

**Second Session – Forty-Second Legislature**  
of the  
**Legislative Assembly of Manitoba**  
**DEBATES**  
and  
**PROCEEDINGS**  
**Official Report**  
**(Hansard)**

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**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Forty-Second Legislature**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
ADAMS, Danielle	Thompson	NDP
ALTOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GORDON, Audrey	Southdale	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah, Hon.	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg, Hon.	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake-Gimli	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	Assiniboia	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMONT, Dougald	St. Boniface	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya	Notre Dame	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	McPhillips	PC
MOSES, Jamie	St. Vital	NDP
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NAYLOR, Lisa	Woleseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REYES, Jon	Waverley	PC
SALA, Adrien	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SMITH, Andrew	Lagimodière	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Vérendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 19, 2020

*The House met at 1:30 p.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.

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 40—The Election Financing Amendment and Elections Amendment Act (Government Advertising)**

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Education):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice, that Bill 40, The Election Financing Amendment and Elections Amendment Act (Government Advertising), be now read for a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Goertzen:** This bill will help to reduce the uncertainty around government advertising and publications during a restriction period during an election or by-election period. Our government is committed to ensuring that Manitobans have access to government information, while ensuring that government resources are not misused during an election period.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Bill 25—The Conflict of Interest (Members and Ministers) and Related Amendments Act**

**Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Families (Mrs. Stefanson), that Bill 25, The Conflict of Interest (Members and Ministers) and Related Amendments Act, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Cullen:** Madam Speaker, for too long Manitoba has had the current conflict of interest, what the commissioner called the weakest in Canada, in the area of ethically—ethical accountability for MLAs and ministers. That is why our government asked the current Conflict of Interest Commissioner to engage in a comprehensive review of the current Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Conflict of Interest Act and make recommendations for change.

I am confident that this legislation will ensure that Manitobans can be confident that all members of the Legislative Assembly are held to the highest ethical standards as they serve their constituents.

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

**Bill 39—The Horse Racing Regulatory Modernization Act (Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Act and Pari-Mutuel Levy Act Amended)**

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable Minister of Families—sorry, the honourable Minister of Justice.

**Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development (Mr. Pedersen), that Bill 39, The Horse Racing Regulatory Modernization Act (Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Act and Pari-Mutuel Levy Act Amended), be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Cullen:** I'm pleased to introduce this legislation that will transfer responsibility for the regulation of horse racing in Manitoba to the Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Authority of Manitoba.

Our government is committed to ensuring the regulatory sustainability of the horse-racing industry. This legislation will modernize the regulatory framework for horse racing, reduce the regulatory burden on the industry and eliminate outdated regulations.

Thank you.

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

**Bill 51—The Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act**

**Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Health, that Bill 51, The Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Cullen:** I'm pleased to introduce this legislation that will allow government to join the class action lawsuit against opioid manufacturers. The lawsuit names more than 40 manufacturers, wholesalers and distributors of opioids in Canada.

By passing this legislation, Manitoba will join other provinces in working to recover the millions of dollars in health-care costs incurred due to addictions here in Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Bill 34—The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2020**

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance):** Madam Speaker, I move, second by the Minister of Health, that Bill 34, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Fielding:** The legislation will provide the legislative authority for the implementation of some tax, financial and other measures being announced in Budget 2020.

I'm pleased to present this bill to the House for its consideration.

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

**Bill 38—The Consumer Protection Amendment Act**

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal Relations, that Bill 38, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Fielding:** I'm pleased to introduce the bill today. The bill will amend The Consumer Protection Act.

The bill will protect consumers by prohibiting unsolicited, direct door-to-door sales of certain household systems and supplies, such as furnaces, air conditioners and air-water purifiers, unless the consumer invites the seller to their homes. It will also repeal the cell phone contract legislation, which is duplicate of federal regulation, and adds uncertainty costs.

These amendments demonstrate our commitment to ensuring Manitobans' consumer protection laws are meeting the needs of Manitobans.

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

\* (13:40)

**Bill 44—The Public Utilities Ratepayer Protection and Regulatory Reform Act (Various Acts Amended)**

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal Relations, that the Bill 44, The Public Utilities Rate Protection and Regulatory Reform Act (Various Acts Amended) be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Fielding:** Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce the bill today that will protect ratepayers and clarify the respective roles of the government and the Public Utilities Board. It will improve the structure, the governance and accountability of the Public Utilities Board and improve the timing and cost-efficiency of rate reviews. These changes will reduce the regulatory burdens and costs to the regulatory regulated entities.

Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to present the bill to the House for its consideration.

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

**Bill 22—The Minor Amendments and Corrections Act, 2020**

**Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Municipal Relations):** Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice, that Bill 22, The Minor Amendments and Corrections Act, 2020; Loi corrective de 2020, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Ms. Squires:** The Minor Amendments and Corrections Act is a bill that is introduced every year in this Legislature. This legislation corrects

typographical, numbering, translation and other drafting errors and makes minor amendments to a number of statutes.

I'm pleased to recommend it to the House.

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

**Bill 37—The Reducing Red Tape and Improving Services Act, 2020**

**Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Municipal Relations):** Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Crown Services (Mr. Wharton), that Bill 37, The Reducing Red Tape and Improving Services Act, 2020; Loi de 2020 visant la réduction du fardeau administratif et l'amélioration des services, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Ms. Squires:** This bill amends 15 statutes and repeals five statutes to remove unnecessary regulatory requirements and streamline provincial services that support Manitoba residents and organizations. This bill eliminates more than 160 requirements to remove unnecessary administrative burden.

Thank you.

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

**Bill 48—The Planning Amendment and City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment Act**

**Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Municipal Relations):** Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Conservation and Climate (Mrs. Guillemard), that Bill 48, The Planning Amendment and City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire et la Charte de la ville de Winnipeg, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Ms. Squires:** This bill will amend The Planning Act, The City of Winnipeg Charter and repeal The Capital Region Partnership Act to implement key recommendations in the planning, zoning and permitting in the Manitoba report. The bill creates a regional planning authority in the Winnipeg Metropolitan Region, creates new rights of appeal on a wide range of local planning decisions. It also establishes timelines for municipalities to process planning applications across the province. This bill will help

reduce duplication and unnecessary delays in planning to ensure Manitoba remains competitive and attractive for business and job growth.

I am pleased to present this bill to the House for consideration.

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

**Bill 49—The Building and Electrical Permitting Improvement Act (Various Acts Amended and Permit Dispute Resolution Act Enacted)**

**Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Municipal Relations):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage (Mrs. Cox), that Bill 49, The Building and Electrical Permitting Improvement Act (Various Acts Amended and Permit Dispute Resolution Act Enacted); Loi améliorant la délivrance des permis de construction et d'électricité et de la résolution des litiges connexes, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Ms. Squires:** I'm pleased to introduce Bill 49, the building and electrical permit improvement act, to implement key recommendations in the Planning, Zoning and Permitting in Manitoba report. This bill enables regulations establishing time frames within which approving authorities must issue or refuse building and electrical permit applications and conduct associated inspections, establish a new dispute resolution process and align electrical code requirements in the City of Winnipeg with the rest of the province.

I'm pleased to present this bill to the House for consideration.

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

**Bill 41—The Advanced Education Administration Amendment Act**

**Hon. Ralph Eichler (Minister of Economic Development and Training):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal Relations, that Bill 41, The Advanced Education Administration Amendment Act, be now read for a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Eichler:** I'm pleased to introduce Bill 41, The Advanced Education Administration Amendment Act. This bill will amend The Advanced Education

Administration Act to allow the government to issue flexible polish-policy-based guidelines on both tuition and student fees for Manitoba's universities and colleges. The changes will help facilitate the delivery of high-quality programming at Manitoba's universities and colleges, now and into the future, and ensure that we maintain the lowest average tuition in western Canada.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Is it the please of the House to adopt the motion? Agreed [*Agreed*]

#### **Bill 42—The University College of the North Amendment Act**

**Hon. Ralph Eichler (Minister of Economic Development and Training):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding), that Bill 42, The University College of the North Amendment Act, be now read for a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Eichler:** I am pleased to introduce Bill 42, The University College of the North Amendment Act. This bill amend The University College of the North Act to provide the university board with the authority to manage parking on all of its campuses.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

#### **Bill 45—The Public Health Amendment Act (Food Safety and Other Amendments)**

**Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living (Mr. Friesen)—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Pedersen:** —that Bill 45, The Public Health Amendment Act (Food Safety and Other Amendments), be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Pedersen:** Madam Speaker, this bill clarifies that food safety is a public health issue. Food safety has long been regulated under The Public Health Act and will continue to be.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

\* (13:50)

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

#### **Bill 35—The Climate and Green Plan Implementation Act, 2020**

**Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate):** I move, seconded by the Minister for Indigenous and Northern Relations, that Bill 35, The Climate and Green Plan Implementation Act, 2020; Loi de 2020 sur la mise en œuvre du Plan vert et climatique, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mrs. Guillemard:** It gives me great pleasure to introduce The Climate and Green Plan Implementation Act, 2020, on behalf of our government. The purpose of this bill is to fulfill our commitment to legislate our made-in-Manitoba green levy in Spring 2020. Our green levy consists of two elements: a flat \$25-per-ton green carbon levy, and (2) an output-based pricing program for large industrial emitters.

The bill will also enable our government to reduce the PST from 7 per cent to 6 per cent, giving Manitobans the second lowest PST in Canada and saving the average family \$350 per year.

In addition, Manitobans will save \$1 billion in carbon taxes alone over the next five years compared to the federal backstop carbon tax. This bill is another step towards achieving Manitoba's vision of becoming the cleanest, greenest and most climate resilient province in Canada. Therefore, it is my pleasure to introduce Bill 35.

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

#### **Bill 36—The Water Resources Administration Amendment Act**

**Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure):** Welcome back, Madam Speaker. And I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal Relations (Ms. Squires), that Bill 36, the water resources administration act, be now read a first time.

**Madam Speaker:** It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Infrastructure, seconded by the honourable Minister of Municipal Relations, that Bill 36, The Water Resources Administration Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

**Mr. Schuler:** I am pleased to finally be able to introduce Bill 36, The Water Resources Administration Amendment Act, intended to

strengthen administration and stewardship of provincial water infrastructure, including provincial waterways and provincial water control works. The bill provides government increased powers to manage and protect provincial water infrastructure, including flood infrastructure.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

#### **Bill 43—The Civil Service Superannuation Amendment Act**

**Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Central Services):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to introduce, seconded by the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Schuler), that Bill 43, The Civil Service Superannuation Amendment Act, be now read a first time. [*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable Minister for Central Services.

**Mr. Helwer:** Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Infrastructure, that Bill 43, The Civil Service Superannuation Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

#### ***Motion presented.***

**Mr. Helwer:** Bill 43, The Civil Service Superannuation Act—amendment act, amends The Civil Service Superannuation Act to align the pension plan with best practices in the pension industry, reduce red tape and protect the pension plan for retirees and for contributors. With the introduction of this bill, the government is acting on the recommendations of both employee representatives and employer representatives to support the long-term viability of the pension plan.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Are there any other introductions of bills?

Committee reports?

#### **TABLING OF REPORTS**

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Education):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table the following report: the Public Schools Finance Board Annual Report.

Thank you.

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance):** Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today in the Assembly to table the fidelity bond crime insurance.

**Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** I would like to table the following report from the Department of Justice: the 2017 Annual Review of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

**Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Municipal Relations):** I am please to table the report of the Office of the Fire Commissioner 2018-19 Annual Report.

**Madam Speaker:** Ministerial statements—[*interjection*]-oh.

Order, please.

#### **MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS**

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living, and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

#### **COVID-19 Update**

**Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide a brief update to members and to the public about the status of the coronavirus pandemic as well as the state of Manitoba's preparedness for addressing COVID-19.

I want to say, first of all, thank you to our front-line health-care workers who are on the job every day, who take this issue seriously, who are working very hard to ensure that Manitobans are safe.

D'abord, je veux remercier tout notre personnel de soins de santé pour leur travail et pour leurs efforts alors que COVID-19 continue d'avoir un impact sur la vie quotidienne des Manitobains.

#### ***Translation***

*First, I want to thank all health-care personnel for their work and efforts as COVID-19 continues to impact on the daily life of Manitobans.*

#### ***English***

Since the time that Manitoba identified its first presumptive case of COVID-19, which was actually only week ago today, we have identified 17 cases in total. It appears that 16 of those cases are attributable

to travel. We are working to establish the cause on the 17th case.

Because of COVID-19, our province's health-care system has been at its highest level of preparedness since February the 3rd. Through our incident management structure we have been monitoring the status of COVID-19 and increasing our preparedness for coronavirus cases in Manitoba.

I am in daily contact with Manitoba's Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, Dr. Brent Roussin, and I commend him and his team for his excellent leadership at this difficult time.

I commend our senior health-care and system leaders who support the work of the incident command structure and, of course, as I said, front-line workers like doctors and nurses, but also administrators, employees at Cadham lab and so many others. In challenging times we rely on these people and their efforts have been tremendous.

As a response to the spread of COVID-19 globally, we have taken many steps to prepare locally. Of course, public health officials are advising to avoid large gatherings of groups of 50 persons or more.

We, with all the support of the parties in this Legislature, passed Bill 33, and in co-ordination with the federal government we ordered additional personal protective equipment for our front-line health-care providers and the patients who will require this—is a \$35.2-million authorization that would provide six months supply of PPE at 20 times normal usage, including N95 masks, surgical masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, thermometer covers and other supplies.

Based on the advice of health professionals, we have ordered additional medical equipment, including ventilators and dialysis machines and UV cleaning machines and more testing equipment for Cadham lab. I am pleased to report to the House today that 23 of the ventilators that we ordered in a hurry have now arrived and are delivered to Manitoba.

\*(14:00)

In an effort to protect patients, staff and the community, members know that all Manitoba hospitals now have protocols in place restricting visitors, with some exceptions for compassionate reasons. We have suspended visits to long-term-care homes. Elective surgeries have been postponed where medical evidence demonstrates that there is no negative impact on the patient as a result.

On the advice of public health officials, of course, classes at public schools will be suspended after this Friday, March the 20th, a precautionary measure announced last week to allow parents and teachers to have a week of planning. We have not had a COVID-19 case identified in schools.

We have also made the decision, of course, to suspend services at licensed daycare centres effective end of day Friday. It is recommended that parents with children in these centres make alternative arrangements as soon as possible. And, of course, these centres are remaining open until the end of the week. We are allowing home-care child-care providers who operate with eight children or less to continue operations. And we are dedicated to creating child-care options for front-line health-care workers and for essential services staff who will need them.

Post-secondary institutions are creating steps to use e-learning tools to replace in-person classes which have been cancelled.

All six casinos were closed earlier this week.

Courthouses have had access restricted. Jury trials through June the 30th have been rescheduled for later or will continue as judge-only trials.

The government has worked co-operatively with Doctors Manitoba, moving to offer virtual doctor appointments and virtual psychotherapy options which follow social distancing requirements. These virtual options will include telephone and video links. They can be used for diagnosis, treatment, even prescriptions and prescription renewals.

Today we announced a medicine unit will be relocated to existing clinical space in the former HSC women's pavilion to enable the creation of a new dedicated 30-bed isolation unit for COVID-19, should it be required. To date it has not.

We are acting out of an abundance of caution to prevent potential spread of the virus. We continue to adapt appropriately as the situation changes.

Our laboratory capacity has increased dramatically. Scientists have been testing samples from hundreds of symptomatic Manitobans daily. To date, over 3,000 tests have been performed. Cadham run-lab runs hundreds of tests each day.

We have opened nine community screening sites in Winnipeg, but as well in Brandon, Flin Flon, The Pas, Thompson and Selkirk, where patients are referred to for COVID-19 screening. The Selkirk screening clinic is Manitoba's first drive-through



screening site, which allows patients to be screened without leaving their car; 2,100 people have been screened so far, more sites to open across the province in the coming days. New drive-through screening sites in Steinbach, and at the Bison avenue MPI, a Manitoba Public Insurance location, are set to open this weekend.

I remind Manitobans that screening sites are intended for referred patients, not for walk-in cases. If you are unsure if you should be tested, a free online self-assessment tool is available on the Shared Health website and the link is available at [manitoba.ca/covid19](http://manitoba.ca/covid19). This tool has helped reduce wait times for telephone health lines in other provinces, and we are already seeing that effect here.

Regardless of travel history, if a COVID-19 test is not needed if you have no symptoms. If Manitobans do have flu-like symptoms, we ask that they contact Health Links-Info Santé. There is a local number. I will provide the toll-free number: 1-888-315-9257. Lines are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Health Links refers—receives over 2,000 calls a day. We have tripled the number of phone lines from 35 to 104 lines. We have added human resources to staff those lines. We have added technology to assist when you are on hold to provide additional information to you.

And there are so many success stories along the way. A few of them were: We're welcoming the efforts of fourth-year nursing students from University of Manitoba's Rady school of medicine who have helped with Health Links to enhance the service. There are doctors, almost 100 so far, who have stepped up to indicate that they will take on additional shifts at clinics and hospitals. We are inundated by industry and business and community and faith-based leaders who are asking how they can help and suggesting practical and positive solutions that are being undertaken to be studied, explored and to see about implementation.

Federal government has taken steps, of course, to limit travel. They've announced restrictions on non-essential travel. Our own Chief Provincial Public Health Officer has issued the same recommendation. Data is showing us that 85 per cent of cases of COVID-19 are attributable to travel. By cancelling non-essential travel, the number of COVID-19 cases can be reduced. Canadians who have recently returned to Canada from overseas should self-isolate for 14 days.

Even after these measures are in place, supply chains remain open.

When it comes to containing COVID-19, we have said we are all in this thing together. This is a public health challenge. Every member of the public must do their part. It means staying home if you are sick. It means that businesses should not require a sick note—or, a doctor's note, I should say—in order to allow an employee to self-isolate. It means taking social distancing strategies to limit possible exposure to the virus.

Always remember: wash your hands and wash them well, don't shake hands with others, maintain a two-metre buffer zone and there is much more practical advice online. By following best practices, we can help contain COVID-19.

We know that in the vast majority of cases, it's a minor illness. But we are mindful of the fact that for elderly people, for persons with respiratory issues, COVID-19 can be life-threatening.

Madam Speaker, we know that these are unprecedented times, we know that these times have called for unprecedented actions. The world seems like a different place than it was simply one week ago, one month ago, certainly a year ago. To address the challenges that we have not seen before, we are asking Manitobans to be who they always have been: people who exercise good judgment, people who are good neighbours, people who reach out, who do good needs, who look out for others.

Manitobans should have the confidence of knowing that its government and its senior leadership are working hard behind the scenes and getting things done and having confidence in each other.

