

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

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Myrna Driedger
Speaker*

Vol. LXXIV No. 28 - 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, May 6, 2020

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
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

Wednesday, May 6, 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.

Good afternoon, everybody.

House Business

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Good afternoon, Madam Speaker.

On House business, I have a leave request for members of the Chamber, and the leave request is as follows: for all sittings of the House during May 2020, is there leave (1) to allow MLAs to speak in debate from a seat in the Chamber other than their own, (2) to prohibit requests for a quorum count, and (3) with the exception of the Speaker, to limit the representation of members present in the Chamber participating in debate and being eligible to be counted as part of recorded divisions as follows: (1) 12 MLAs from the government caucus at a time; (2) six MLAs from the official opposition caucus at a time; and (3) one independent Liberal in the Chamber at a time; and (4) to allow the independent Liberals to move motions without a seconder.

Madam Speaker: For all of the sittings of the House during May 2020, is there leave (1) to allow MLAs to speak in debate from a seat in the Chamber other than their own, (2) to prohibit requests for a quorum count, and (3) with the exception of the Speaker, to limit the representation of members present in the Chamber participating in debate and being eligible to be counted as part of recorded divisions as follows: 12 MLAs from the government caucus at a time; six MLAs from the official opposition caucus at a time; and one independent Liberal in the Chamber at a time; and No. 4 is to allow the independent Liberals to move motions without a seconder.

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS****Bill 213—The Personal Protective Equipment Reporting Act**

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I move, seconded by the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara), that Bill 213, The Personal Protective Equipment Reporting Act; Loi sur la production de rapports concernant l'équipement de protection individuelle, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, with this bill we are proposing that Manitoba establish a standing stockpile of personal protective equipment like masks, gowns and gloves.

All Manitobans have recently become aware of the difficulty to try and source this material at the last minute: surge pricing, dwindling inventory, the rationing of life-saving equipment. By setting up a permanent standing stockpile of this gear and keeping Manitobans updated about that inventory, we can implement one of the lessons that we've already learned from the COVID-19 pandemic: that we should never have to source protective equipment during a crisis again.

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

Committee reports? Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Health—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): It is my pleasure to be able to provide an update to my colleagues in the Legislature on the status of Manitoba's response on COVID-19, but first I would want to take a moment

to acknowledge those who have lost their lives to COVID-19.

And we know that only yesterday we announced the seventh death in Manitoba, and while those numbers may seem relatively low compared to other places in the world—and, indeed, across Canada—even so, we know those are seven lives lost. We know in each of those cases there is a family that mourns the loss of that loved one. And even now we know that that ability of any family to celebrate that life, to gather, to have a funeral or a memorial service, that has been sharply curtailed. And I would add that even with these gathering sizes set at 10, even families who have lost a loved one who didn't have it related to COVID-19 feel that same strain.

We all know that we are in this together. There have been many significant and prolonged disruptions in the way we live our lives because of COVID-19, and those things are very real. And we continue to hear, all of us as MLAs, from our constituents about how their ability to move around, to go to work, to do things with their children, to see their elderly parents, all of that has been interrupted. And we should never lose sight, as policymakers, of the very significant interruptions into peoples' lives that this has created. We should always seek to hear those stories, act where we can to mitigate, and all of us together—as the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer likes to say, all of us in this together, working collaboratively, obeying the orders and doing what we need to do will be the best way for us to restore normalcy in the province of Manitoba.

The numbers as they stand today: 282 total cases; three–37 active cases; 238 recovered cases; four in hospital; zero in intensive care units; seven deaths, as I indicated.

The loss of individuals who have passed underscores the importance of the work that is being undertaken by our front-line medical staff—and, again, we never want to lose an opportunity to thank all those in the front line both in health care and other essential services for their work, for their commitment, for their courage during such unprecedented circumstances. It is because, in part, of the efforts of individuals like this and in part because of the careful planning from the senior leaders who are leading this effort in—at the incident command structure that Manitoba can say to this date there has been no outbreak in a northern community. There has been no outbreak on a First Nations community. There has been no outbreak in a personal-care home, and I reflect on the fact that many

other Health ministers rising these days to update their provinces and territories respectively, will not be able to say such a thing. So, again, our thanks and generosity goes out to those people who are working every day to keep all of us safe.

