Kerri Irvin-Ross
Justice and Attorney General	Andrew Swan	Andrew Swan	James Allum	Gord Mackintosh
Finance	Stan Struthers	Jennifer Howard	Greg Dewar	Greg Dewar

Culture, Heritage and Tourism	Flor Marcelino	Flor Marcelino (Department name change to 'Multicultural -ism and Literacy')	Flor Marcelino	Flor Marcelino
Health	Theresa Oswald	Erin Selby	Sharon Blady	Sharon Blady
Children and Youth Opportunities	Kevin Chief	Kevin Chief	Melanie Wight	Melanie Wight
Agriculture, Food and Rural Development	Ron Kostyshyn	Ron Kostyshyn	Ron Kostyshyn	Ron Kostyshyn
Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs	Jim Rondeau	Sharon Blady	Deanne Crothers	Deanne Crothers
Advanced Education and Literacy	Erin Selby	James Allum (Departments merged into the 'Departments of Education and Advanced Learning')	Peter Bjornson	James Allum
Education	Nancy Allan			
Immigration and Multiculturalism	Christine Melnick	Erna Braun (Department name change to 'Labour and Immigration')	Erna Braun	Erna Braun
Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade	Peter Bjornson	Theresa Oswald (Department name change to 'Jobs and the Economy')	Kevin Chief	Kevin Chief

*Minister Ashton stepped down from the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation on December 22, 2014 to run for leadership. The next day Agriculture, Food and Rural

Development Minister Ron Kostyshyn became the interim Minister. On April 29, 2015 Minister Ashton resumed his former cabinet position.

But the governing concerns do not end there. In a surprising move, Selinger announced on November 10, 2014 that a leadership convention would be held in March 2015. Why Selinger would submit to a leadership challenge is unclear other than to put concerns about his leadership capabilities to rest once and for all. That may have been his goal, but his decision actually revealed there is significant dissention and infighting within NDP ranks. In total, three contenders competed for the leadership position, and ultimately to serve as premier, at the March 2015 election: Steve Ashton, Theresa Oswald, and Greg Selinger.

Theresa Oswald had already resigned from cabinet so she was ready to campaign for leader. Steve Ashton resigned his position as Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to run for leader, but Selinger announced in mid-November that he had no intention of resigning his position as leader and installing an interim leader in order to campaign. Selinger noted that other leadership contenders would not have to resign their positions either, citing the NDP by-laws (Article 14A, Section 1, 2013): "Subject to the resignation, death or legal incapacity of a Leader, the Leader shall stand for election at each Convention as provided in Article 14."

Two concerns exist with Selinger's campaign in a leadership review while remaining premier. First, there may be the perceived or real use of the premier's office in a partisan event. Political scientist Royce Koop refers to this as a conflict of interest even if Selinger "runs a totally squeaky clean campaign (separated from his office)" (cited in Kusch 2014: A4). Second, there may be the challenges of running government, and all its complexities, during a leadership campaign such that certain issues may be overlooked or neglected as the NDP plunges into a leadership campaign. This latter point is particularly concerning to political scientist Kelly Saunders: "You can't wear two hats like that in a moment like this...How on earth anyone is going to be focused on those issues is beyond me" (cited in Kusch and Owen 2014: A4). Others like Lett (2014c: A4) agree: "Consider the practical implications of his leadership proposal. How can the besieged premier convene productive meetings of cabinet, treasury board and caucus while some in those bodies are actively campaigning to end his leadership?" What is clear is that this crisis

illustrates a lack of leadership from all camps as Lett (2015) suggests: “And in both the actions of the mutineers and the response by Selinger, there has been precious little leadership” (A15).