Les Manitobains peuvent être assurés que votre gouvernement prend des mesures pour assurer la préparation du système de santé.

**Translation**

*Manitobans can be assured that your government is taking measures to ensure the preparedness of the health-care system.*

**English**

In partnership with the retail sector, some grocery stores are opening extra hours at our government's request and in collaboration with business to allow for elderly and vulnerable populations to shop when, arguably, the store is cleaner and get access to things like prescriptions.

We have seen University of Manitoba faculty of medicine students helping occupational health services to help with screening, as staff and physicians return from international travel.

As I mentioned, 100 doctors stepping up to offer their services already, and many more we know will come; nurses doing the same.

And while this is a public health crisis, none of us can ignore the impact of all of this on our mental health. If you need help, reach out. Sometimes, the best antidote for anxiety is doing something nice, doing something kind. And we can all have a part in doing those little things.

One thing we all can do, if we are able, is to still safely donate blood, and I recommend that all Manitobans do so. There is an app for your phone. Go online to Canadian Blood Services, set up a username and password, find the clinic nearest to you and give the gift of life.

Madam Speaker, I recommend that Manitobans rely on reputable sources of information. Our actions must be guided by information, not by fear. Our government's website continues to be regularly updated, as does the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada. I am pleased at this point in time—my office is delivering daily updates to all the members of this Assembly, to make sure that they have up-to-date information that they can share with their constituents and stakeholder groups.

Our website has information and links to the Shared Health self-assessment tool. It has advice to do—on what you need to do if you need to self-isolate. Good information is important.

The challenge of COVID-19 is significant. It is not insurmountable. The flattening the curve is an idea that now Manitobans—Canadians, indeed—understand, where only a few weeks ago they would not have understood what it was or why we were doing it.

\* (14:10)

We are all in this together, we must do our part and, Madam Speaker, we are calling on all Manitobans to remain strong, to remain neighbourly, to get good information, and we will get through this together.

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** With the cases of COVID-19 continuing to grow in our province, we know that Manitobans have concerns and fears about their health, their jobs, their families, their communities and the economy.

We first want to say thank you to all the front-line workers who have been shouldering so much of the burden during these times. We'd like to thank Dr. Brent Roussin, the chief public health medical officer, and chief nursing officer, Lanette Siragusa, for their ongoing daily updates and information that they very compassionately share with all Manitobans. We want to thank our health-care workers, our first responders, our grocery and retail staff, child-care workers, teachers, public servants, community organizations, truck drivers, taxi and transportation and transit drivers. And to all those other workers who have been deemed an essential service and who are continuing to report to work: we thank you.

As the government continues to expand the capacity to deal with COVID-19 day to day, we want to tell all Manitobans that we know this situation is causing a lot of anxiety. We're proud of how folks are pulling together and supporting one another, day in and day out, displaying what it means to be Manitobans: creatively showing up for one another, for their neighbours, for youth, for seniors in our communities; simply doing what they can within their capacity to make sure that everyone is okay.

We also know that this is hitting some Manitobans harder than others. Layoffs, loneliness, uncertainty about child care, finances—including Manitoba small-business owners, about course completion, about supports for students, and the reality that being in self-isolation is not safe for everyone. These are all concerns that we have. These are all concerns that we share.

As we continue to work with this government on making sure that the health-care system has adequate capacity to deal with COVID-19, we're also looking ahead at the impacts that this is going to have on our province. We want all Manitobans to know that we are here for them, that we will continue to work hard for all Manitoban families, for the vulnerable and for the marginalized in our province. We will absolutely get through this together.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for St. Boniface, on leave?

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** Yes, Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to speak in response to the minister's statement.

**Madam Speaker:** Does the member have leave to respond to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

**Mr. Lamont:** I want to thank the minister for his update and for the improvements the government has made to date, and especially thank all—everyone who's been working so hard behind the scenes, scrambling in a very difficult and evolving situation: everybody in public health, but also businesses, labour, community groups, faith groups, everyone who's come together in order to respond to this.

On March 2nd, just 17 days ago, Manitoba Liberals called on the PC government to present a plan to deal with COVID-19, to protect and support northern communities, to protect personal-care homes, to be prepared to assist individuals on low incomes who face quarantine, cracking down on price gouging and hoarding of supplies, ensuring the work of the government continues in setting up a central command centre that can ultimately co-ordinate food and other deliveries.

There has been a lot of testing, but there have been delays in notifying people that they have a—they do not have COVID-19, so we understand that some people are—and their contacts are staying in self-quarantine longer than needed because they're waiting for a test to tell them that they don't have it.

But in that time in—since we made our first request on March 2nd, there were 82,000 cases worldwide and 3,200 deaths. Seventeen days later, Johns Hopkins showed the number of cases and deaths has nearly tripled: 235,000 confirmed cases and 9,785 deaths. And data from the centers for disease control in the US have just suggested the spread of COVID-19 may have a greater impact on young people than originally thought.

So one of the most important messages we can all send to our fellow Manitobans is that we have the power, working together, to slow the spread of this disease. We need to hope for the best, but we need to plan for the worst and be ready to prevent economic suffering that it can be a consequence of fighting this pandemic.

The measures that are being taken now are already leading to layoffs. Service workers, restaurants, event facilities, performers, contract teachers, child-care workers are not only going to lose their jobs, they will not be able to return to work so long as their work is closed.

I've spoken many times in this House about the fact that the economy is much more fragile than people realize and that 50 per cent of Manitobans are on the edge of insolvency. We have to recognize that

some of the measures it will take to slow the spread will be massively economically disruptive for businesses and workers alike. The businesses and those people are not going to be able to work anytime soon, especially at a time when the price of oil is collapsing and a global financial collapse appears to be unfolding. There are—these are public health and economic challenges that have not been seen in decades.

We all know these are extraordinary times. We all accept that extraordinary measures are required. I hope that in these times we can set aside partisan blinders and narrow ideology to do the extraordinary things that will be demanded of us. If we can accomplish that, we will be stronger, wiser, more united and more prosperous.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

\* \* \*

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):** On House business.

I have a number of separate leave requests to make, and I would ask that you please canvass the House for the leave for each of these items as I present them.

First, is there leave to consider Interim Supply today and for the House to not see the clock until royal assent has been granted on the interim appropriation act, 2020?

**Madam Speaker:** Is there leave to consider Interim Supply today and for the House to not see the clock until royal assent has been granted on the interim appropriation act, 2020?

Has leave been granted? *[Agreed]*

**Mr. Goertzen:** I thank the House, Madam Speaker.

Secondly, is there leave to skip steps 5 and 10 of the budget procedure in appendix D of the rule book so that after the minister finishes his speech, he tables the messages and the budget documents, and then other members may speak to the motion?

**Madam Speaker:** Is there leave to skip steps 5 and 10 of the budget procedure in appendix D of the rule book so that after the minister finishes his speech, he tables the messages and the budget document, and then other members may speak to the motion?

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

**Mr. Goertzen:** Madam Speaker, I thank the House.

### House Business

**Mr. Goertzen:** Thirdly, despite the motion passed by the House on March 16th, 2020, is there leave to allow the House to suspend its sitting indefinitely after we rise today and for the House to adjourn until the call of the Speaker upon request from the Government House Leader or their designate for a duration determined in advance by the Government House Leader or their designate, or the Government House Leader, the Opposition House Leader and the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) or their designates; and while the House is not sitting, for the Speaker, the Government House Leader, the Opposition House Leader and the member for River Heights or their designates, to consider ways for the Assembly to alter its operations to accommodate social distancing in light of pandemic planning?

**Madam Speaker:** Despite the motion passed by the House on March 16th, 2020, is there leave to allow the House to suspend its sittings indefinitely after we rise today, and for the House to adjourn until the call of the Speaker upon request from the Government House Leader or their designate for a duration determined in advance by the Government House Leader or their designate, or the Government House Leader, the Opposition House Leader and the member for River Heights or their designates; and while the House is not sitting, for the Speaker, the Government House Leader, the Opposition House Leader and the member for River Heights or their designates to consider ways for the Assembly to alter its operations to accommodate social distancing in light of pandemic planning?

Is there leave? [*Agreed*]

\* \* \*

**Mr. Goertzen:** I thank the House, Madam Speaker.

Before I put this final motion, I'd like to thank the Clerk's office, in particular the Deputy Clerk Rick Yarish for his work in helping put this together on relatively short notice.

\*(14:20)

Madam Speaker, is there leave for the House to have a limited debate today, after the budget motion passes, on the matter of urgent public importance filed today by the member for River Heights, with the debate to last no more than 30 minutes, featuring one 10-minute speech from a member of the government caucus, a member of the official opposition caucus, as well as the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont)?

**Madam Speaker:** Is there leave for the House to have a limited debate today, after the budget motion passes, on the matter of urgent public importance filed today by the member for River Heights, with the debate to last no more than 30 minutes, featuring one 10-minute speech from a member of the government caucus, a member of the official—[*interjection*]

There is some clarification on this, and I'm going to start that one again.

Is there leave for the House to have a limited debate today, after the budget motion passes, on the matter of urgent public importance filed today by the honourable member for St. Boniface, with the debate to last no more than 30 minutes, featuring one 10-minute speech from the member of the government caucus, a member of the official opposition caucus, as well as the member for St. Boniface?

Is there leave? [*Agreed*]

### MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

#### Keesy Rodewald and Simon Resch

**Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland):** Madam Speaker, I wish to recognize Keesy Rodewald and Simon Resch, two special individuals from the constituency of Borderland who consistently go above and beyond in serving their communities.

I had the opportunity to witness them both in action at the Emerson Winter Carnival as well as at a Valentine's Day fundraiser at the Emerson Golf Course. The whole community was out for a time of family fun at the Emerson Winter Carnival, themed Wonderful World of Disney, and included hockey, skating on the nearby frozen river, snowmobiling and performances for the children. Local entertainment and a fantastic dinner wrapped up the evening.

The Depot at Emerson Golf Course was again the scene of celebration and entertainment on Valentine's Day, where nearly 100 members of the community and their significant others were treated to an evening of laughs, fine dining and great company.

Simon, who has a professional background in the culinary arts, delivered one unforgettable dish after another, while Keesy corralled volunteers and brought to life the event, for which she had undoubtedly spent countless hours organizing and preparing—a lot of work to put on—and, throughout the evening, many compliments and words of appreciation were shared.

Madam Speaker, I've highlighted just these two occasions, but Keesy and Simon are behind

so much of what goes on in the Emerson and Dominion City area each year. Keesy, a mother to five beautiful children, serves on numerous volunteer and community boards and is a true champion of her community.

Simon, who, together with his father Michael, owns and manages the Emerson Duty Free on the US-Canada border, is also CEO of the Emerson-Franklin economic development corporation, and is actively involved in finding ways to attract investment and open up opportunities and growth for the area.

Madam Speaker, despite the challenges, there's a lot of heart in rural and small-town Manitoba, nowhere more so than in Emerson. And thanks to the spirit, volunteerism and hard work of people like Keesy Rodewald and Simon Resch, the best is yet to come.

Thank you.

### Save Our Seine

**Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital):** Madam Speaker, 30 years ago the first group of volunteers formed Save Our Seine with the goals to protect, enhance and advocate for the Seine River and surrounding natural areas in Winnipeg. Throughout—through grassroots action, community outreach, engaging government and private industry, Save Our Seine has—is having a major impact on improving the health of the Seine River and increasing accessibility to natural space in our community.

What started as a basic clean-up crew has morphed into a dedicated group of activists. One of the most significant achievements of Save Our Seine was their tireless lobbying of the City of Winnipeg to address issues of industrial waste dumping—stop the City of Winnipeg from dumping toxic sludge into the Seine, poisoning it for decades.

After almost 15 years of lobbying, officials eventually undertook a comprehensive environmental study. The study, not surprisingly, confirmed the existence in environmental damage. Since then, thousands of tons of contaminated soil has been hauled out and nutrient-rich soil has replaced it, slowly healing the river.

Save Our Seine was also leading force behind bringing the plight of Seine's nearby forest, the Bois-des-esprits, to the attention of our government and the City of Winnipeg. Bois-des-esprits is one of the largest pristine urban forests in Canada. It is home to a wide variety of plants and wildlife, including

enormous oaks, aspens, beavers, blue herons and snapping turtles.

Thanks to Save Our Seine's campaign to raise donations through contacting hundreds of corporations and foundations across Canada, making presentations, attending countless meetings and launching a postcard campaign, the Bois-des-esprits is now properly protected.

I personally have enjoyed long walks with family members along the banks of the Seine River—

**Madam Speaker:** The member's time has expired.

Is there leave to allow the member to complete his statement? *[Agreed]*

I would ask the member to quickly, then—he has leave to wind up his statement.

**Mr. Moses:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I personally have enjoyed long walks with family members along the Seine River and I fondly remember a canoe ride I took with my brother along there one spring morning.

Madam Speaker, let's all congratulate Save Our Seine on 30 years of hard work.

Thank you very much.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for St. Vital.

**Mr. Moses:** Can I ask leave for—to include the names of the board members of Save Our Seine in Hansard?

**Madam Speaker:** Is there leave to include the names of those board members in Hansard? *[Agreed]*

*Save Our Seine board: Isabelle Bertazzo, Veronica Dunne, Josée-Anne Le Dorze, Tari Mwingi, Wilma Sotas, Sandra Stewart, directors; Denis Gautron, past-president; Michelle Kading, executive director; Anita Moyse, secretary; Robyn Palmer, vice-president; Laurie Ringaert, president; Sunny Saini, treasurer.*

### Boys & Girls Club of Thompson

**Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson):** Madam Speaker, our children need support to help them grow into responsible citizens. We have a greater responsibility to lend a helping hand to children and youth at risk.

The Boys & Girls Club of Thompson is a safe haven for children and youth at risk. This grassroots organization provides recreational, nutritional, education and vocational-based programming.

Roughly 500 children and youth take part in their—in this type of programming. Their core values foster respect, equal treatment and nurture the growth of children through encouragement, support, collaboration and value of speaking out.

For the first time, children and youth of boy—the—of the Boys & Girls Club of Thompson took part in the Have a Heart campaign initiative on Valentine's Day. This initiative is about reconciliation and the promotion of rights and needs of indigenous children across Canada. It is about helping children and youth know that they have rights and they can speak their different experiences on behalf of other children.

The children and youth part of the after-school programming participated in writing messages to the provincial and federal governments. I believe we have a responsibility to help our young people, and one of the ways we can do that is by amplifying their voices. This year, their message to all levels of government is: indigenous children deserve a fair chance to grow up with their families, have a good education, be healthy and be proud of who they are.

Madam Speaker, in support of this message and promoting the rights of indigenous children and all children, I am pleased to table the written message from the Boys & Girls Club of Thompson Have a Heart initiative.

### **COVID-19 Preparation**

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Madam Speaker, in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic.

First, it's clear that we can make improvements within our Legislative Building to ensure the safety of all who work here, should the pandemic continue as expected. I look forward to working together with the Speaker and the government and the opposition House leaders in this effort.

Second, on personal-care homes, 17 days ago Manitoba Liberals raised concerns about the need to protect residents of personal-care homes, as they are particularly vulnerable; 15 days ago I followed up to ask the minister about this in question period. In the days since, COVID-19 has spread inside the Lynn Valley Care Centre in North Vancouver, with the majority of deaths to date in Canada in residents of this home.

I thank our public health officials for moving two days ago to immediately suspend visits to seniors' homes. I also thank Connie Newman for emphasizing the importance for people to stay in touch, and I thank

those homes which are helping residents connect through FaceTime.

I now ask the minister and public health officials to examine one issue more closely. At a number of personal-care homes, a close family member, a close friend or a private nurse have been very important to the ongoing care of a resident, often spending hours a day in this effort. This direct involvement in care has been very positive, as the situation in some homes has staff stretched thinly.

I suggest the minister take a look at this and see whether such caregivers could be exempted from the restriction of visitors to a personal-care-home resident, provided they are properly screened. There may have to be extra care when a private nurse is visiting more than one resident or visiting more than one personal-care home.

I thank the minister and public health officials for their attention to this.

\* (14:30)

### **Acknowledging Community Response During COVID-19**

**Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere):** Madam Speaker, in these uncertain times, the COVID-19 virus has brought with it a sense of unease, and so it falls to us to offer compassion, calm reassurance and practical help as we seek to bring stability, care and hope to those affected.

We should thank health-care workers in our clinics, hospitals and care facilities for their care for our families and communities. We should express gratitude to school staff for delivering classes and assignments with an Internet connection instead of a classroom.

We should support grocers and shop owners who offer early morning shopping hours for seniors so they can shop in a cleaner and less crowded store, and we should applaud those taking extra measures to sanitize workplaces and public 'space'—public places; and we should join the growing numbers of ride-givers, meal-makers, snow shovellers, babysitters and friendly Manitobans lending a helping hand in appropriate ways.

We can call the elderly, those living alone or grieving, to say hello and see how they're doing. A food bank in my community is taking the extra time and effort to box up food to offer drive-through food bank services for dozens and dozens of families.

These are some of the ways we can come together, even as we are required to stay apart.

There are more sharers than hoarders, more helpers than complainers and more burden-lifters doing their part. Social distancing need not become total isolation. We hope—with hope in our hearts, let us do what we can to flatten the curve and continue to serve.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

## ORAL QUESTIONS

### COVID-19 Pandemic Health-Care Funding

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Madam Speaker, this morning when my wife left the house to go work in one of our public clinics, I told her, go save the world; and it's with that same respect and admiration that I want to give a huge thank-you to all of the first responders, the paramedics, the physicians, the nurses, the health-care aides who are going to be on the front lines of this battle against COVID-19.

I also want to thank the many others who provide essential services in transportation, operating our grocery stores and ensuring that we are going to be able to live through this uncertainty. All these people are stepping up to have our backs, and it's very important that we collectively in the government have their backs as well.

Can the Premier commit today that he will fund health care not only by the level of population growth and inflation, but also by whatever is needed to get Manitoba through the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier):** Our top priority is the health and well-being of all Manitobans, and we do especially appreciate the diligent work of our front-line health-care workers and others throughout our system.

We put our priorities on display; we'll continue to. The opposition has put theirs on display. I hope they don't continue to.

Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a supplementary question.

### Health-Care System Nursing Vacancies

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Madam Speaker, I began by including a

thank-you to all the nurses, and we know that we are asking much of them now, after they have already been bearing quite a burden in the form of mandatory overtime and the impact of the cutbacks that this Premier and his government have implemented in our health-care system.

We know that there are high vacancy rates across many indispensable areas: 30 per cent vacancy for respiratory therapists at Health Sciences Centre; 28 per cent for ER nurses at St. Boniface; 27 per cent for critical-care nurses across the Winnipeg health region; and, of course, there was the cut to nursing programs.