We know that in Manitoba we have worked hard to flatten the curve, and we know that last week with the release of the modelling in Manitoba we are showing a picture that indicates that we have had success mostly because of the willingness of Manitobans to comply and to do the right things: to wash their hands; to cover their coughs; to stay home as much as possible; to maintain social distancing; to be sure to act on the basis of any suspicion of illness that they have—and we say that this is a story that is yet not fully told and so we know that we stand at a very significant juncture on our journey on COVID-19.

* (13:40)

Yes, the curve has been flattened here. Yes, the evidence of community transmission is low, but it could change and that's why we must be vigilant and that is why our government has worked so hard to create capacity in our health-care system to be able to add resources to procure the equipment and the supplies that we need to have to help our COVID-19 effort, and I'm able to update the House today on a number of the ways in which we have acted to keep people safe.

On Monday, May the 4th, we all know our government started phase 1 of the Restoring Safe Services plan, and this includes nonessential services. It includes the resumption of surgeries and procedures and diagnostics, and other therapeutic and medical activities. The impact of this gradual relaxing of public health restrictions will be closely monitored by public health officials.

Keeping Manitoba safe and keeping Manitobans safe, we've said, is our top priority, which is why several protective measures remain in place. Of course, the limit on gathering sizes remains at 10 people or less. This includes a continued ban on travel to the north of the 53rd parallel to protect potentially vulnerable communities there. And it was exactly weeks ago in this House when this Legislature passed, with all-party support, Bill 59, The Public Health Amendment Act, to enable the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer to put those controls in place, and we are pleased to say that, to this day, those conditions have been effective and have been embraced by people in the North.

I would want to indicate that with the—there is the part of this COVID-19 pandemic that we see and experience every single day, and then there's the part of it that we don't see as clearly but is just as real, and that is the mental health impact of this—all this disruption, all this change, all this stress and strain. And we are very pleased that we were the first Canadian province to sign on to a digital platform to provide unlimited access to Manitobans to be able to connect with mental health experts to talk about anxiety they may be feeling. I can update the House today and indicate that over 1,700 Manitobans have formally registered on the AbilitiCBT platform to be able to receive these services, more added every single day.

There are new rules, of course, in place for businesses that are open during phase 1 of our reopening plan. Manitobans, of course, can read about specific restrictions on businesses. They can learn more about our Restoring Safe Services plan by visiting www.engamb.ca.

As part of our Restoring Safe Services plan, we have contracted with Dynacare laboratories to assist Cadham Provincial Laboratory to increase the number of tests for COVID-19 that we can do. Our target is to reach 3,000 tests per day. We know that, by today, over 28,000 COVID-19 tests have been performed, and even last week we were again expanding the criteria, expanding eligibility to anyone with symptoms—even mild symptoms. Our ability to test and then to isolate individuals means that all of us have an improved access to the things that we want to do.

We must be vigilant. We will continue to be vigilant.

Symptomatic Manitobans, of course, can call Health Links to set up an appointment to be tested. We have, of course, added staff and phone lines. Wait times that were—when we started this—over one hour, wait times that were flagged as concerns by members in this Legislature are now consistently down between two and five minutes for the last month, a huge success story. And all of our thanks to those people who are occupying those phone lines and helping to resource those who phone in.

Last month we, of course, created a 30-bed isolation unit at Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg. Isolation units are also established at Grace Hospital and St. Boniface Hospital, and should the need arise we have prepared to establish temporary hospital locations.

Since our April sitting we have, of course, limited staff working at personal-care homes to working only at one location. The official implementation date of this was only last Friday. I am pleased to report that all 127 long-term-care facilities have met this target now where we have limited that one worker per PCH site to keep those who are most vulnerable safe. It's an important policy for all of us.