V. AND THE PREMIER IS...

The lead up to the March convention illustrates there is considerable tension within the NDP with Paul Thomas (2014b) referring to it as an “increasingly nasty fight.” Moreover, questions have been raised as to what is the most appropriate way to select a new premier. Political commentator Curtis Brown (2015) describes the leadership process as “convoluted [and...] the real issue here is the process used to select the leader of many parties – and particularly the Manitoba NDP – is not only arcane, but it could also be perceived to be lacking popular legitimacy.” The approach used by the NDP is a delegated convention where 2,217 delegates were selected to vote on March 8, 2015 for a new leader. It is not the intention of this article to thoroughly explore the composition, challenges and implications of a delegated convention system using a secret ballot with sequential elimination after the first ballot or how it compares to other approaches such as “one member, one vote.” However, this brief discussion on leadership selection hopes to inspire further research into lessons learned and analysis as to how political parties can develop policies and procedures to better support decision-making processes and structures for leadership conventions. This type of research squarely focuses attention on political parties which, as Paul Thomas (2014c) argues, are “hybrid private-public organizations” whereby their processes, structures and decision-making apparatus are internal and private, but they also become external and public with real implications for governing and democracy:

Political parties in Manitoba are hybrid private-public organizations. Until well into the 20th century they were seen primarily as private associations of like-minded people dedicated to achieving particular political aims. As such, there was little attempt by the state to regulate or support their activities. Gradually, they came to be seen also as public institutions serving democracy. This shift in perspective resulted over time in laws, regulations, subsidies and reporting requirements intended to direct and support their roles in the election, governing and opposition processes. Both perspectives exist today. There is, however, a tension between seeing parties as private associations entitled to autonomy and seeing them as public institutions subject to laws. This tension helps us to

appreciate the complications of finding a simple solution to the crisis over leadership of the NDP (Thomas 2014c).

On March 8, 2015, Greg Selinger was re-affirmed as leader of the NDP, but only by the slightest of margins. A total of 1,709 ballots were cast on the first ballot with the results as follows: Ashton (502), Oswald (572) and Selinger (612). With Ashton removed from the second ballot, Selinger won with 759 votes compared to 726 votes for Oswald. From these results, two observations can be made. First, a total of 219 delegates from the first ballot opted not to vote in the second ballot. What happened to these delegates? Does their exodus reveal such deep division that they refused to vote because the options were unviable or does their exodus reveal a dangerously thin commitment to the NDP such that once Ashton lost their commitment to the party evaporated? Second, Selinger won with a mandate of just 51 percent on the second ballot. Some may argue that a winning result of 51 percent is a weak endorsement and is untenable for leading the party and the province. Others may argue that by abiding by the rules, a win of just 51 percent still constitutes a legitimate win. Either way, Selinger needs to work across the divisions within his party and extend olive branches to the Oswald and Ashton camps if there is any hope for unity leading up to the next election.

To date, the wounds of this leadership crisis remain open and in need of closure. This is a concern for the state of governing. The ability of the NDP to heal and bridge differences is seriously lacking and this impedes the ability to develop sound public policy that is informed by divergent opinions within the NDP caucus.

VI. BUDGET 2015

Compared to the political drama described above, Budget 2015 was relatively dull. Titled “Steady growth, steady jobs,” the budget emphasizes targeted spending in such areas as infrastructure (\$1.08 billion), and continues to run a net deficit of \$422 million with a net debt of \$20.4 billion.

As outlined in table 4 below, certain departments, notably Finance (–11.36 percent), Labour and Immigration (–9.30 percent), Civil Service Commission (–8.80 percent), Mineral Resources (–8.77 percent), and Infrastructure and Transportation (–8.11 percent) experienced a notable

reduction in funding. Comparatively, Housing and Community Development experienced a sizable increase in funding of 12.47 percent. Other departments saw minor changes to their funding.

Budget 2015 is not a normal budget for two key reasons. First, with the fixed election set for April 19, 2016, this budget is likely the last opportunity for the NDP to sell its policies before the drop of the writ. In this sense, Budget 2015 becomes an election budget. Second, this budget was born out of political and economic challenges. Politically, there was likely little internal discussion related to the budget given the in-fighting that occurred between the Selinger-Oswald-Ashton camps. It is difficult to gauge the impact of the NDP leadership challenge on the ability to address the debt and deficit situation, but the degree of representation from experienced ministers and staff feeding into budget decisions is certainly questionable. Economically, Moody's Investors Service (2014) downgraded Manitoba's long-term rating from AA-1 to AA-2 because of the growing debt and failure to meet balanced budgets projections. What is clear is that this government continues to struggle with the deficit and debt overall while protecting front-line services notably in health and the social services, which is in keeping with the NDP's social democratic roots.