We know that as we turn to our health-care system to lead us through these trying times, that some of those vacancies will cause strain.

Will the Premier be clear? Will he commit to hiring and training more nurses to fill all of those spots?

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable leader of the—honourable government—sorry.

The honourable First Minister.

**Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier):** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We inherited the worst health-care system in the country from the NDP government. We're committed to fixing it up.

Real compassion isn't delays, it's acting on good advice. That's exactly what we're going to keep doing over here.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary.

### Number of ICU Beds

**Mr. Kinew:** Around the world people are taking stock of their health-care systems and specifically asking whether they have enough ICU beds. This Premier oversaw a cut to the ICU bed capacity in our province.

In 2017, in Winnipeg alone, there were 73 ICU beds. Following the closure that this government implemented of emergency rooms, today we heard from the Winnipeg health region that there are only 55 beds in operation. That means that we have lost 18 ICU beds over the past few years. That does not look like a good idea given the current situation that we are in. Fewer beds, fewer nurses—we need to reverse that trend.

Will the Premier reverse those cuts to our health-care system and restore as many ICU beds as possible, as quickly as possible?

**Mr. Pallister:** Actually, over the last number of days the NDP opposition has run away from their responsibilities. The only refreshing advantage of that, for the people of Manitoba, was the absence of false assertions such as those contained in the member's preamble. Madam Speaker, he is wrong.

We are focused on the well-being of Manitobans, on protecting Manitobans. That is what we are focused on.

The conduct of the NDP over the last number of days leaves the question in Manitobans' minds: What are they focused on?

### COVID-19 Pandemic Stock of N95 Respirators

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** Madam Speaker, last week the minister said that surgical masks are sufficient to protect our front-line workers who are engaged in routine interactions with those sick with COVID-19. But our understanding of this virus is changing daily, and we believe, along with the Canadian Federation of Nurses, that we should take a precautionary approach.

Will the minister follow this advice by taking a precautionary approach? Will he greatly increase the levels of protection for our front-line workers, including greatly increasing access to nine-sorry-N95 respirators?

**Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier):** This government has taken the lead in protective equipment purchasing, and we have actually moved forward on the protection of our front-line workers thanks to the diligent work of our Health Minister who deserves a commendation.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Union Station, on a supplementary question.

### Equipment for Health Workers

**MLA Asagwara:** The toll this virus takes on health-care workers around the world concerns me greatly. We see this from the experience of other jurisdictions. Doctors in the hardest hit regions of Italy are reporting to media that the front-line professionals, as much as 30 per cent of them, have contracted the virus. We need to do better.

What steps will the Health Minister take that are available to him to ensure that every front-line worker

has access to the personal protective equipment they need to do their jobs safely?

**Mr. Pallister:** In the past important seven days in the emergence of this COVID virus, Madam Speaker, the ND-'pid'-put on display that their first concern wasn't front-line workers; it was them, just them.

Madam Speaker, the member says we need to do better. She's talking to her caucus colleagues when she says that. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order, order.

**Mr. Pallister:** I want to apologize to the member for using she. I meant the member, and I apologize.

**Madam Speaker:** And we thank the First Minister for that.

The honourable member for Union Station, on a final supplementary.

### International Student Health Coverage

**MLA Asagwara:** Thank you for the apology.

Madam Speaker, I am concerned for other people in our community who do not have access to proper health care. There are over 18,000 international students who under this government lost their health-care coverage. Before the COVID-19 pandemic I heard from several international students who faced heart-wrenching health choices. They did not have necessary medical coverage to protect themselves. Now, many of them are worried they may not have health-care coverage if they get sick.

I ask the minister: Will they cover health-care costs for international students during the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic?

\* (14:40)

**Mr. Pallister:** Madam Speaker, the opposition continues to do its best to foment fear. It refused over the past number of days to even debate bills because it decided it was afraid to see those bills.

Luckily, today we were able to reverse that course of action and now the member can start to confront her own—the member can start to confront the member's own fears and those of her colleagues, and now they can debate facts rather than fear mongering.

### COVID-19 Pandemic Financial Relief

**Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital):** Madam Speaker, it's clear that COVID-19 is going to cause real damage to the financial well-being of Manitobans. We need to



take action, we know this, to get through this difficult time together.

The federal government—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Moses:** —has already announced stop-gap programs on EI, but there are still some who may not have access to that financial relief.

Is the minister prepared to work with the federal government to ensure every Manitoban worker has direct and immediate access to compensation—money in hand—for lost wages, salaries or jobs during this time of crisis?

**Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier):** I appreciate the member referring to—using the phrase in his preamble, take actions. The actions of the NDP over the last number of days speak clearly to their inability to understand the real priorities of Manitobans.

That is why we have put, in the last year and this coming year, a billion additional dollars on the kitchen tables of working Manitoba families, seniors and small businesses.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for St. Vital, on a supplementary question.

**Mr. Moses:** We are also concerned with the damages done to small-business owners because of COVID-19. Thousands of businesses and tens of thousands of Manitobans who are employed at those businesses are at—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Moses:** —financial risk because of the shutdown and the slowdown in our economy.

We need additional programs to help small businesses weather this storm.

Will the Pallister government—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Moses:** —and the minister commit to offering immediate financial support for small businesses, including no-interest loans during this time of crisis?

**Mr. Pallister:** The members' had so little concern for Manitoba's small businesses, working families, people needing goods and services, that they supported blockades of our major railroads.

Their actions speak loudly to their lack of concern—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Pallister:** —to their lack of concern for small businesses in our province, while we stand up on this side for small businesses, including our ministers who support lower taxes, such as our Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding).

His deeds speak—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Pallister:** His deeds speak credibly to his priorities.

The members' actions speak clearly to their lack of priorities.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for St. Vital, on a final supplementary.

**Mr. Moses:** Madam Speaker, it's clear we need an exceptional response to this crisis. We're not—we don't have it yet. We simply don't have it yet.

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Moses:** Workers need help during this time, as people are feeling very insecure.

The federal government has offered grace periods on repayment—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Moses:** —of loans for students, then—they will not charge them any interest. But recent grads and workers should not have to worry about paying back those loans this time.

Will the minister commit to delaying the repayment of all student loans in Manitoba for at least six months?

**Mr. Pallister:** Sadly, the NDP's compassion for working families, students, seniors and so on, Madam Speaker, was never in evidence when they were in government. They raised taxes 15 times in 14 years, including the PST which they promised they would not.

Their actions speak louder than words. Of course, the words were absent in the past week; just the actions were on display.

### COVID-19 Pandemic Waiving of Child-Care Fees

**Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson):** Madam Speaker, the coming closures of daycares is a necessary step to help reduce the spread of COVID-19, but there remains many unanswered questions. No clear

direction has been provided to daycare centres on—  
[interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Adams:** —whether parent fees—[interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Adams:** —should still be—[interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Adams:** —charged or how workers will be paid.

This is an issue that impacts every parent, and if parents are off work not earning wages, then we shouldn't be adding to the burden of paying for child care. It's important for government to step up.

Will the minister cover the cost of parent fees so parents don't have to pay for child care while centres are closed and work—so workers can be paid?

**Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier):** Well, the member's right. There are a lot of unanswered questions, and that's partly because the members opposite refused to ask any questions.

While they weren't asking them, we were answering them in partnership with people who care, who really care about child care for Manitoba's children. [interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

The honourable member for Thompson, on a supplementary question.

#### Home-Based Daycares

**Ms. Adams:** While many home-based daycares have less children, many young children are unable to maintain social distancing and care providers cannot maintain social distancing while providing for their needs. The safety and well-being of early childhood educators must be prioritized. We know other jurisdictions in Canada are suspending all child-care services with the exception of some essential service providers.

Will the minister commit to suspending home-based daycares, ensuring all early childhood educators are able to be—work as [interjection]—be—as possible? [interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Pallister:** Madam Speaker, the ideological blindness of the previous government resulted in an unavailability of child care for Manitobans, who could care less about ideology. They care, like our Minister

of Families (Mrs. Stefanson) does, that families get the child care they deserve for their children.

I thank the Minister of Families for her diligent work on behalf of the families of this province.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Thompson, on a final supplementary.

#### Child Care for Essential Service Workers

**Ms. Adams:** Madam Speaker, it is important to all essential service workers to have access to child care, but the government has not been clear on how—  
[interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Adams:** —they plan to ensure this will occur.

Health-care workers,—[interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Adams:** —other essential workers, child-care facilities and ECEs are wondering what facilities will be open and running, and whether they will operate 24 hours and whether opportunities exist for ECEs from closed facilities to work there.

So I ask the minister to clarify: Who is considered essential service workers? What facilities will be open? What child care for health-care workers and other essential services will be charged—free of charge?

**Mr. Pallister:** I understand the member has a multitude of questions she wasn't able to ask because of the decisions of her House leader and the advocacy of silence that prevailed over there for the last week, but I assure the member that we understand the priorities of Manitobans.

We're standing up for them while the NDP stand up for something else. [interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

#### COVID-19 Pandemic Paid Sick Leave Protection

**Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon):** COVID-19 is impacting all parts of our society. Many workers face job losses and financial insecurity. We are especially concerned for workers who have no sick leave protection at all.

As a society, we're asking them to stay home if they're sick. But in some workplaces if they don't work they don't get paid, and there are workplaces where a worker's job is not protected at all. If they

have to be off work, they may lose their job. It is an impossible choice. We need to protect workers, and when we do, that helps all of us.

Will the provincial government immediately move to implement at least 14 days of paid, job-protected leave for all workers in this province?

**Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier):** Today the member claims he's interested in protecting workers who he ignored for the past week while he was part of a blockade that involved filing 28 frivolous points of privilege that abused the privileges of members of this House. He should be ashamed of himself and apologize to workers right across the province.

\* (14:50)

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a supplementary question.

#### **Sick Note Requirement Ban**

**Mr. Lindsey:** There are many ways to protect workers in this province and so far the government has done none of them.

Madam Speaker, particularly at this point in time, we think all Manitobans should have guaranteed job-protected leave from work. It's the right thing to do during this crisis. Unfortunately, there are still employers out there who demand sick notes when a worker's off sick. That is contrary to the recommendations of the public health officer and contrary to just plain common sense—short supply over there, I suspect.

We need to do everything we can to encourage those who are ill to stay home, to practise social distancing and to keep us all safe.

During this crisis, will the Pallister government ban all—

**Madam Speaker:** The member's time has expired.

**Mr. Pallister:** Last week the NDP opposition put on display that they actually believe this Legislative Assembly that we work in belongs to them.

We don't believe that over here. We believe very strongly and sincerely that it belongs to the working families and the people across this great province. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a final supplementary.

#### **Right to Refuse Work**

**Mr. Lindsey:** We're getting reports from workers whose employers are not taking the necessary steps to protect those workers. Workers are forced to work directly with those who may be sick, and the employer has taken no social distancing precautions whatsoever. Madam Speaker, this has to be stopped. Workers need to be able to protect themselves without fear that they will lose their jobs for doing so.

Will the Pallister government make a clear commitment that the right to refuse unsafe work includes the right for workers to protect themselves against the risk of contracting—contracting COVID-19?

**Mr. Pallister:** Day after day after day, the NDP opposition had the opportunity to stand up and speak on behalf and ask questions which would have been answered by all members on this side of the House, questions that matter to people in Manitoba. They refused to do so. They put their own personal interests ahead of the interests of the people of Manitoba, something this government will not do.

Madam Speaker, we will continue to stand up for the best interests of workers, working families in this province. That is not going to stop.

#### **COVID-19 Pandemic Foreclosure/Eviction Freeze**

**Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas):** Many Manitobans live paycheque to paycheque and account for every dollar they have. Financial relief will likely be delayed for those forced to go on EI or those who don't even a—qualify, leading to weeks without any income. Many Manitobans are fearing for what is to come next, and what will that mean in terms of putting a roof over their heads and food on their tables?

Ontario has announced, Madam Speaker, that no eviction orders will be issued as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now more than ever it's important that Manitobans stay in their home.

So I ask the minister and the Premier today: Will they make sure that Manitobans keep their homes and put a freeze on evictions and foreclosures?

**Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier):** The member had a choice to make a few days ago. She could have stood up to her House leader and said let's stand in our place and ask questions that matter to the people of Manitoba, like the one she just asked, Madam Speaker, and I respect the member asking that question.

But I have to ask her to explain why she didn't ask it a week ago when we started dealing with the issue, and we will continue to deal with all these issues.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Point Douglas, on a supplementary question.

### Homeless Shelter Help

**Mrs. Smith:** I'll take that as a no.

Vulnerable Manitobans are highly at risk during this—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mrs. Smith:** —public health emergency, yet this government has not put any parameters in place to protect them. Many shelters in our province are doing their best to make sure that people are fed and have a warm roof over their head, maintaining social distancing by spacing out beds and limiting the number of people entering their building. But this can be difficult as spaces can be limited at the best of times, and 53 people have been—had to—been turned away from entering those sites.

How does this minister plan on assisting shelters in keeping our most vulnerable populations safe?

**Mr. Pallister:** Now, this comes from the political opposition who, when government, led us to the highest child poverty rates in the country of Canada and failed to table any plan to address those concerns.

The member speaks of an emergency. If it was an emergency—and we agree on this side that it should be faced as one—then why was the member not rising in her place to ask these kinds of questions over the past week, while this team of people was addressing these social concerns head on?

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Point Douglas, on a final supplementary.

### Food Bank Aid

**Mrs. Smith:** We've seen no plan from this government to address the vulnerable Manitobans in this province.

Manitobans of all backgrounds—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Order.

**Mrs. Smith:** —from all neighbourhoods and all walks of life rely on our food banks every day. COVID-19 has had a—has led to donation shortages at food banks, and the suspension of classes have forced access for children to nutritious food through these programs in their schools. Many of these schools rely—

or many of these people who rely on food banks will also be the ones most impacted by job loss as a result of COVID-19. The need for food banks will likely only increase during this difficult time.

So I'll ask the Premier: What is he doing to provide immediate aid to Manitoba's food banks today and to ensure that no Manitoban—

**Madam Speaker:** The member's time has expired.

**Mr. Pallister:** Day late and a bucket short, Madam Speaker.

We've been addressing these issues. We'll keep on doing that by working—outreaching and working co-operatively with agencies all across the province who deliver these important services, as opposed to the members opposite, who sat on their hands, twiddled their thumbs and listened to each other fake a point of privilege day after day after day, revealing that they're not with these people in Manitoba. They're just with themselves.

### COVID-19 Pandemic Update to Budget

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** Madam Speaker—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Lamont:** —the first priority we all share is to ensure that Manitobans are safe and healthy in this pandemic. Almost every other province has declared a state of emergency and most are reworking their budgets as we speak. I table the actions of other provinces to date.

Unless the budget in Manitoba has changed in the last week, it is almost certainly obsolete.

How long will Manitobans have to wait for this government to introduce an economic update, as many other provinces have, with new health funding dedicated to protecting vulnerable populations, front-line workers, seniors in care homes and more?

**Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier):** Madam Speaker, it seems, in the past week, that the top priority of the member for St. Boniface is changing the Liberal leadership review rules so two thirds of people have to oppose his leadership in order for him to be replaced.

The fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, that we're addressing the issues that have arisen as a consequence of COVID-19—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Order.

**Mr. Pallister:** –not from a reactive standpoint, but from a proactive standpoint. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

The honourable member for St. Boniface, on a supplementary question.

### Income Support Program

**Mr. Lamont:** Madam Speaker, I–The Canadian Press has retracted that story, as it was inaccurate.

Madam Speaker, we all know the public health measures being introduced to fight COVID-19 are necessary. We also know that economic disruptions are going–*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Lamont:** –to be colossal. Across Canada, businesses are shutting down and laying off employees. So long as pandemic measures are in place, some people will not be able to work. Some businesses will not be able to operate. They will be–*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Lamont:** –unable to pay their bills in a matter of weeks, if not days.

When businesses have no revenue and people have no income, a tax cut is a percentage of zero.

Will this government consider providing support to workers, acting as a buyer of last resort for businesses and working with the federal government to introduce Mincome or a job guarantee to ensure Manitobans can pay the bills?

**Mr. Pallister:** Madam Speaker, the member opposite and his party have been advocating for tax hikes ever since the member became leader. Now he's an expert on tax cuts. I don't think it's going to work. The fact is we're putting more money on the kitchen tables of Manitobans and the Liberal Party, or what remains of it, is opposed to that.

\* (15:00)

So, Madam Speaker, I think the keyword here is resiliency. Manitobans are more resilient because we're leaving more money they worked so hard to get with them to help them strengthen their financial priorities and goals. We're doing other initiatives as well.

But, Madam Speaker, the member seems to believe that simply one size fits all and that if we just

raised the taxes on these very people, they'll become healthier and happier. He is wrong.

### COVID-19 Pandemic Income Support Program

**Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** Today alone I have received questions from my constituents about private daycares remaining open, the safety of home-care workers, seniors who are interested in withdrawing their pensions, concerns about applying for EI and the need for more COVID-19 testing to those who haven't travelled. Madam Speaker, Manitobans are understandably concerned as many employees do not have job security.

I know my awesome team of staff will continue to work hard from home, and I am asking if this government will be a model employer and implement income support for all businesses in Manitoba, including Crown corporations.

**Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier):** The member's posed a number of questions. I understand she wasn't able to over the last number of days, Madam Speaker. We'd be happy to provide her with the information she seeks.

But I want to assure the member that our team–our leadership team, both elected, non-elected in the bureaucracy, is working in tandem with one another. Our incident-response teams are meeting regularly and we are endeavouring to communicate with the public in an open and honest way so that people have the information they need to feel more confident and secure as we all face an uncertain time. As opposed to the members opposite, who simply wanted to add to those fears, we want to comfort Manitobans with the correct information and help them to face the necessary challenges as we move forward and to reduce their fears, not magnify them.

### COVID-19 Pandemic Testing Site Locations

**Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East):** Manitoba's public health officials have been working tirelessly, ensuring that testing for COVID-19 is available to all those who need it.

Yesterday, the province's eighth dedicated testing site opened in Brandon, and there are more to come.

Can the minister please update this House on the work going on within our health system to ensure that testing is available to those who need it?

**Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living):** I thank the member for Brandon East for the question.

He is correct: we did recently open a new testing site, a community screening site in Brandon. We have also just opened up a drive-through testing site in Selkirk.

I want to reiterate, though, that these are not walk-in clinics; they are for referrals. Sites are also open in Thompson, Flin Flon and The Pas, Winnipeg, of course, in Steinbach starting tomorrow. People who are feeling unwell should consult our online screening tool and call Health Links.

These are trying times for Manitobans. Manitobans should have the confidence that their government is working to keep Manitobans safe.

### **COVID-19 Pandemic Child Food Insecurity**

**Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley):** Madam Speaker, during this crisis we need to look after one another and we need to ensure that children are being fed. Thousands of Manitoba children rely on school meal programs for at least a portion of their nutrition, including on weekends through the Breakfast2Go program. The suspension of school means that many children will be hungry and some will become malnourished.

Will the Pallister government take immediate steps to ensure food is getting to the children that need it?

**Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier):** Of course, Madam Speaker, and I want to share with members some of the initiatives that some of our colleagues have taken on.

The member for Interlake-Gimli (Mr. Johnson) is assisting in picking up and delivering groceries to seniors. The member for Selkirk (Mr. Lagimodiere), through his office is working to co-ordinate assistance with shut-ins by aligning them with volunteers who can assist with errands. The member for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson) is doing the same thing in respect of groceries and assisting in that way. The member for Southdale (Ms. Gordon)—who is a regular blood donor, I might add—is co-ordinating blood donations, and I encourage all members to assist in this respect.

There are things we can do as a government. There are things we can do as individual members as well, and I encourage all members to pursue these opportunities to be of value and assist.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Wolseley, on a supplementary question.

**Ms. Naylor:** I'm—that's heartwarming to know that members on all sides of this House are taking those individual actions, helping our communities. I've seen a lot of examples of that, and I'm happy to hear that perhaps this crisis is making this government more compassionate.

But there are too many children still facing food insecurity. The suspension of schools during this pandemic is going to make this problem worse. Since the pandemic began, food banks like Winnipeg Harvest are finding it difficult to meet the demand and they are begging publicly for support, and with schools suspended this week we're really concerned for these vulnerable children.

Will the Pallister government take immediate steps to ensure food is getting to the children that need it and to the food banks?

**Mr. Pallister:** Just simply using the word compassion does not give the attribute to a human being nor a political organization, Madam Speaker. Compassion is demonstrated through deeds and outcomes. Compassion's not demonstrated by having the longest waiting times for health services in the country of Canada or highest poverty rate or the highest ambulance fee.

Real compassion is demonstrated through deeds and actions. Over the past week we've seen how much the NDP cares about the people of Manitoba and we've seen how much this government cares about the people of Manitoba, through deeds, Madam Speaker, actual deeds, not just claims to compassion.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Wolseley, on a final supplementary.

### **School Closures**

**Ms. Naylor:** I'm sad that we can't get an answer to the question about feeding children, but my supplementary question is related to teachers and other division staff who have a lot of questions, and the minister should give them clear answers.

The chief public health officer has encouraged Manitobans to work from home and to engage in as much social distancing as possible. Suspension of classes begins on Monday, but the minister has not actually closed schools.

Will the minister give clear direction to school boards on whether both teachers and other school employees should work from home during this time?

**Mr. Pallister:** Isn't it rich for a member opposite to demand answers after a week of not asking questions, Madam Speaker?

Children and many others are stressed right now and it's important that we demonstrate leadership here. It's important that we understand that children need adults' love. They need their attention in difficult times. It's important to understand that we work with families to strengthen those bonds, not weaken them. It's important that we understand that and we remember to listen to our children—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Pallister:** —as we must listen to the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith), in spite of the irrelevance of what she has just said.

Keep to regular routines; help create new ones. The members opposite tried to create a new one, so that may be an exception. The new one they tried to create was to ignore the priorities of the people of Manitoba for a full week in the midst of an unprecedented pandemic.

While they were unfocused on the priorities of Manitobans, members on this side were focused on the priorities of Manitobans.

#### **COVID-19 Pandemic Correctional Facility Safety**

**Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns):** Before I begin I just want to personally thank the Minister of Justice for the open line of communication that we've had in the last week and a bit. I do appreciate that.

Madam Speaker, we know at any given time Manitoba correctional facilities are overcrowded, often housing Manitobans with a myriad of underlying health issues. We know at any given moment there are hundreds of Manitobans working and living together in very confined spaces, not conducive to social distancing or in the spread or prevention—in preventing the transmission of COVID-19.

Can the minister share with us today what are the plans to protect folks in correctional facilities in Manitoba?

**Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier):** We're implementing—actually implementing plans, Madam Speaker, in respect to the topic the member raised, while for the past week she's been part of organizing

a blockade here in the Legislature involving 28 frivolous points of privilege.

The fact is that the member advocated, when working for the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, for the closure of all penitentiaries in the province. That criticism was directed at the previous NDP government, Madam Speaker, and now she's part of an organization that is actually advocating against the closure of those same facilities, in respect of the one in Dauphin. I would urge the member to be consistent in her positions in respect of these things.

What we are going to do, what the Justice Minister is doing is placing the best interests of all who work in our system, all who are incarcerated, we hope coming out with different attitudes and behaviours. We're focused on doing that. I commend the Justice Minister for his actions in respect of that caring.

\* (15:10)

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for St. Johns, on a supplementary question.

**Ms. Fontaine:** We haven't heard yet one answer to any of the questions that we've asked. Only the Premier is asking, in a very cranky mood today.

But these are serious questions, Madam Speaker, and so my question is for the Minister of Justice (Mr. Cullen). In the midst of this COVID-19 pandemic, we've seen government around the world make considerable decisions—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Fontaine:** —in best interests of their folks who are incarcerated. Manitoba correctional facilities see, in a day, hundreds of Manitoba citizens who are in conflict with the law, correctional officers, families, visitors, suppliers, lawyers and health-care professionals.

My question, again, to the minister, is: How is he protecting these Manitobans?

**Mr. Pallister:** By standing up for the rule of law when the member opposite stands up against it, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for St. Johns, on a final supplementary.

#### **Winnipeg Police Service Safety**

**Ms. Fontaine:** During this time, Madam Speaker, our front-line workers will be—continue to be very critical and needed. Many police forces are taking precautionary matters to deal with COVID-19, such as

social distancing, but it can be very difficult for front-line officers.

We know that the Winnipeg Police Service has temporarily closed station duty offices to deal with this issue.

Can the minister advise whether or not he has had conversations with Chief of Police Danny Smyth and any other municipal policing agencies, and how will he protect front-line officers?

Miigwech.

**Mr. Pallister:** As opposed to members opposite, members on this side, including our Attorney General and Justice Minister (Mr. Cullen), have been steadfast in focusing on the networking that the member references in her preamble.

I would say to you, Madam Speaker, and to all members of the House, that we appreciate and understand the priorities of Manitobans, and we understand the will of Manitobans is resolute and we understand the will of Manitobans is strong.

And I would say, as a government, we are dedicated. We believe it is our duty to express that will in everything we do with every passing day, as we will defeat the challenges that are presented to us and we will keep Manitoba safe and stronger and more resilient than it has ever been before.

**Madam Speaker:** The time for oral questions has expired.

Petitions?

Grievances?

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):** Madam Speaker—I believe that the podium is being put into place. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable Government House Leader.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Madam Speaker, I am very honoured—now I'm doing the Mark thing. I got the Wasyliv virus.

Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to announce that and ask that we can move to the long-awaited, much-anticipated and eagerly, eagerly ready-to-be-accepted Budget 2020, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** It has been announced that the House will now hear the budget address this afternoon.

### BUDGET ADDRESS

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Health, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Fielding:** Madam Speaker, I'd first like to take a few minutes to discuss the threat of COVID-19.

Things have changed in the last week. Manitobans are concerned about the threat posed by COVID-19 pandemic. They want to know that they, their families and fellow Manitobans are safe. They want to know that their government is taking the necessary steps to protect them and have the resources required to accomplish these objectives.

Every member of our government understands these concerns, and that is why I'm pleased to table the document titled COVID-19 emergency supplement to the Budget 2020.

Madam Speaker, I want to assure Manitobans that we are prepared and we have a plan to protect Manitobans. As Manitobans review the document, they will see Budget 2020 is the most resilient, emergency-ready budget tabled in 150 years of this province. They will see that the rainy day fund has increased to over \$872 million, and they will see that \$100 million has been set aside for emergency expenditures. That's nearly a billion dollars of funds to fight this threat, if required, and those funds are in addition to any financial supports that will be provided by the federal government.

The government of Manitoba will ensure that all needed resources are available to ensure our province is prepared for this pandemic. Our department has ensured that there's flexibility in spending priorities to provide additional supports, should this arise.

In partnership with the federal government, we've already contributed more than \$35 million to a joint procurement process for supplies and supports for Manitobans who are fighting COVID-19. We have purchased additional ventilator machines, more renal replacement machines and personal protection equipment for all front-line health-care workers, and we'll continue to make these investments required to keep Manitobans safe from COVID-19, as protections



of Manitobans is the utmost important for our government.

Over the last week, the federal government has announced the first measures by providing assistance to Canadians. We will work to identify Manitobans who will still require specific help and ensure they receive the assistance that they need at that time.

Madam Speaker, Manitobans will also see that we have built a strong, experienced, effective team to respond to the many challenges of COVID-19. They are leading the medical response to the virus. They are ensuring that our government will continue to deliver the services that Manitobans depend on. Government is working with business community to protect our economy.

Madam Speaker, Budget 2020 reflects the lessons learned throughout the history of our province and the values we share as Manitobans. We know the importance of being prepared for emergencies here in the province. We know that we must both have flexible and agile plans to respond to this issue. We also know the value of confronting our challenges as a community, as a family, and that's what Budget 2020 does, and that is what our government will continue to do with COVID-19 until it's defeated.

\* (15:20)

Madam Speaker, four years ago our government put Manitobans on a long road to recovery. The previous government had left our province with enormous debt, fueled by an annual summary deficit approaching \$1 billion, on a trajectory towards \$2 billion by 2022. The rainy day fund had been drained. The Province had the longest health-care wait times and the worst education outcomes in Canada. Our social services were not serving Manitobans who needed them most. We led the nation in child poverty. Numerous assets on the government's books were overvalued. Many liabilities were either understated or hidden from Manitobans. A number of items listed and valued as government assets weren't government assets. In response to this mess we inherited from the NDP, Madam Speaker, our Progressive Conservative government began the hard work to fix Manitoba's finances, repair the services that Manitobans rely upon and rebuilding the economy.

Madam Speaker, we have made remarkable progress toward—to achieving each of these objectives, and we're far better off today than we were four years ago. We've reduced the deficit each year and, in fact, exceeded our deficit targets while

making record investments in health, in education and for families. We have made life more affordable for Manitobans by cutting the retail sales tax rate, by ending income tax bracket creep and by 'libining' many other fees.

Thousands of our low-income citizens no longer pay Manitoba income tax. Fewer children are living in poverty, and we've delivered better health care sooner—and, yes, Manitoba, in this budget we're replenishing the rainy day fund with an 'anitional' \$300-million contribution. Madam Speaker, this will result in a balance of \$872 million by the end of the fiscal year, at which point we'll be fully funded.

Our province will be the far stronger position to respond to unforeseen emergencies. We have made our books far more accurate and transparent through our transition to summary accounting and by accurately valuing government assets as well as liabilities.

In just four years, Manitobans have travelled a long way towards a sustainable—strong, sustainable physical foundation, but our journey to the road to recovery is far from complete, Madam Speaker. Many significant challenges remain in our path. Despite this consistent progress we have made by reducing the deficit, Manitoba continues to have the highest per capita debt amongst all provinces. For a third year in a row, interest in debt servicing costs of the provincial debt will exceed \$1 billion. Returning to a balanced budget before the end of the current term of government will be a remarkable achievement, but it still requires 82 consecutive years of balanced budgets; after that, \$100 million annual debt payments before Manitobans will be debt free. That's how deep the hole that was left by us by the former NDP government really was, and that's the hole Manitobans have been climbing out of since 2016, that we'll continue to climb out for decades to come into the future.

Budget 2020 continues the hard work by focusing on issues that matter most to Manitobans by providing better services, by protecting our environment, by making our communities stronger and safer, by making life more affordable for Manitobans, and by building a better, brighter future for Manitobans and their families, Madam Speaker. This is what Manitobans elected us and re-elected us to do, and that is what we are doing. It's a 'cobitment' we have made to Manitobans, and our government keeps its promises.

In 2016, we reduced the summary deficit by \$143 million to \$789 million, and we've made consistent progress since then. I'm pleased to report to advise Manitobans that we are on track to reduce the summary deficit for the 2019 fiscal year to \$325 million, and through a combination of measures that we'll outline in a moment, we are projecting a summary deficit of \$220 million for the coming 2020-21 year, Madam Speaker. We remain on track to table a balanced budget during the current term of our government.

Madam Speaker, after more than a decade of decay in the quality of health-care systems under the previous government, our government is transforming the health-care system so that Manitobans receive better health care when they need it, where they need it most.

After more than a decade of decline in the quality of our education system, our government is delivering new schools and a new approach to the education that will give young Manitobans the opportunity to achieve their true potential.

After more than a decade of despair for families and the need throughout our province, our government is reducing poverty and delivering the social services Manitobans need to get back on their feet.

Madam Speaker, Budget 2020 increases the funding to the department of health, seniors, active listening–living to over \$6.82 billion, \$157-million increase over last year.

And, Madam Speaker, that is the highest level in Manitoba history. That includes funding for a wide range of capital projects of total strategic infrastructure budget of \$1.8 billion.

Two of the largest projects are the Health Sciences Centre master campus plan, at an estimated total cost of \$592 million, as well as the St. Boniface redevelopment at \$88.5 million, Madam Speaker.

The implementation of the Provincial Clinical and Preventive Services Plan will invest more than \$250 million in rural and northern communities, digital health supports and infrastructure investment projects and program delivery. This plan will improve local access to health services to meet the needs of communities of areas like prevention, screening of management of chronic diseases. It will enable patients to access the care they need closer to home, Madam Speaker, and prevent more than 2,500 patient transports to Winnipeg over the next five years. And

it'll shorten wait times in Winnipeg hospitals by moving 21,000 days of care away from the city's acute-care facilities.

Budget 2020 also invests an additional \$10 million to reduce wait times for cataract and joint replacement surgeries, Madam Speaker. It will reduce surgical wait times for thousands of Manitobans.

Madam Speaker, our government also continues to make investments in renal replacement therapy in both in-centre dialysis at health centres across Manitoba, as well as home hemodialysis programs. An additional 22-station dialysis unit, supported to 132 patients, is being developed within a \$75 million Diagnostic Centre of Excellence at the Health Sciences Centre. Substantial completion of this project is expected later this year.

Our government also is working hard to address mental health and addictions in our province. And that's why Budget 2020 increases funding for mental health and addictions by \$2 million, Madam Speaker—increased by \$2 million to \$22 million under the Canada-Manitoba funding agreement.

Budget 2020 also includes an increase of \$1.9 million for acute and long-term drugs, an increase of \$3.9 million for family drug program.

As well, Madam Speaker, an additional \$188,000 in funding is allocated to the Cadham Provincial Labs to respond to provincial-wide outbreaks—so important.

Madam Speaker, a few weeks ago, our government announced \$6.6 million in—\$6.6-million increase through the K-through-12 funding for the 2020-21 school year. Budget 2020 provides operating grants totaling \$1.33 billion to the public schools divisions. It's the highest level of education funding in the province's history.

The existing funding formula ensures that no school divisions will receive less than 98 per cent of the funding it received last year after adjustments have been made for enrolment and other factors.

Budget 2020 also provides \$160 million in K-through-12 education capital projects, Madam Speaker, which includes constructions of seven new schools and several major additions and renovation projects. By the end of fiscal—by the end of the coming fiscal year, more than 4,425 classroom spaces will be open or under construction. And that's just the beginning. We have 13 new schools coming over the next 10 years under our 20-school guarantee.

Madam Speaker, our government knows that a good, healthy breakfast each morning is an important part of a child's education. We will continue to work with our community partners to provide food within our school system for students who need it most.

Last year, our government initiated an independent review of the kindergarten through grade 12 education system. A nine-member commission is carrying out the review, and its findings and recommendations are expected this spring. Budget 2020 allocates \$5 million for the implementation of the education reforms related through the K-through-12 review.

\* (15:30)

Budget 2020 also provides funding for curriculum development by \$2.4 million, Madam Speaker. This funding will support the expansion of the provincial assessment programs, modernization of the provincial curriculum framework and renewal of the K-through-12 science and health education anti-addictions curriculum.

As part of our government's five-year commitment towards implementing the teacher ideas fund, Budget 2020 allocates \$5 million for this important initiative, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, our government knows that strong families are the foundation of a strong province. That's why Budget 2020 increases cash funding to the Department of Families by \$2.1 billion—to \$2.1 billion. This is the highest level of voted cash supports for social services in Manitoba history. It includes \$21.2-million increase in funding for the community living and disability services. With an investment of \$2.7 million, Budget 2020 also supports the addition of 1,087 licensed early learning and child-care spaces. Of these spaces, 1,037 will be added through the completion of new capital projects, including new schools, along with 50 new home-based centres—spaces.

Madam Speaker, our government continues to implement the single-envelope funding model for Child and Family Services authorities and agencies. The model empowers transformational change and gives those authorities the flexibilities to allocate more funding for prevention and early-intervention initiatives. It gives agencies the ability to implement creative solutions to support families and prevent the children from coming into care or remaining in care.

Under Budget 2020, cash funding for the Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation

increases by \$10 million. Over the next five years, this—the role of MHRC will shift from housing provider to one of funder as well as regulator, with an objective making social housing more sustainable for Manitobans.

Budget 2020 also allocates \$12.7 million as part of the plan to dissolve the Manitoba Housing development and renewal fund under the special fund remediation initiative. These monies will be reinvested in order to address capital deficits in our housing stock and capital projects, which is more consistent with original intent of the fund.

Madam Speaker, our government is leading the worldwide fight to protect our environment from pollution and impacts of climate change. We're leading the way by eliminating coal-fired electricity production in our province. We're leading the way by investing billions of dollars in the production and transmission of clean, renewable hydroelectricity. And we're leading the way with our best-in-Canada Climate and Green Plan. It's a plan that will continue to make investments in renewable energy while encouraging Manitobans to reduce their energy consumption. It will assist communities in their efforts to protect our watersheds and will clean up contaminated sites, increase recycling and building new schools to the highest standards of energy-efficient and environmental design.

The dangers imposed by climate change compels us to lower greenhouse gas emissions by reducing our reliance on hydrocarbons. We know that hydro—the carbon pricing has the potential to change consumer behaviour. If implemented with proper thought as to its economic impact, it can encourage consumers to choose products and services and activities that are less harmful for the environment. The federal government's one-size-fits-all carbon tax scheme does not accomplish this objective here in Manitoba. The Ottawa plan fails to recognize its harmful impact on the high proportion of agricultural emissions and our small industrial sector. It also fails to account for our clean electric grid, which is the result of massive investments already made by Manitobans as part of our shift to carbon-free energy production.