Table 4: Departmental spending

Department	Change from 2014–15 to 2015–16
Aboriginal and Northern Affairs	–2.04%
Agriculture, Food and Rural Development	–2.41%
Children and Youth Opportunities	2.93%
Civil Service Commission	–8.80%
Conservation and Water Stewardship	–4.26%
Education and Advanced Learning	3.09%
Family Services	3.35%
Finance	–11.36%
Health	5.04%
Housing and Community Development	12.47%
Infrastructure and Transportation	–8.11%

Jobs and the Economy	-1.74%
Justice	0.75%
Labour and Immigration	-9.30%
Mineral Resources	-8.77%
Multiculturalism and Literacy	1.90%
Municipal Government	2.48%
Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection	-5.43%

Source: Budget 2014 and Budget 2015

VII. CAN THE NDP RECOVER BEFORE THE NEXT PROVINCIAL ELECTION?

An important question to ask is whether the NDP can re-build its brand before the next fixed election date of April 19, 2016. While the twitter feed on March 8, 2015 suggested that the re-installment of Greg Selinger was a gift to Brian Pallister,⁵ to dismiss the NDP so decisively is premature, I suggest, because there are too many unknowns at this point.

One of these unknowns relates to the type of election that will occur. Elections, quite simply, matter. Elections can humble the most popular party or candidate as seen in the 2014 City of Winnipeg mayoral race. Conversely, elections can boost underdogs as seen in the unexpected win by Kathleen Wynne in the 2014 Ontario election. Given this, it would appear that there may still be time for the NDP to recover, despite internal disagreements, or for the PCs to falter. Given the electoral volatility, it is simply too soon to dictate the death of the NDP just yet.

Another unknown variable in the next election is the new Liberal leader (Rana Bokhari). Historically, a surge in support for the Liberal Party of Manitoba comes at the expense of the NDP according to MacKay: “when a disgruntled New Democrat is looking for a home, there’s too much ideological difference between them and the Tories. They have to

⁵ See Royce Koop’s (@RoyceKoop) tweet on March 8, 2015: “Brian Pallister could have not hoped for a better result than this one #MBNDP15” or Jeff Denton (@justjeff82) “Congratulations to @Brian_Pallister for his Premier-in-Waiting victory today. #MBNDP15”.

find somewhere to go, and they have to say something to a pollster on the telephone. They just can't bring themselves to be a Tory just yet" (cited in Owen 2014: A4). If the Liberal party runs a smart campaign, coupled with the endorsement of a popular Justin Trudeau, this could be problematic for the NDP, but this can only be known closer to the election.

To be sure, the NDP is battered and bruised from the backlash against the PST and the subsequent leadership crisis. However, only time will tell whether the NDP withers away or can withstand deep internal turmoil and an unpopular leader. What we know for certain is that the next election on April 19, 2016 will likely be one of the most defining elections in our history.

On a sad note, you may be aware that the funding for the Manitoba Institute for Policy Research (MIPR) ended June 30, 2015. Needless to say, the loss of MIPR is significant for the public policy community in general, but it may also have implications for our ability to provide public policy analysis in this journal. MIPR, particularly the permanent staff including Robert Ermel and Gillian Hanson, were instrumental in supporting this section of the journal by providing funding for publication plus numerous research assistants including Alana Kernaghan, Kelly MacWilliam, Raina Loxely, Devon Hanel, Michael Hanson, and Wanda Hounslow. Robert and Gillian also assisted in coordination and provided outstanding leadership and ongoing support. With this loss, the Academic Director (Dr. Andrea Rounce) and I are developing a strategy to ensure that this public policy section continues, but the future is uncertain at this time. I sincerely hope to write to you again next year with a new array of public policy articles pertinent to Manitoba.

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