Madam Speaker, we often speak of the imprudent overinvestment in Manitoba Hydro and the bad project management that has led to the costs of those projects to increase by close to \$10 billion. The hard reality, however, is that Manitobans will be paying these investments for decades to come into the future. Manitobans deserve respect for having the foresight to

make these investments. They deserve credit for shouldering these massive costs when no other provinces were doing as such. The federal carbon tax plan at \$50 per ton would cost each Manitoba an additional \$400 annually. In comparison, every Manitoba household owns nearly—owes nearly \$44,000 in Hydro-specific debt, with an annual interest cost of almost \$1,600 per household. In other words, Manitobans are already paying a tax for investments that reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the form of Manitoba Hydro debt payments, and that tax is almost four times as much as a \$50-per-ton, made-in-Ottawa carbon tax would be.

Madam Speaker, the math is beyond dispute: the federal government's imposition of a carbon tax on top of the Hydro debt burden is just truly unfair to Manitobans. It penalizes us for being the nation's leader in green investments.

Residents of no other province is being forced to pay such a high cost in the fight to reduce carbon emissions. Ottawa's carbon tax is a threat to Manitoba's economy. It hurts our 'competitiveness,' and, as the rate increases year after year, it will cost us jobs and private sector investment. Our government will not allow this to happen, though, Madam Speaker.

That's why we will be implementing a green levy, effective July 1 of this year. At \$25 per ton, the Manitoba green levy will be flat like a prairie horizon. It will not change each and every year. It will cost Manitoba families and businesses less, and will be more effective in reducing greenhouse gas emissions than the federal carbon tax.

Madam Speaker, our government is determined to complete the Lake Manitoba, Lake St. Martin Outlet Channel Projects as soon as possible. Budget 2020 reinforces that commitment by allocating \$101 million for that important project.

Budget 2020 also includes a one-time capital investment of \$45 million for climate resiliency types of projects. First announced in November of this year, this funding will be allocated in three portions of \$15 million for municipalities within the Capital Region, municipalities outside the Capital Region, and previously identified provincial protection priorities.

The City of Winnipeg's North End water pollution control centre is the single largest source of nutrients, including phosphorus and nitrogen, flowing into Lake Winnipeg. Upgrades to the facility will support efforts

to reduce nutrients and improve water quality for Lake Winnipeg.

Our government has advised the City of Winnipeg that we are providing an additional \$21.8 million, to be held in reserve for the North End water pollution control centre. That investment increases the total amount of provincial funding for this project to over \$56.2 million, including funding already provided.

We will continue to work with both the City as well as the federal government to ensure funding is in place for this important project, Madam Speaker. Budget 2020 also provides up to \$15.8 million in funding to support municipalities outside the City of Winnipeg in the development of safe and sustainable water and sewer facilities.

Madam Speaker, our government is committed to keeping Manitobans safe. We are working with communities and law enforcement to keep crime off our streets and out of our neighbourhoods, and that's why Budget 2020 allocates an additional \$6 million in funding to provincial police service agreements, including 27 new officers.

That's why Budget 2020 provides the additional 3.6 to address crime and gang activities throughout improved intelligence sharing and other measures, and that's why Budget 2020 also invests \$2.3 million as part of our government's Policing and Public Safety Strategy, so that Manitobans feel safe in their homes and their communities.

Budget 2020 also includes over a million dollars in funding to help police detect and deter drug-impaired driving. This will 'imprude' road safety through increased training and enforcement of new legislative offences following the legalization of non-medical cannabis.

Madam Speaker, with additional funding of \$568,000, Budget 2020 increases annual funding for First Nations policing to \$14.48 million. This investment will enhance public safety in First Nations communities, fund additional officer positions, increase officer safety, improve equipment for those officers using—carrying out their duties.

\* (15:40)

While others choose to treat thugs and thieves as victims, our concern is for the real victims of crime. That is why Budget 2020 allocates 561 for grants to support community projects to deliver services for victims of crimes in Manitoba. That includes more

funding for organizations such as the North End Women's Centre, Aurora Family Therapy Centre, Age and Opportunity, Brandon Victim Services and Family Dynamics.

In addition, funding provided through Criminal Property Forfeiture Fund for projects that directly support victims for crime will increase by \$200,000 to a \$500,000 base budget.

Madam Speaker, our government is determined gender—is determined to end gender-based violence in our province, and that's why Budget 2020 provides \$58,000 of additional funding for the Western Manitoba women's resource centre so that it can continue to do the important work on this issue.

Madam Speaker, while the previous government left Manitobans without the resources to respond to a natural disaster, our government has replenished the rainy day fund. In order to ensure that we are well-positioned to address the risk of flooding this spring, Budget 2020 increases the budget for emergency expenditures to \$100 million. There is also \$5.7 million in funding for the Department of Infrastructure to react quickly to small-scale floods and other emergency situations. We have never been prepared to deal with other—with flooding and other impacts of climate change than ever before.

Budget 2020 also allocates \$500,000 to support emergency preparedness and response related to animal health and welfare.

Our government knows that a strong, sustainable municipality makes a strong, sustainable Manitoba. That's why our government's support for municipalities continues to be the most generous of all of Canada. Budget 2020 delivers \$313 million for funding for local governments through the strategic municipal infrastructure fund. It also provides \$3.8 million in funding for a number of critical infrastructure projects in northern Manitoba, including wastewater treatment lagoons at Thicket Portage and a water treatment plant upgrade in Sherridon. This funding is in addition to the increase of \$300,000 in minor capital grants for northern communities.

Our government's strategic municipal infrastructure investment fund supports fair say for the City of Winnipeg and other local municipalities. It gives them the flexibility to carry out long-term planning, with improved transparency and predictability for both operating and capital, Madam Speaker.

Over \$3 billion will be invested in critical infrastructure across Manitoba over the next 10 years through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. The Department of Municipal Relations is working with the Manitoba strategic infrastructure secretariat and other departments to ensure that Winnipeg, Brandon and other departments to ensure local governments have access to capital funding under that program.

Madam Speaker, our government knows that a strong infrastructure network is critical to the safety of a strong Manitoba economy, and that's why Budget 2020 increases operating funding to the Department of Infrastructure by 7.2 per cent, to \$494 million. The department's capital budget is increasing to \$516.2 million, reflecting an overall increase of \$83.7 million. And the highways capital budget allocation rises to 362.5, a \$12.5-million increase from the current fiscal year.

This is the first step towards keeping our government's commitment to increasing the highway infrastructure capital budget to \$400 million over the next four years and to fully spend these dollars or carry them over to the following fiscal year. It will not go unspent, as happened far too 'often' under the previous NDP government.

Budget 2020 also includes an allocation of \$600,000 for the trucking productivity improvement program. These funds will be used to maintain highways included in on that program.

Madam Speaker, our government continues also to engage with indigenous communities towards developing a comprehensive reconciliation strategy. Budget 2020 provides \$500,000 to further advance this important objective.

In 'other'—in order to advance Treaty Land Entitlement Framework Agreement, Budget 2020 invests \$500,000 to support the resolution of outstanding, historical third-party interests that are preventing land transfers under this important agreement, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, with the costs of so many goods and services rising, Manitoba families are finding that they have less money at the end of each and every month. They are concerned about their ability to pay their bills. We understand those concerns over here, and that's why our government is working hard to lake life more affordable for Manitobans.

We promised to lower the retail sales tax rate by 1 per cent to 7 per cent during our first term of office,

and we kept that promise, Madam Speaker. During the recent election campaign, as part of our 150th anniversary in 2020, we promised to return \$2,020 to Manitoban households over the next four years. We are keeping our promises on that.

Budget 2020 delivers significant tax reductions which, combined with 2019 tax cuts, are the largest in Manitoba's history. We are delivering those savings to Manitobans while reducing the deficit at the same time.

In order to offset the impact of the green levy I referred to earlier, our government will lower the retail sales tax to 6 per cent July 1st of this year. Manitoba will be the only province that has cut its sales tax in recent years, and we've done that twice. We will have the second lowest tax rate in Canada.

The rate reduction will ensure that all who pay the green levy will benefit by lower sales tax, Madam Speaker. With approximately 510,000 households in Manitoba, the average annual savings will amount to approximately \$345 per household, but that's not all.

It's estimated that up to half the savings received by Manitoba businesses will be passed on to Manitoba households, benefiting them by an additional \$131 per year, Madam Speaker. That will result in average tax total savings for Manitoba's households of \$476 per year.

In addition to making life more affordable for Manitobans, the PST cut will increase economic output and assist in job creation. Combined with last year's PST rate reduction to 7 per cent, it is estimated that the additional reductions in the PST rate and implementation of the green levy will grow the provincial nominal GDP by over \$108 million. It will increase labour income by close to \$50 million annually, and generate an estimated 1,042 person-years of employment growth.

The basic personal amount or exemption is a non-refundable tax credit that every Manitoba resident is entitled to claim on their income tax return. Our government legislated the indexing of the BPA and personal income tax brackets to the rate of inflation beginning in 2017.

Since then, the BPA has increased from \$9,134 to \$9,838. The increase in the BPA saves Manitobans \$18.4 million income taxes in 2019, and will save them another \$16.2 million in 2020. Even more importantly, Manitoba—Madam Speaker, it removes close to 11,000 low-income Manitobans from the tax

rolls altogether. That number will increase next year as well as in 2022.

Probate fees—criticized by many as death taxes—represent double taxation on money that has already been taxed. They are ineffective social policy, victimizing Manitobans at a time when they are already experiencing the trauma of a death of a loved one. Beginning on July 1st of this year, probate fees will be eliminated here in the province of Manitoba.

\*(15:50)

Madam Speaker, the health and post-secondary education levy, commonly 'reknown'—known as the payroll tax, is a tax imposed on wages paid to employers—employees. Approximately \$510 million is paid in payroll taxes per year by approximately 3,000 employers. The payroll tax threshold has not been changed since 2008. There's another form of bracket creep. It discourages entrepreneurship and costs Manitobans jobs. It must be corrected, and that is why Budget 2020 increases the payroll threshold effective January 1st of 2021. This will benefit close to 1,000 businesses throughout the province. It will result in more jobs and more opportunities for Manitobans.

With higher taxes and fees, the previous government took more from Manitobans and delivered less. Our government is taking less but delivering more. We're leaving more money on the kitchen table, Madam Speaker. And there's more tax relief coming.

Madam Speaker, Manitobans know that a quality education is the best protection against poverty, and that's—the shortest pathway to prosperity is also a good job. Our Economic Growth Action Plan is gaining momentum and optimism in growing throughout the province. Our government is working with the private sector to create 40,000 new jobs during the current term of our government, and we are off to a great start. We continue to be amongst the leading provinces in private sector capital investment. More Manitobans have jobs than ever before and will continue to have one of the lowest unemployment rates in Canada.

Immigration to our province is at a highest level in decades, proving once again that Manitoba is the home for hope for people from all of the world who seek a better life for themselves and their families. By increasing funding for the Manitoba scholarship and bursary program by \$4.8 million, Budget 2020 gives young Manitobans the opportunity to achieve their dreams. This includes \$1.8 million for the Manitoba Bursary Program and \$3 million for the Manitoba

Scholarship and Bursary Initiative. Madam Speaker, in conjunction with a private fundraising matching formula, this will make \$30 million available for students to begin or continue their post-secondary education.

Madam Speaker, the number of Manitoba students accessing student loans is estimated to increase by 35 per cent. In response, Budget 2020 makes more than \$41 million in interest-free loans available for students to realize their post-secondary education goals and move into their chosen career paths.

Our government is also committed to a strong, sustainable economic growth through northern Manitoba, Madam Speaker. That's why Budget 2020 allocates \$500,000 towards the implementation of a mineral development protocol. And that's why the Department of Agriculture and Resource Development will be providing project-based funding of up to \$50,000 each to First Nation communities to support activities related to mineral exploration and development within their territories.

Madam Speaker, in just four years, Manitobans have made tremendous progress on the road to recovery. The road is long. However, the journey is far from complete. Many significant challenges remain in our path, but our government is up to those challenges. We are moving Manitobans forward by focusing on the issues that matter most to Manitobans. We're providing better services, we're protecting our environment, we're making our communities stronger and safer and we're making life more affordable for Manitobans. We're restoring hope, we're creating opportunities and, driven by an unshakable faith that our best days are ahead of us, we're building a better, brighter, more prosperous future for all Manitobans.

Thank you very much.

### Messages

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance):** Madam Speaker, I have two messages from Her Honour, the Lieutenant Governor, as well as the budget documents, which I'd like to table.

**Madam Speaker:** Please stand for the reading of the messages.

To the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the Lieutenant Governor transmits to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Estimates of sums required for the services of the Province for capital expenditures

and recommends these Estimates to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Estimates of sums required for the services of the Province for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2020, and recommends these Estimates to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

### BUDGET DEBATE

**Madam Speaker:** As previously agreed to by the House, the floor is now open for debate by members.

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Madam Speaker, this government had an additional week to prepare their budget in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and based on what they tabled today, it's just not enough.

Madam Speaker, this budget puts our health-care system on life support in the midst of a global pandemic. At the same time, it cuts the very programs that help our families keep their heads above water as an economic tsunami is landing on our province and in our country.

Simply put, this budget is inadequate to meet the challenges of this moment. When we look at health-care funding, Madam Speaker, and we take into account simple things like population growth and inflation, this budget actually reduces funding for health care. I don't believe that there's a single Manitoban who wants to see health care cut at this time.

We also know that with the increasing demand for testing, which is being run out of Cadham lab, that what is being proposed here in terms of funding is inadequate. There should be a dramatic increase in the level of support so that everyone in Manitoba who needs to get tested for COVID-19 can be tested. That starts with supporting Cadham lab.

At the same time that other provinces are dramatically scaling up their ability to care for those people who may be critically ill, this budget freezes funding for nurses. This budget also freezes funding for intensive-care-unit beds. We know that the COVID-19 illness does, amongst some members of the population, lead to an increased need to be hospitalized and, in many cases, unfortunately, to be placed in ICU beds.

Rather than freezing, this government should be dramatically accelerating the opening of ICU beds right across Manitoba, and that includes hiring the necessary number of nurses to staff those beds. And in a very ill-guided move, this government, in the midst of a public health crisis, is actually cutting money from the public health budget.

It makes no sense whatsoever when we are asking Manitobans to band together with perhaps one of the greatest public health asks of recent memory with this term, social distancing, having all been introduced to us in the past few weeks. That is the product of public health strategy, public health co-ordination and public health programming. If that intervention is to save lives, it will be a victory for public health, and yet that is the type of program that this government seeks to cut in their budget. That is wrong.

We know that the other major concern of Manitobans at this time, in addition to their health and well-being, has to do with financial security, and that's why it is a mistake for this government to cut programs which provide security to Manitoba families.

\* (16:00)

Specifically, this government is cutting support for child-care centres and cutting support for those families who need subsidies in order to access daycare. We know that that's wrong, Madam Speaker, but what is needed in addition to that is not only for those subsidies to remain, but also for the government to step in at this time and cover the parent fees for daycares. This would provide certainty for the parents that they'd not have to bear that cost while their children are not attending the daycare centres, and it would allow those child-care centres to remain financially viable, even as they do work to help our province meet its public health goals by following the edicts of public health experts to stay closed.

What is more, many Manitobans are concerned about their jobs. Many Manitobans are concerned about the ability to put food on the table. And that's why it is incomprehensible to see this government cutting millions of dollars out of the social safety net at this time. This has a straight \$5-million cut to Employment and Income Assistance, Madam Speaker, and with so many Manitobans living just above the poverty line, feeling so economically insecure at this moment, that is another mistake. And it is one that we cannot abide by. Now, we know that these cuts to health care and that these cuts to the social safety net do not make sense to Manitobans

during a health-care crisis and at a time of great financial instability.

But, as we are asking Manitobans to band together, I would also point out that this government fails to include everyone in their budget speech. There is no mention of queer folk in this budget. There is no—il n'y avait aucune mention de la communauté franco-manitobaine dans ce discours du budget.

**Translation**

*There was no mention of the Franco-Manitoban community in this budget speech.*

**English**

So, again, there is a need for Manitobans to band together. Yes, we know this. But this government needs to dramatically increase their capacity to respond to the current situation. What the government has brought forward today, Madam Speaker, it's just not enough, and we know that they need to do better.

Beyond seeing the coverage of parent fees while daycares remain closed, we would also propose that the government step in to top up lost wages for people who are not only on EI, but also for those who are receiving sick pay.

Furthermore, we need to see direct, quick, expedited action when it comes to ensuring paid sick leave, when it comes to tackling the issue of sick notes and, finally, in guaranteeing the health and safety provisions for all workers in the province, starting with those on the front lines of this epidemic: the front-line health-care workers.

Having thus made my feelings about this budget speech clear, Madam Speaker, I would like to move the following:

I move, seconded by the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara),

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

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

- (a) continuing to underfund health care after previous cuts and consolidations have already led to a crisis in hospitals, lack of support for nurses and other front-line workers and capacity issues in ERs and ICUs prior to and amid a pandemic; and
- (b) failing to account for the economic challenges that will face the province and



provide aid to those economically impacted as a result of the current pandemic, and

- (c) attempting to push through a legislative agenda that impacts students, schools, universities, pensioners, working people and, indeed, all Manitobans.

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

**Madam Speaker:** It has been moved—*[interjection]* Order.

It has been moved by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew), seconded by the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara),

*THAT the motion be amended by—*

**Some Honourable Members:** Dispense.

**Madam Speaker:** Dispense. *[interjection]*

**An Honourable Member:** Okay. I take it back.

**Madam Speaker:** The—I will therefore read the amendment:

*Therefore the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after "House" and substituting:*

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

- (a) continuing to underfund health care after previous cuts and consolidations have already led to a crisis in hospitals, lack of support for nurses and other front-line workers and capacity issues in ERs and ICUs prior to and amid a pandemic; and,
- (b) failing to account for the economic challenges that will face the province and provide aid to those economically impacted as a result of the current pandemic; and
- (c) attempting to push through a legislative agenda that impacts students, schools, universities, pensioners, working people and, indeed, all Manitobans.

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

The amendment is in order. The floor is open for debate.

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** Do I have—I have leave to—so I have leave to speak to the budget?

*[interjection]* I can just go. All right, thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The government has been consistently inconsistent when it comes to presenting its budgets. On the one hand, they've routinely made grandiose promises, overpromising and underdelivering, especially when it comes to budgets.

When it comes to actual responses to genuine crises in poverty, the environment, mental health, crime, the economy and now a pandemic and a potential enormous economic slowdown, they have generally been met with Band-Aids.

In the absence of any ideas or policy of their own, the PC's approach has been to hand the reins of government to consultants who are experts in accounting but not education, health care or infrastructure. There is nothing new about this approach. It is the same approach that has been failing Manitoba for decades.

It's worth saying that this government—we could have a balanced budget right now, but this government is choosing to cut and freeze and borrow, which is not fiscally prudent. The infrastructure that was announced today, much of it is not core infrastructure.

We—do we absolutely need more investment in hospitals and schools? Yes, we do. We often hear that the number that 20 schools will be built, when the reality is that it's 13, but this is not strategic infrastructure that will ultimately grow the economy.

We are not seeing the kind of investment we might need in bridges, in roads. When it comes to the CFS block funding, block funding has been a huge problem for many CFA agencies, simply because it's based on historical data.

The green plan is not focused on climate change. We've complained about it before, that in a number—it is has no targets. Most of the funding that's been announced for environmental clean-up supports the clean-up, which may be very well and good in its own—of contaminated—but the clean-up of contaminated sites, which in and of itself is a fine thing but it doesn't actually do anything to reduce the impact of climate change.

The claims that the new green levy which is going to be brought in is going to be more effective than the federal green levy is based on the first two years of data alone. It's simply not the case that it will be more effective because the calculation is based on the

Province bringing in a flat \$25 tax when the federal government is only charging \$10.

So the idea that this green plan or that—well, the—their—the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and the Finance Minister's new-found love for carbon taxes is somehow going to be better than the federal government is—or having more impact is simply not the case.

We heard that—again, that there are going to be cuts to Education, that there will—the guarantee that people will get at least 98 per cent of their funding is a cut. We know that there are going to be cuts to post-secondary education. The idea that we're just going to—that it's a positive thing that we're going to be forcing young people and students to take on millions and millions of dollars of more debt is being trumpeted as a positive thing when it's not.

This is a terrible thing when there's a huge number of students and young people who are already going bankrupt: one in six people under the age of 30 who go through—one in six bankruptcies in Canada are people under the age of 35 who are struggling with student loan debt.

As to the specifics of the budget, it is also wildly optimistic, especially considering we are looking at massive shutdowns in terms of pandemics: businesses shutting down, people unable to work, businesses not able to pay taxes, people unable to pay taxes.

\* (16:10)

The GDP growth estimate of 1.3 per cent is incredibly weak but also incredibly optimistic when in countries that have enacted serious pandemic measures have seen huge drops in GDP, well over the worst-case scenario that's listed in this budget. The idea that we're going to have a revenue increase of \$712 million is unlikely. The income tax revenue is likely too high. The fact that Manitoba's Hydro income is pinned at \$47 million, which is a razor-thin profit margin on a company of its size, is also likely too high. Hydro is also going to be affected by impacts in the general energy market. Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries estimates of revenue is likely too high because casinos are now closed. There's no indication of how this government will address the COVID-19 pandemic and whether any investments will be made to address pressing and critical needs in the health—especially with shortfalls to respiratory therapists in critical care, ICU nurses, and the entire issue of economic issues in relationships to workers and businesses has completely been avoided.

This is—we've said many times that this government needs to go back to the drawing table and come up with an economic update. And that stands, because this government—this budget is still obsolete, because basically the world has changed in the last week and we are staring a recession in the face that this government seems to be completely unprepared to deal with. And the idea that people are just going to have to muddle through or go on their own is going to be disastrous.

I don't want to be an alarmist and I don't want to fear monger, but the fact is, is that there are very—I will say—but there are some very serious people who are talking about—including Wall Street investors and others, who are talking about this having a catastrophic effect because this is not simply the—COVID-19 is not simply the impact of a pandemic, but that we are seeing a meltdown. There's a broader debt crisis around the world, which is—and in addition to that, a drop in the price of oil, which is going to have enormous impacts across Canada.

I would like to have heard that there was more cooperation with the federal government on this issue because the federal government has made a number of statements about what they're going to do to help people out who are unable to pay their taxes, who are unable to pay their mortgages. But we are not seeing that. It is not enough for this government to just say, well, we're going to keep taking money from the federal government and we're going to use it to lower taxes or we're going to use it to bail out—to increase the size of the rainy day fund, when, this is a rainy day. In Estimates last year, I asked the Premier what—to define what a rainy day was. He was unable to say what it was. But this is a rainy day, not just for this government but for all Manitobans who are facing a very serious crisis.

We're not seeing the kind of investments we need to see in health care and guaranteeing that the specific investments will be made. And the idea that the economy is strong, again, ignores the fact that—and this is something the Premier himself has said, has acknowledged that Meyers Norris Penny does routine—routine surveys show that show that 50 per cent of Canadians and about 56 per cent of Manitobans are on the verge of insolvency, which means that if they miss \$200 a month they will be bankrupt, that they could either be—they could be evicted, they could default on their mortgage, they could end up being followed by a collection agent. We are in the midst of a debt crisis, and I think that's

something that is not being adequately dealt with or recognized by this very rosy budget.

There's a—and there's a deeper issue here simply because, again, budgets ultimately are supposed to be about revenue and about expenditure, but this is also a government which is focused—it tends to focus only on one side of the balance sheet. When we talk about the fact that we have record numbers of people coming to Manitoba, we also have record numbers of people leaving Manitoba. We have larger numbers of people who are joining the very—the 1 per cent in Manitoba, but we also have record numbers of people on EIA.

And just last week Statistics Canada showed that insolvencies are up in January in every single province in Canada, and that—including in Manitoba—that they're the highest level since 2010. This is a very serious warning sign because we are already looking at a situation where record numbers of Manitobans are going broke. And this was in January. This was before the oil crisis, this is before COVID-19, this is before the shock. I don't think that this government is adequately prepared to address the very serious issues that are—there—that are being faced. I hope that they will take the opportunity to listen, because I think there are actually ideas on all sides of this House.

But the fact is, is that this—many people have talked about this being an unprecedented situation. It is not just—it is unprecedented, perhaps, in our lifetimes or in our memory, but there are times in the past where we've had to deal with pandemics; there are times in the past where we've had to deal with extremely serious global economic downturns. And the way out of it was not done by continually dismantling public services, by selling off and liquidating public assets or by leaving people on their own and cutting out social safety nets.

My major concern is that we are looking, that there are people who've talked about it not just being a very—a major recession, but also that—perhaps something longer, in which case, we actually need all—there will be even greater strains on the safety nets that have been undermined and taken apart by this government. And that's at a time, again, when we have record inequality and the Province seems to be depending more on—for new revenue—on the federal government than on anything else.

So, again, there are a number of things that we asked for, that we called for and this—that have not appeared in this budget. We specifically asked that there could be funding for insulin pumps for type 1—

people with type 1 diabetes and diabetes supplies. I see the government is spending lots of money on kidney dialysis, which is usually a result of diabetes. So we're seeing investments in crisis; we're seeing investments in the final stage of something, instead of—and being reactive instead of being proactive and preventive.

And, honestly, if the PCs were being serious with their concerns about Manitoba's finances, they would not be offering yet another—offering a revenue cut at a time of a global pandemic while still trying to have balanced the budget.

That being said, Madam Speaker, I would like to second—sorry, I will move our subamendments to the budget.

I move, seconded by the member for Tyndall Park (Ms. Lamoureux),

THAT the budget amendment be—the amendment be amended after clause (c) the following clauses:

- (d) failing to adequately ensure we are completely ready to address health issues around the COVID-19 pandemic including the provision of adequate respirators, respiratory technologists and critical-care—ICU—nurses for a severe epidemic; and
- (e) failing to pass along federal funding increases in Manitoba into crucial services, infrastructure, and climate projects for Manitobans; and
- (f) failing to support Manitoba's economic health by falsely inflating the Province's deficit, budgeting increased amounts in departments for which there is no intention of spending the increases; and
- (g) failing to introduce a carbon credit to incentivize or reward individuals, municipalities and others to take climate action into their own hands through programs such as the solar energy program; and
- (h) failing to protect the public universal health-care system by completely stalling provincial increases to health funding and solely relying on federal increases to fund health-care cost increases; and
- (i) failing to trim from the top by increasing executive support for ministers by more than 4 per cent; and

- (j) failing to ensure mining operations in Manitoba stay viable and threatening the economic viability of northern communities by delaying mining permits; and
  - (k) failing to support Manitoba's incredible arts and cultural communities by allowing cultural infrastructure to crumble and freezing or decreasing funding to arts and cultural organizations; and
  - (l) failing to remove the head tax to applications for the Provincial Nominee Program; and
  - (m) failing to ensure all communities, especially in northern and rural Manitoba, have access to high-speed Internet and cellphone coverage within three years; and
  - (n) failing to respond to the call from municipalities to have a cost-sharing model for the revenue from cannabis sales; and
  - (o) failing to provide adequate funding for drug stabilization units, transitional housing and a 24-7 virtual clinic to assist individuals with substance use disorders to get referrals; and
  - (p) failing to ensure that the upgrades to the North End Sewage Treatment Plant have been completed under previously set timelines; and
  - (q) failing to adequately address human exposure to lead in Manitoba and its resulting impact on the health of children and adults; and
  - (r) failing to address radon contamination as a cause of lung cancer in Manitoba homes; and
  - (s) failing to include basic income, a job guarantee and temporary income supplements for people who are not working through no fault of their own.
- technologists and critical-care ICU nurses for a severe epidemic; and
  - (e) failing to pass along federal funding increases in Manitoba into crucial services, infrastructure and climate projects for Manitobans; and
  - (f) failing to support Manitoba's economic health by falsely inflating the Province's deficit, budgeting increased amounts in departments for which there is no intention of spending the increases; and
  - (g) failing to introduce carbon credit to incentivize or reward individuals, municipalities and other to take climate action into their own hands through programs such as the solar energy program; and
  - (h) failing to protect the public universal health-care system by completely stalling provincial increases to Health funding and solely relying on federal increases to fund health-care cost increases; and
  - (i) failing to trim from the top by increasing executive support for ministers by more than 4 per cent; and
  - (j) failing to ensure mining operations in Manitoba stay viable and threatening the economic viability of northern communities by delaying mining permits; and
  - (k) failing to support Manitoba's incredible arts and cultural communities by allowing cultural infrastructure to crumble and freezing or decreasing funding to arts and cultural organizations; and
  - (l) failing to remove the head tax to applications for the Provincial Nominee Program; and
  - (m) failing to ensure all communities, especially in northern and rural Manitoba, have access to high-speed Internet and cellphone coverage within three years; and
  - (n) failing to respond to the call from municipalities to have a cost-sharing model for the revenue from cannabis sales; and
  - (o) failing to provide adequate funding for drug stabilization units, transitional housing and a 24-7 virtual clinic to assist individuals with substance use disorders get referrals; and

\* (16:20)

**Madam Speaker:** It has been moved by the honourable member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont), seconded by the honourable member for Tyndall Park (Ms. Lamoureux),

*THAT the amendment be amended by adding after clause (c) the following clauses:*

- (d) failing to adequately ensure we are complete ready to address health issues around the COVID-19 pandemic, including the provision of adequate respirators, respiratory

- (p) failing to ensure that the upgrades to the North End Sewage Treatment Plant have been completed under previously set timelines; and
- (q) failing to adequately address human exposure to lead in Manitoba and its resulting impact on the health of children and adults; and
- (r) failing to address radon contamination as a cause of lung cancer in Manitoba homes; and
- (s) failing to include basic income, job guarantee and temporary income supplements for people who are not working through no fault of their own.

The amendment is—the subamendment is in order. The floor is open for debate.

**Some Honourable Members:** Question.

**Madam Speaker:** Is the House ready for the question, then?

**An Honourable Member:** Question.

**Madam Speaker:** The question before the House is the proposed subamendment of the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew)—sorry.

Therefore the question before the House is the proposed subamendment of the honourable leader of the member for—the honourable member for St. Boniface Hospital—*[interjection]*—what did I do? *[interjection]* Oh, I did. Too much pandemic on my mind.

The question before the House is the proposed subamendment of the member—the honourable member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont).

Do members wish to have the subamendment read?

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Madam Speaker:** Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the subamendment?

**Some Honourable Members:** Yes.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Madam Speaker:** I heard a no.

**Voice Vote**

**Madam Speaker:** All those in favour of the subamendment, please say yea.

**Some Honourable Members:** Yea.

**Madam Speaker:** All those opposed, please say nay.

**Some Honourable Members:** Nay.

**Madam Speaker:** In my opinion, the Nays have it.

I declare the subamendment lost.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** On a recorded vote, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Does the member have support of three other members for a recorded vote?

There is no support for a recorded vote.

The subamendment is defeated.

\* \* \*

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

Do members wish to have the amendment read?

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Madam Speaker:** No.

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

**Some Honourable Members:** Agreed.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Madam Speaker:** I hear a no.

**Voice Vote**

**Madam Speaker:** All those in favour of the amendment, please say yea.

**Some Honourable Members:** Yea.

**Madam Speaker:** All those opposed, please say nay.

**Some Honourable Members:** Nay.

**Madam Speaker:** In my opinion, the Nays have it.

I declare the amendment lost.

**Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader):** On division.

**Madam Speaker:** On division. It is defeated on division.

\* \* \*

**Madam Speaker:** I would like to just ask everybody at this time as the House is adjourning for an indefinite

period today I would encourage all honourable members to remove the contents of their desks now. I would further encourage members to recycle as much of the material as possible. The blue bins here in the Chamber are designated for recycling of Hansard only. Any other material you would like to recycle may be placed in the larger recycling containers in the message room located just outside the Chamber.

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

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

**Some Honourable Members:** Agreed.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Madam Speaker:** I heard a no.

#### Voice Vote

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

**Some Honourable Members:** Yea.

**Madam Speaker:** All those opposed, please say nay.

**Some Honourable Members:** Nay.

**Madam Speaker:** In my opinion, the Yeas have it.

#### Recorded Vote

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):** Recorded vote, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** A recorded vote having been called, call in the members.

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

#### Division

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

#### Yeas

*Clarke, Cox, Eichler, Fielding, Friesen, Goertzen, Gordon, Guenter, Guillemard, Helwer, Isleifson, Johnson, Johnston, Lagimodiere, Martin, Michaleski, Micklefield, Morley-Lecomte, Nesbitt, Pallister, Pedersen, Piwniuk, Reyes, Schuler, Smith (Lagimodière), Smook, Squires, Teitsma, Wharton, Wishart, Wowchuk.*

#### Nays

*Adams, Asagwara, Brar, Bushie, Fontaine, Gerrard, Kinew, Lamont, Lamoureux, Lindsey, Maloway, Moses, Naylor, Sala, Smith (Point Douglas), Wasyliw, Wiebe.*

**Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk):** Yeas 31, Nays 17.

**Madam Speaker:** I declare the motion carried.

\* \* \*

**Madam Speaker:** As previously agreed to, we will now consider the matter of urgent public importance that was filed today by the honourable member for St. Boniface.

I will now call upon the honourable member for St. Boniface to move the motion.

#### MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** I move, seconded by the MLA for River Heights, that under rule 38(1), the ordinary business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely, the need for an immediate economic update to assure funding for health workers and businesses affected by the pandemic response to COVID-19 due to the declaration of a global pandemic by the World Health Organization and with cases in Manitoba doubling.

**Madam Speaker:** Before recognizing the honourable member for St. Boniface, I should remind all members that under rule 38(2), the mover of a motion on a matter of urgent public import—oh, I'm told that I do not have to go into that part.

So I will now recognize the honourable member for St. Boniface.

**Mr. Lamont:** Manitoba Liberals have been calling for this debate for a number of days. We do think that it's extremely important to—both to put some information on the record, as well as to ask questions and raise some concerns about what we've been hearing over the last week.

Without question, this is an urgent matter. Without question, this is of utmost public importance. As I said earlier, on March 2nd, just 17 days ago, when we called on the PC government to present a plan to deal with COVID-19, there were 82,000 cases around the world and 3,200 deaths; 17 days later, the Johns Hopkins shows the number of cases and deaths has nearly tripled.

*Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair*

In fact, between the time that I printed this speech and the time that I came up to the Chamber, the number of confirmed cases had increased by 7,000 and the number of deaths had increased by 400.

At the time, we asked to protect and support northern communities, where people living in close quarters could easily catch the virus, people who have challenges around social distancing as well as accessing health care. We wanted to make sure that we protect personal-care homes because personal-care homes in particular have been sites that—where COVID-19 has claimed a lot of lives, because seniors tend to be more susceptible to the disease.

We need to be prepared to assist individuals on low incomes who face quarantine. It's not—for many people who might be on EIA or people who are working full-time, it's well known that people—that if you're making minimum wage in Manitoba, it's not enough to pay the rent.

And, if you're asking people to stay home for two weeks and stock up on food, that is simply not something that is financially realistic for people, so we have to make sure that that food is available and it needs to be done on a—the scale of government and not simply on the scale of individual people providing that help.

We need to be prepared to crack down on price gouging and hoarding of supplies. We've seen reports of that across Canada.

We want to make sure that the work of government continues. We recognize that we're going to be closing down the Legislature because we have not been able to find ways to make it work and keep it safe and have social distancing.

The safety of the employees of this place are—is paramount and their—and so is their health, but we still also need to make sure that we are doing what we can to make sure that this government is held to account through having debates, and that there are clear lines of communication being kept open so that we can pass our—the concerns of our constituents on to the government and have their—those questions answered.

Finally, we had asked to set up a central command centre that can co-ordinate food and other deliveries in an expectation that the pandemic may peak.

Now, there are two issues here. and one is health-related, clearly and one is economic.

Just today in the Washington Post, there was an article that suggested that new data from the Centers for Disease Control about the spread of COVID-19 has a greater impact on young people than thought. Most of the information coming out of China showed that it was the people over 50; it got more and more serious the older and less well people were. We're now seeing that in Europe as well as in the US young people are falling ill and having to be treated with respirators.

And one of the most important messages we can send to people is we do have the power, working together, to slow the spread of this disease. That should be the goal because, as everyone knows, if a lot of people get sick in a very short time, it not only means that more people will get sick but it could overwhelm our health-care system, but effective measures cannot just reduce the number of cases, it can effectively reduce the number of deaths.

In Italy, just recently, we were hearing that hospitals were at 200 per cent capacity and that extremely difficult decisions are having to be made when it came to triaging patients.

\* (16:40)

We need to be optimistic, but we do need to plan for the worst. The measures that are being taken now are already leading to thousands of layoffs. We've had layoffs for casino workers; the entire WSO and their staff have been laid off; I'm hearing from people who work—businesspeople in my constituency, people who run restaurants who are facing—are not able to—are having to close their doors, lay off their staff; service workers; restaurants; event facilities; performers; people who are self-employed, especially—I'm hearing from that—from people who are self-employed who will be unable to work but—who will not be able to access EI, who are going to need emergency income assistance. The same also applies to contract teachers and for child-care workers.

Not only is this the case that people are—we're asking people not to work, we're asking people to stay home, but they do not have another source of income. They—the fact is that markets around the world are all begging and the private sector around the world is begging—are begging governments to do more in order to offset the incredible disruption this is going to have, and we haven't seen that action adequately from this government.

I've spoken many times in this House about the fact that the economy is much more fragile than

people realize. Tax cuts for people who have no income or tax cuts for businesses with no revenue are not going to stimulate the economy. When you have zero, reducing a percentage of zero is still zero.

We have to recognize that some of the measures that it takes to slow the spread are going to be massively, economically disruptive for businesses and workers alike. We are staring in the mouth of a recession because people are being laid off as we speak across Manitoba and Canada.

It goes beyond simply COVID-19, as I've mentioned. There's also a drop in the price of oil, which is going to have an incredible impact, not just in oil-producing provinces like Alberta and Saskatchewan and Newfoundland, but we have an oil patch here in Manitoba as well that is going to be extremely hard hit. These people and these businesses are not going to be able to get back to work anytime soon, especially at a time when global finance—there is—appears to be a global stock market collapse unfolding.

These are public health challenges that we have not seen in a century. It's an economic challenge we may not have seen since the 1930s. Yet, compared to the action of other countries, the Government of Canada's response is small and the response from this government has been virtually non-existent. In the coming weeks, we risk seeing an economic fallout that is going to be extremely, extremely difficult.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we often hear that this is unprecedented. It is unprecedented in our memory, but it is not unprecedented in our history. We often hear that we do not know—that those who do not know their history are doomed to repeat it. We do not know our history, and we are repeating it because this government is pursuing the same policies that create recessions, make recessions longer and deeper than they need to be. And at a time of international, national and local crisis, the government and the opposition have been unable and unwilling to compromise over a handful of bills.

There has been a lot of shameful behaviour in this Chamber, Madam Speaker, but the obstruction of the NDP and the bullheaded refusal to compromise on the part of this PC government is nothing short of disgraceful.

And let's be clear, every day the NDP has offered an opportunity for the budget to be presented, and every day the government said no. But let's also be clear that the government decided to dump dozens of

bills on budget day when they would get the minimum of attention. We're waiting to hear commissions and reports on massive overhauls of education, labour relations and planning for the City of Winnipeg, yet this government is introducing bills on all of these before the reports are in—that, and a whole series of other bills and measures that were never mentioned in the recent election campaign.

*Madam Speaker in the Chair*

Madam Speaker, we have said that this budget is obsolete. We need an economic update immediately because thousands of Manitoban workers and business owners are going to be broke, if not in a matter of weeks, a matter of days.

Madam Speaker, in the last weeks, the world has changed, yet the behaviour of the PCs and the NDP in this Chamber has been to focus on punishing each other while getting nothing done for Manitobans. We are particularly concerned because this unwillingness to compromise resulting in deadlock serves no one.

We are also concerned this government will refuse to provide the help that is needed out of a mistaken, ideological belief in austerity. I am concerned, Madam Speaker, that instead of investing to ensure we have jobs today and tomorrow, this government will seize this crisis to further liquidate public assets.

To pull Canada out of the Depression took extraordinary measures: public investment, employment programs and the creation of a series of social safety nets that this government is dismantling. There were debt relief programs for farmers that cut their debt in half, Manitoba's depression-era debt was forgiven by the federal government in 1946 and the Bank of Canada provided 75 per cent of government financing. That is our history; it worked. But we do not know our history.

We all know these are extraordinary times; we all accept that extraordinary measures are required. I hope that in these times we can put aside blinders and narrow ideology to the extraordinary things that will be demanded of us.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living):** I stand to provide some comments on the record, in response to the Liberal Party's bringing of a matter of urgent public importance this afternoon. I want to, first of all, state



that this is indeed an urgent matter; COVID-19 is significantly disrupting our lives.

I reflected earlier today that it is only one week since the discovery of the first case of COVID-19, the first presumptive positive case of the virus in our jurisdiction. I reflect this afternoon that—on all that has changed between last week, Thursday, and today. Indeed, on a call earlier today where I addressed the key leaders of our incident command structure in the province of Manitoba, a tremendous group of individuals who have the positions, the responsibility, the capability, that we're entrusting them with to lead on this issue, I told them the same, that's it incredible to think of all that has changed in a short time.

So I want to respond to some questions that have been raised. I want to provide some updates, as I am able. I was pleased earlier this afternoon to be able to bring a ministerial statement. I realize I have less than 10 minutes to respond, but I would say, first of all, that the Leader of the Liberal Party (Mr. Lamont) has many things wrong in his statement. He makes suggestions, at times, to state that somehow this government is not preparing adequately for COVID-19, and this is not accurate.

Madam Speaker, I can assure you that we are, as a government, engaged every single day in jurisdiction with our counterparts in the other provinces, with the federal government, with the Public Health Agency of Canada, with our partners, globally, with the Centers for Disease Control of the United States, with the World Health Organization, providing leadership, giving guidance, solving problems. Yesterday I was asked a question to say what is the effect of the changes that we have made in the health-care system to the challenges we're now facing, and I would suggest that the changes that we have made in the last two and a half years to create a health-care system that is more aligned, less siloed, more focused, articulating specific activities and specific roles for specific sites causing specialists to work more closely together, bringing Shared Health, establishing clinical governance, these are things that I believe will actually produce a better response in the face of this significant threat to the health of Manitobans, to the health of all of us in Canada than we otherwise would have had.

In some sense, we are testing right now the new structures that we have built. And I can tell you, Madam Speaker, the list of successes that I could point to in terms of how this government is preparing

and acting, in concert with its senior leaders, is incredible.

From procurement that we have done already—Madam Speaker, you've heard me say we were the first province to sign on that personal protective equipment joint procurement exercise with the federal government. I have a call later this afternoon with the federal Health Minister to, once again, underscore we need this equipment in jurisdiction. We are looking for assurances in the federal government that there will be no delay in delivery.

But I can tell you, besides that, ventilators, we were—we placed an order on very short notice for 43 additional ventilators. I want to add this update, I can confirm the number is higher than I provided earlier this afternoon. I have a recent update: 27 ventilators now in the jurisdiction in possession in Shared Health. *[interjection]* Thank you. The remainder on the way.

But in addition to this, I can tell all members that we recently passed an emergency funding to help bring five UV disinfection units for post-isolation into this province. This is going to be very significant. I actually believe there may be even more than five on the way that would be distributed through our system, a very technologically advanced and appropriate way to decontaminate an area that has been used for isolation.

\* (16:50)

We are bringing a bulk order of 100 per cent alcohol solution for dilution that could be used because we cannot procure this through normal channels. We are bringing 13 continuous renal replacement therapy machines into jurisdiction. These are not your normal renal machines that would be used for dialysis but rather ones that are used in emergency, in ICU, for those who are affected and it allows us to be able to provide medicine and therapy in a more continuous, less intrusive way.

There are so many success stories in the system. Some of them I shared earlier this afternoon: the way nurses and doctors are stepping up; the way we were able to enter into an agreement with nurses only days ago that provides for additional ability to resource them and to shift them to new areas—not just nurses, but all labour within the system, to shift them as appropriate.

This is a contingency plan. It's not something we do all at once. We first invite, but clearly we need to plan, and we welcome the co-operation that we have

through organized labour to come to the table to agree that the patient needs to be first. We believe that these changes are appropriate and we'll put patients first as we continue to do advanced planning.

Doctors Manitoba—we're so proud of the work that we've done with Doctors Manitoba to bring into this jurisdiction, finally, virtual charges, new tariffs, new codes in the system where we will be able to provide services—for no less remuneration for a doctor—service on a telephone or Internet or video conference platform rather than going into office.

That will benefit all of us, not just for diagnosis, not just for wellness continuance, but also for things as basic as prescriptions and prescription renewals. And we believe that this will be very significant in our jurisdiction. Other jurisdictions have this already. Now we're able to bring it, but we're only able to bring it because we're working effectively in—with our partners.

I haven't shared in this House the way I've been on the phone with the colleges and the regulators, and I can tell you that the work that is being undertaken by those regulators in our province is very significant; to do things like figure out how we can bring people from retirement back into the system to serve because, Madam Speaker, you more than many people in this Chamber know the difficulty that comes with licensing. And I can tell you that while those controls are very necessary, people are finding appropriate and nimble pathways.

I heard this morning at Shared Health leadership phoned to one of the colleges and they were brainstorming on the phone and found three new ways to do something that had previously been underexplored or unexplored, and it's simply a result of Manitobans rolling up their sleeves and getting to work.

Our incident command structure needs to be signalled for the incredible work that they're doing to give guidance, direction to solve problems, to work together, to collaborate. I could say, if I had more time, the incredible offers that are coming in from private industry, private sector, manufacturing.

I was up this morning for an hour and I received an email from a Winnipeg-based manufacturer that has relationships and subsidiaries all around the world who said we can help you with issues and shortages and procurement and supply and manufactured items that you need. We are exploring everything. Some of that will undoubtedly return value.

Here's a quick list of some of the ways the government has been at work: we have opened the collection centres; we have brought an online assessment tool; we have been working to expand capability in our laboratories; our Health Links-Info Santé has been working around the clock, seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

If there are people listening now, I tell them again, when you need information on COVID-19 go first to the public health website. Then, if you need to because you're experiencing symptoms, go to Info Santé, and go to the collection site only when you are requested to go there because Info Santé or your doctor or your nurse practitioner has said that is the place that you should go to.

There are so many success stories. I don't have time to share them all. There are so many changes coming.

We recognize, Madam Speaker, that COVID-19 has significantly disrupted the everydayness of our lives as Manitoba, and it has been abrupt and it has been violent and it—there is more to come, but we're doing it for a reason. We realize all together that the slowing down of the spread of the virus is designed for one thing only, and that is to create and maintain the capacity in our health-care system that we so desperately need to make sure the most sick—in acute care beds, in ICU beds—get the care they need; that we have ventilator capacity for the people who need it.

Madam Speaker, I say to Manitobans: be brave. Be bold. Be kind. Your government is acting. Your senior health leaders are acting. We have your best interests in mind.

We disagree profoundly with statements by the Liberal Party that would suggest that somehow we're not doing everything we can, but we invite all members of this House to collaborate. There is no bad—there is no good idea that will not be fully considered. We are in this thing together.

**Madam Speaker:** I will now recognize the honourable member for Union Station.

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** I appreciate this opportunity to speak to this matter of urgent importance in regards to COVID-19 in Manitoba. It was only a short time ago that I stood up in the House and I said that Manitoba had yet to have our first case of COVID-19, and things have markedly and very quickly changed in Manitoba.

It has certainly created a tremendous amount of stress and anxiety and uncertainty for many Manitobans, but I'm very, very proud to be part of, you know, a member of the Legislative Assembly and a member of this caucus that is working day in and day out in whatever capacity we can to ensure that all members of our constituencies and that all members of this province have access to the care that they need during these times in order for us all to come through the other side as a collective, healthy society in Manitoba.

I'd first like to thank and reiterate my thanks from earlier to all front-line workers who are really working around the clock to ensure that as many people as possible have access to what they need, that as many people as possible get the treatment they need to access and have their questions answered, have access to essential supplies and basic services.

I cannot express that thank-you enough to our health-care workers; our teachers; daycare workers; retail and grocery workers; first responders; transport, taxi, trucking and transit folks. Thank you to all the community organizations and shelters and collectives who have stepped up, in place of supports from this provincial government, and have stepped up and made sure that their neighbours, that their community members, their fellow Manitobans are taken care of.

I've seen so many stories—countless stories at this point—of individuals banding together, creating groups on social media, pooling resources to make sure that seniors in their communities, that low-income folks, folks who are homeless, those living in poverty have what they need, that youth have what they need in order to be okay.

With all of that being said, we know that it's going to be an ongoing challenge for many, many people to practice important public health measures that will help keep all of us safe. And I hope and I know that I'll see Manitobans continuing to do great work collectively to ensure that it's as easy as possible for everyone to be able to do that: practice social distancing, self-isolation and so on and so forth.

I do think it's important to talk about the realities of what we're in, in terms of COVID-19 in Manitoba. We at—are—a critical time where practicing those important public health measures can really contribute to health outcomes being positive in Manitoba, and it's imperative that this government take the lead and provide reassurance to Manitobans in regards to what they can expect in terms of support from their provincial government.

This government has a responsibility to provide a transparent and comprehensive COVID-19 plan that will address the anxiety that so many Manitobans are facing in regards to their income, employment, access to sick time, access to health care, access to groceries, access to very basic necessities that will help keep folks healthy and safe in their homes.

\* (17:00)

And also a comprehensive plan to ensure that our most targeted and vulnerable and at-risk populations in Manitoba have access to the services that they need. If our most targeted and vulnerable populations in Manitoba are left out of this decision-making, are left out of any comprehensive planning and interventions, it will have catastrophic impacts on everyone in Manitoba.

We need to make sure that the folks who are dealing with chronic illness, folks that are dealing with chronic homelessness, ongoing, acute mental health issues, problematic substance use and addictions—that those individuals are the ones that are being supported—those individuals are the ones who we are going above and beyond to make sure that they have their health needs met. It is those individuals that are going to suffer the most negative impacts of what this virus can do to a person. You know, we're seeing it in other countries, that if—in other jurisdictions, that if our most vulnerable and targeted demographics aren't taken care of during this time and prioritized, the implications for all of our communities are significant.

I worry about the realities of the pressures of that on our front-line service providers and our health-care workers. I feel it important to acknowledge not only as a thank-you, but to speak into this House the realities of what our front-line workers and our health-care workers and our nurses are dealing with. I worry about how long this government will continue to expect nurses and front-line workers to do everything and then some without the adequate support that they need to do their jobs and serve Manitobans well. Before COVID-19, our Manitoba health-care workers were begging for increased supports, begging for this government to hear their voices and their calls to address the lack of capacity in our health-care system.

And I credit all of the folks in the health-care system who are coming together, working together to make sure that Manitobans do have access to what they need. I credit our chief public—our public health medical officer and our Chief Nursing Officer for the incredible efforts they're putting in to making sure that

every single day we have access to critical information so that we can make informed decisions in Manitoba.

But I hope that, at some point, after we've all come through the other side of COVID-19 and collectively, you know, stronger as a Manitoba family—I hope that instead of just a thank-you, that this government will do right by nurses and be right by front-line service providers and start listening and start actioning what these front-line service workers and our nurses are asking for: put an end to mandatory overtime and stop expecting nurses and front-line workers to sacrifice their well-being, their time with their families, all in the name of balancing books and putting profit ahead of people in Manitoba.

I want to—I also want to make sure that I acknowledge, with the time that I have, the struggles and the anxieties that many international students, migrant workers, undocumented folks—the struggles that they're facing, the anxieties that they're navigating right now.

I hear from people on a daily basis in all of our communities, in all of our constituencies, the fears that they were dealing with before COVID-19 came to Manitoba in terms of being able to access equitable health care, being told to pay up front to access health-care services, the fears of just astronomical medical bills that they will not be able to pay for. I hear from folks right now who are terrified that should they be infected with COVID-19, they're not going to be able to pay for the treatment that's required in order to recover from it.

It is all of our responsibilities to make sure that every single Manitoban has equitable access to health care in this province, and that includes our international students, it includes our migrant workers, it includes folks who are undocumented. It means all Manitobans, those without identification, those who are transient and homeless, as well.

And so with that, I would just like to finish by saying that, you know, collectively we should and we can work together. We're seeing this on display every single day by, you know, everyday Manitobans contributing in whatever way they can in their capacity to make sure that we all get through the other side of COVID-19 well and healthy and intact.

And, you know, I want all Manitobans to know that we, in our caucus, we are here for our communities; we are here for Manitobans; and we will continue to work alongside all members of the House

and all members of our collective societies to ensure that we get through this together united as Manitobans and stronger than ever.

Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** As previously agreed to by the House, this concludes consideration of the MUPI.

We shall now proceed with the Interim Supply process in consideration of The Interim Appropriation Act, 2020.

The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply to consider the resolutions respecting the Interim Supply bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

## COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

### Interim Supply

**Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Pivniuk):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

We have before us the consideration of the resolution respecting the Interim Supply bill.

The first resolution respecting operating expenditures in the Interim Supply reads as follows:

RESOLVED that a sum not exceeding \$10,298,383,000, being 75 per cent of the total amount to be voted as set forth by part A—forth—in part A, Operating Expenditures, of the Estimates, be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2021.

Does the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) have any opening comments? No.

Does the official opposition Finance critic have any opening comments? No.

The floor is open for questions. Any questions?

Is the committee ready for the question?

**Some Honourable Members:** Question.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Shall the resolution pass?  
[Agreed]

The second resolution respecting capital investments in Interim Supply reads as follows:

RESOLVED that a sum not exceeding \$649,989,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount to be voted as set out in part B, Capital Investments, of the Estimates, be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2021.

Does the Minister of Finance have an opening comment?

Does the official opposition Finance critic have any opening comments?

The floor is open for questions.

Is the committee ready for the question?

**An Honourable Member:** Question.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Shall the resolution pass? *[Agreed]*

The third resolution respecting loans and guarantees for Interim Supply reads as follows:

RESOLVED that the sum not exceeding \$332,532,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount to be voted as forth—as set forth in part C, Loans and Guarantees, of the Estimates, be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2021.

Does the Minister of Finance have an opening comment?

Does the official opposition Finance critic have any opening comments?

The floor is open for questions.

Is the committee ready for the question?

**An Honourable Member:** Question.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Shall the resolution pass? *[Agreed]*

\* (17:10)

The fourth resolution respecting capital investments by other reporting entities in Interim Supply reads as follows:

RESOLVED that a sum not exceeding \$1,960,097,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount to be voted as set forth in part D, Capital Investments by Other Reporting Entities, of the Estimates be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2021.

Does the Minister of Finance have an opening comment?

Does the official Finance critic have any opening comments?

The floor is open for questions.

Shall—is the committee ready for the question?

**An Honourable Member:** Question.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Shall the resolution pass? *[Agreed]*

The resolution is—this concludes the business before the committees.

The committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

## IN SESSION

### Committee Report

**Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Chairperson):** Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has considered and adopted four resolutions respecting Interim Supply.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for Southdale (Ms. Gordon), that the report of the committee be received.

**Madam Speaker:** It has been moved by the honourable member for Arthur-Virden, seconded—

**An Honourable Member:** Madam Speaker, Turtle Mountain.

**Madam Speaker:** Oh, sorry. The member's correct. He's from Turtle Mountain.

So it has been moved by the honourable member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Piwniuk), seconded by the honourable member for Southdale, that the report of the committee be received.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

### Interim Supply Motion

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Health, that there be granted to Her Majesty, on account of certain expenditures, public service, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021, out of the Consolidated Fund, the sum of \$10,298,383,000, being 75 per cent of the total amount to be voted as set out in part A, Operating Expenditures; \$649,989,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount to be voted as set out in part B, capital expenditures; \$332,532,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount being voted as set out in part C, Loans and Guarantees; and \$1,960,097,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount to be voted, as set out in part D, Capital Investments by Other Reporting Entities, of the Estimates laid before the House as the present session of the Legislature.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Fielding:** Just read that over, just to make sure we got everything right.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Health, that there be granted to Her Majesty—magistry—on account of certain expenditures of the public service for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021, out of the Consolidated Fund, the sums of \$10,298,383,000, being 75 per cent of the total amount to be voted as set out in part A, Operating Expenditures; \$649,989,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount to be voted as set out in part B, Capital Investments; \$332,532,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount to be voted as set out in part C, Loans and Guarantees; and \$1,960,097,000, being 90 per cent of the total amount to be voted, as set out in part D, Capital Investments by Other Reporting Entities, of the Estimates, laid before the House at the present session of the Legislature.

*Motion agreed to.*

#### INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

##### Bill 53—The Interim Appropriation Act, 2020

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Families (Mrs. Stefanson), that Bill 53, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2020, be now read a first time and be ordered for second reading immediately.

*Motion agreed to.*

\* (17:20)

#### SECOND READINGS

##### Bill 53—The Interim Appropriation Act, 2020

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Cullen), that Bill 53, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2020, be now read a second time and be referred to the committee of a whole—of the whole.

*Motion presented.*

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable Minister of Finance? Does the minister wish to make any comments on second reading?

Do members have any questions on the bill?

**Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry):** I don't have questions.

**Madam Speaker:** Oh. I did see as—a member over there. I'm wondering if there are questions on the bill.

**An Honourable Member:** Yes.

#### Questions

**Madam Speaker:** A question period, then, of up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the minister by any member in the following sequence: first question by the official opposition critic or designate, subsequent questions asked by critics or designates from other recognized opposition parties, subsequent questions asked by each independent member, remaining questions asked by any opposition members; no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Yes, Madam Speaker, we're seeing a situation where many businesses in Manitoba are seeing a dramatic drop in revenue.

And I would like to ask the Minister of Finance: What are his plans with respect to these businesses which are facing going out of business or bankruptcy in very near future?

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance):** To the member: first of all, we're very proud of the fact that this is the most emergency-ready budget in Manitoba history. We've replenished the rainy day fund from close to \$110 million, when we first came to office, to over \$872 million.

We believe that there is a lot of contingencies that are built into this. As a government, you want to prioritize things. We have made appropriations for—right off the bat—things like health care, to protect our workers, and big investments in health-care field.

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** I was just wondering whether the—it's a possibility, in terms of business support, whether the government would become a buyer of last resort in order to support businesses to prevent them from going under.

**Mr. Fielding:** We had a call with the federal Finance Minister—two, in fact, in the last week.

The federal government has introduced a number of stimulus packages to support, No. 1, the credit, to make sure it's flowing through businesses, as well as to support people, I would say, through the EI system that's there.

We are going to do whatever it takes to support—to protect Manitobans and ensure the supports are there.

**Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** My question for the minister is: What are the plans to address the shortage of respiratory therapists?

**Mr. Fielding:** Well, No. 1, as an emergency basis, our government has taken proactive measures to inform citizens on a daily basis. We are the first province in the country to buy protective gear. We want to make sure that health-care workers are supported. We want to make sure that we have enough to support people in so many different ways.

Our government also has hired close to 300 more nurses. I know that isn't specifically related to that. And we have invested the most amount of money for health care in the province's history: \$157 million even above and beyond last year; five-hundred-\$594 million more, each and every year, from the previous government.

**Mr. Gerrard:** The minister has tried to provide an answer with respect to the shortage of respiratory therapists, but the problem is that there's very limited supply. There's not very much likelihood we could bring respiratory therapists from other provinces.

If we get into a situation where we have many people on respirators because of the pandemic, what will the government do in terms of making sure we have sufficient respiratory therapists to address this issue?

**Mr. Fielding:** The government of Manitoba will do whatever it takes to protect Manitobans in a whole number of different ways.

Plans have been under way in the Department of Health. We've been informing individuals as situations arise. We try and provide as much information and as much resources for people to come. We've increased the amount of people that are on Health Links, for instance, by—we tripled that, in fact. We provided \$36 million for protective gear. The government of Manitoba will do everything in our power to protect Manitobans, period.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes, the problem is that you can't just go out and buy respiratory therapists. You may have to have a very rapid training program, for example. You might have to look at people who have partial training, which could overlap. But you need to start the program now because if you don't, then you won't be ready for three, four, five, six, seven, eight, 12 weeks, whatever it is before we hit a peak and need them.

**Mr. Fielding:** As the Minister of Finance for the Province of Manitoba, I can tell you we're putting resources—this is the most emergency-ready budget in Manitoba history. The Minister of Health is involved day to day, and I can say hour by hour, and minute by

minute, to address these issues as we go forward. I will be a part of that team, ensuring that the finances are there. I can tell you, the commitment from the Premier (Mr. Pallister), the commitment from this government, is to provide as much resources to protect Manitobans.

Thank goodness this was the most emergency-ready budget in Manitoba history. The particular details of how we do that, the Minister of Health probably is in a better position to answer, but I can commit from the government that we'll throw as much resources as we can to address these issues to protect Manitobans.

**Madam Speaker:** Are there any further questions?

### Debate

**Madam Speaker:** If no, are there any members wishing to debate the bill?

**Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry):** They say that a budget tells you a lot about the values of the government, and this one certainly does that. And I think the values of this government are loud and clear. So we know we're in this unprecedented pandemic, this COVID-19 crisis, so you would think that this budget would be about health care and restoring all the damage and the cuts and the chaos that this government has wrought on our system. But, no, despite knowing for a week that this is coming, this government doubles down on their original plan and has further cut health care in a time that we need it most. And the chickens will come home to roost, unfortunately. And I would urge this government to absolutely reconsider their approach and put money into health care.

So we know this budget isn't about the other sort of—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** —existential crisis that we have right now, the climate crisis. There are very, very few—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. I would ask for everybody's co-operation, please. I think we owe it to members to be heard in the House, whether they're asking a question or answering a question. So I would ask for everybody's co-operation, please.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** Thank you. So we have an ongoing climate emergency, and, of course, this government pays lip service to that, and has what would be also considered a very tepid response for something that's

going to do very little to actually reduce climate change. So what is this budget about? Well, it's like every other budget this government's brought in; it's about tax cuts and it's about tax cuts to disproportionately benefit wealthy Manitobans. And they pride themselves that they are draining our Treasury at a time of crisis of \$1.8 billion at a time when we need it most. This is a time they think now is a good idea to give wealthy Manitobans a tax cut. You know, tax is the only way that we, as a community, can respond to a crisis. And, by reducing our ability through taxes to do that, you're hamstringing your—yourself as a government to respond to this crisis. So, you know, this government says, well, we're still in deficit: well, are we? If we have \$1.8 billion of money for tax cuts for wealthy Manitobans, we absolutely are not in deficit and we don't need to be. And this government is creating an artificial deficit. And, of course, the reason for it has been the reason from the beginning, because they have to justify more cuts to an already struggling health-care system, more cuts to an education system, a daycare—child-care system that's on the brink of collapse. We have infrastructure deficits in this province—just the provincial share, \$11 billion. City of Winnipeg is \$6 billion. Oh, if you add in all the school boards, the RHAs, there are further billions of dollars there.

\* (17:30)

But, apparently, we have money so that if people want to get a fancy haircut, we're going to give them a coupon on that. If people are wealthy, we want to make sure that they stay wealthy by giving them a break on their wills. The only inheritance-type tax we have in Manitoba, the only instrument we have to ensure that we reduce wealth inequality in Manitoba, a probate fee, they're getting rid of that to the tune of \$10 million—\$10 million comes pretty close to keeping an ER open for a year. So that tells you the values of this government.

It also means that our—with all these tax credits that the governments bring in, it's making our tax system less progressive. It means that we are shifting the burden of taxation in Manitoba from the people who can afford to pay it—wealthy corporations and individuals—on to the most vulnerable and least able to pay—our working and middle classes.

You know, the government's whole strategy is, well, we've cut your PST. Well, the problem is you need money to buy things. And the more money you have, the more expensive things you can buy, and the

more you can buy and the more you save. If you have no money, a PST cut does nothing for you because nothing plus nothing equals nothing.

So, to pay for all this, of course, we're going to have continued cuts to health care, to our child-care system, to education. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** And then, of course, we have the basic personal exemption that's being raised yet again, and we can term this the reverse Robin Hood tax. This is where we take from the poor and give to the rich. The low-income earner is going to save \$53 from this tax measure. The high-income earner—those that make over \$70,000 a year, including everybody in this room, is going to save more than \$253 a year.

So how does that help low-income Manitobans? That again makes us less of a progressive tax system, and it affects the fairness of our system.

Under the Pallister government, revenue has fallen to 23 per cent of GDP and expenditures have fallen from 24.4 per cent of GDP down to 23.2 per cent of GDP. So not only are we collecting less revenue, we're also providing less services. And, of course, this at a time that this government was already putting us into recession.

We used to have the second fastest growing economy in Manitoba. We had the second lowest unemployment rate. All that's been flipped on its head. Now we're near the bottom; we are underperforming the Canadian average.

And now that we're in a pandemic, we are going to be in recession, and this budget doesn't speak to it. There is no—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** —plan, there is nothing to help Manitobans out of this mess. And we're seeing, again, you know, actions have consequences. We are seeing the government's own poverty reduction information says that we have had significant increases in poverty in our community since this government took office.

So households in core housing needs has seen an increase. There has been a decrease in adult learning program participation. The employment rate has seen a decrease. We've seen income inequality has seen an increase. We've seen a decrease in post-secondary education participation rates. We see the percentage of children who are not ready for school has increased in Manitoba. The number of children in care has



increased in Manitoba. Deaths occurring before the age of 75 have been increasing in Manitoba. And the prevalence of health issues related to poverty—hypertension, arthritis, respiratory disease—in a time of a pandemic, are all on the rise.

So this government has truly shown their stripes. They have told everyone in Manitoba what their values are and, quite frankly, we should all be concerned. Thank you.

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** We are looking forward to passing the Interim Supply procedure, as we understand that this is extremely important to get done so that the—that government can actually function, that funds can flow to the—to Manitobans as quickly as possible.

That being said, in the larger scheme of this budget, there's an old Saturday Night Live sketch called Theodoric, medieval barber, in which Steve Martin plays a medieval—

**An Honourable Member:** Thought the Church Lady.

**Mr. Lamont:** No, no. This is older than that. [*interjection*] No, the—this is the good one.

Yes, he plays a medieval barber. And in medieval times, barbers—you know that a barber pole has red stripes down it; it's because barbers bled people. That's what they did. It was—it's blood running down an arm.

And that was the solution that Theodoric the medieval barber had to everything. He bled everyone. So, if somebody came in and they were complaining that they were feeling low, he'd offer them a haircut and he'd offer to bleed them.

And Bill Murray plays a character who gets run over—he drinks too much mead and gets run over by a cart and has his legs crushed. So the medieval barber's recommendation is that, since his legs have been crushed, he should be bled.

And, unfortunately, that seems to be this government's approach to governing, as well, is that cuts and more bleeding is the answer to absolutely everything. Because one of the things that this government is doing is that they are freezing and they are cutting and—while running a deficit and borrowing to pay for those cuts. Is that—we could actually have a balanced budget right now. We could be either paying down debt or investing in new programs, but that's not happening.

The increase in child poverty—or, the—in—the improvements in the child poverty rate have been almost entirely due to the Canada child benefit, just as the improvements in this province's fiscal situation is almost entirely due to increased transfer payments from the federal government. If they'd been—if they'd stayed frozen, as they were for six years under the Harper Conservatives, we would still have a deficit of over \$1 billion.

And the fact is that, while there are—that budgets ultimately are about two sides of a ledger, and the presentation of this budget has overwhelmingly been about one side of the ledger. So we'll talk about how the number of income—that income taxes has increased, but the other fact—because we have more high-income earners—but the others—that the number of people on EIA is actually at an all-time high. We have the—a record number of people coming into Manitoba, but we also have record number of people leaving Manitoba. We had a record number of—apparently a record number of jobs created in January in Manitoba, but the number of insolvencies has reached a 10-year high.

So, it's clear that we have—this is—part of what's happening, is that our economy—our province is running in two directions at once and that there is some extremely serious issues that are—that we don't think are being fully addressed, especially the economic impacts of COVID-19 and the shutdowns that are going to be requested.

I do take the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) at his word when he says they will do all that they will—everything it will take to protect Manitobans. The one thing that I will say is that I hope it goes beyond just helping people in health care and making sure that people are safe in terms of medical care, but to ensure that people are protected from the extremely damaging economic impacts of this—of the pandemic and the measures we have to take, that people are going to be very—we're going to see huge numbers of layoffs.

There are huge numbers of people that do not have protections, do not have the access to EI, do not have access to funds. And I hope that the—again, that this government will see the wisdom in adding to the investments, not just working with the federal government, but supplementing whatever the federal government is going to be putting into measures to deal with—because I think we are—again, I hope that things work out, but I fear that things could be considerably worse than anyone anticipates, and we

need to make sure that, if this is truly the most emergency-ready budget, that we need to be ready for an extremely serious economic downturn.

So, that being said, we'll—I—we'll move on with this. And frankly, I wish all of you all the best and good health until the next time we see each other.

Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Is the House ready for the question?

**Some Honourable Members:** Question.

**Madam Speaker:** The question before the House is that Bill 53, the appropriation act, 2020, be now read a second time and be referred to a Committee of the Whole.

\* (17:40)

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? Agreed? [*Agreed*]

The House will now resolve into Committee of the Whole to consider and report on Bill 53, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2020, for concurrence and third reading.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

#### COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

**Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Pivniuk):** Will the Committee of the Whole please come to order.

#### Bill 53—The Interim Appropriation Act, 2020

**Mr. Chairperson:** We are now considering Bill 53, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2020.

Does the honourable Minister of Finance have an opening statement? No.

Does the official opposition Finance critic have an opening statement? No.

We shall proceed to consider the bill clause by clause. The title and enacting clause are postponed until all other clauses have been considered.

Clause 1—pass; clause 2—pass; clause 3—pass; clause 4—pass; clause 5—pass; clause 6—pass; clause 7—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

That concludes business before the committee.

Committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

#### IN SESSION

#### Committee Report

**Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Chairperson):** Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has considered Bill 53, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2020, and reports to—the same without amendment.

I move, seconded by the member from—the honourable member from McPhillips, that the report be—of the committee be received.

*Motion agreed to.*

#### CONCURRENCE AND THIRD READINGS

#### Bill 53—The Interim Appropriation Act, 2020

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Education (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 53, The Interim Appropriation Act, 2020, reported from the Committee of the Whole, be concurred in and now be read for a third time and passed.

*Motion agreed to.*

**Madam Speaker:** As previously agreed, we shall now move to royal assent.

\* (17:50)

#### ROYAL ASSENT

**Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms (Mr. Ray Gislason):** Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

*Her Honour Janice C. Filmon, Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Manitoba, having entered the House and being seated on the throne, Madam Speaker addressed Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor in the following words:*

**Madam Speaker:** Your Honour:

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba asks your Honour to accept the following bill:

**Clerk Assistant (Ms. Monique Grenier):**

Bill 53—The Interim Appropriation Act, 2020; Loi de 2020 portant affectation anticipée de crédits

**Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk):** In Her Majesty's name, the Lieutenant Governor thanks the Legislative Assembly and assents to this bill.

**Hon. Janice C. Filmon (Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Manitoba):** I'm going to break protocol right now. Apparently, I have that opportunity.

In unprecedented times, as they are, I think the reset button has been pushed. The question has been asked. How will we respond? There will be new ways of doing and being. It's a transformative time and we are being asked to care for other people before ourselves.

I want to, on behalf of all Manitobans and myself, thank you for the role that you play in giving the leadership that you give, the thoughtfulness and the care, because there is no good reason for not caring, and you do.

Thank you.

*Her Honour was then pleased to retire.*

*God Save the Queen was sung.*

*O Canada was sung.*

**Madam Speaker:** These are, indeed, unprecedented times. We are asked to stay calm. We are asked for our leadership and we shall survive all of this as long as we are all working together. And I think that's incredibly important right now.

I would like to thank the Assembly staff who have, over the last few days, really stepped up in many ways. There has been some really good work done here by the people that are always behind the scenes, but work very hard to make this place function. And within a very short period of time, we developed pandemic guidelines for how the Assembly should go forward. And we have been working as a team, and it's been an amazing experience by people that are really working so hard. They have stayed calm, they have stayed diligent, they have stayed conscientious.

We have been working as a team. We will continue to do that. We have set up a pandemic readiness team—a preparedness team. There's two levels of that. One is with senior staff here in the Assembly and some other managers, and we are meeting regularly or we are in contact regularly by email. We will continue to do that.

There is another group that's been meeting, and that's been House leaders, as well.

And we will all continue to stay in touch because we are going to have to keep working towards, you know, finding a way that we can carry on, have business continuity, even when we can't be here. Work of government does not stop, and we have to be able to all work together.

\* (18:00)

I want to also thank the civil service for the great collegiality in working along with us to put together what we have put together as pandemic guidelines for the Legislative Assembly. There has been great co-operation and great collegiality by, you know, a lot of people.

So I think there's so much recognition that we have never, ever experienced this before. This really is unprecedented times and we will get through this together, and we need to stay together.

And just, you know, thank you to the staff that have risen to the occasion and will continue to rise to the occasion and, you know, all of us need to certainly be working forward so that we can protect ourselves, our families and our communities.

So you may not hear from all of us in—you know, for a while, but we will all—we will endeavour always to stay in touch so that people are well informed.

And that's probably the most important thing that we need to do is ensure people are well informed about what's happening, what we're all doing. Otherwise, that's when people panic and fears rise more so than they should.

So our commitment from the Legislative Assembly is good communication, and if you ever need to get a hold of us, too, please do so.

We will all be in this together and there are—we will get past this because, you know, that's Manitoba, and Manitoba will rise to the challenge as we always do.

So, the hour being past 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until the call of the Speaker—a future day, called by the Speaker.

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, March 19, 2020

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**<http://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>**