I will also indicate that many Manitobans will remember that our government was the first to implement new virtual visits for doctors to enable patients to receive health-care services that they formerly may have received at a clinic now online safely, and with the support of doctors and with the support of the—of clinical providers.

I am able to update the House and indicate that for now over a week in place we have had an additional new five virtual visits, including tariffs for psychotherapy, including tariffs for specialist appointments and including a new tariff so that a doctor can actually see a patient in a personal-care home with ever—without ever having to have a physical appointment. Imagine the advantage for someone in a personal-care home, and imagine the degree of alignment between this one policy and our overall commitment to keeping seniors and vulnerable Manitobans safe.

I encourage Manitobans that are seeking treatment, diagnosis or prescription renewals to take full advantage of the new virtual doctor's visits to take care of themselves and to keep taking care of their health issues even during a pandemic. Your medical practitioner has not gone away. They are accessible to you and there are many ways in which you can continue to receive care at this time.

Prescription drug limits have been put in place in all provinces in Canada, as my colleagues know. We continue to hear from Manitobans, indeed I hear—I receive correspondence from many members of this Assembly, that this an added expense. There is an impact on people because, formerly, if a person could receive a 90-day prescription for a drug, right now that is limited to 30 days.

We understand the impact. To assist, we did freeze the Pharmacare deductible for the new annual year. We have not raised that deductible level. We have introduced a new refundable Seniors Economic Recovery Credit, and we are sending \$200 cheques to seniors who have been impacted by COVID-19.

We will continue to closely monitor the 30-day prescription limit. We are talking to other provinces and territories. We are sharing our concerns and we will continue to act in the best interests of Manitoba.

This week is Mental Health Week in the province and, as I said, mental health is a true and undeniable impact of COVID-19. More people are indicating that they're experiencing things like anxiety than they did even six months ago, and as many as one in five Canadians is reporting increased anxiety in their lives, and no wonder.

So I did want to update and say that more people are accessing the crisis counselling 24-7. There is no health card needed to do so. If you are a person who was—is in distress, who is under pressure, who is feeling that load mentally, we are offering virtual mental health services to all Manitobans for free. Please visit manitoba.ca/covid19 to sign up.

While we are restoring safe services, we must be vigilant about protecting ourselves and others against COVID-19, and that means it's always back to the basics. Wash your hands. Cover your cough. Keep your distance when you leave home, even as we begin to release some of the restrictions. It is so important that Manitobans do not lose their enthusiasm to do the things that really make a difference in their homes, in their neighbourhoods, in their workplaces, when they are out and about.

And I should say here, as well, we have been so overwhelmed by the response by business, by industry, by non-profit groups, by community groups who are stepping into this and say we want to comply, we want to keep our workers safe, we want to keep our customers and the people who come into our establishments safe. It has been a true success story to see the degree to which Manitobans are caring and paying attention and doing the right things.

Of course, at the same time right now, we are telling people if they are sick or have symptoms, they should absolutely not go to work. They should self-isolate. They should call Health Links.

We understand that many are—many people are ready to get back to normal. We understand that this has been tough and we will get back to normal as a province. Manitoba will again be open. We will once a day—once again have a day when we go to the movies. We will have a day when we go to concerts again. We will go to Jets games again. We will go to the symphony again. We will go to a Bombers game

and see them win the Banjo Bowl again and again and again and again.

* (13:50)

But that day, if I was quoting Brent Roussin, the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, I would say that day is not today. That day won't be tomorrow, either. But I promise you that that day is coming in Manitoba as we all continue to do the right things.

So now we do what we can do. We do what we must do. We all work together, we all do our part because the things we're doing are working.

We're in a really good place in Manitoba right now, but that could change. And so we are vigilant and we will continue to be vigilant. We got to this point in time because so many Manitobans did what needed to be done. We have more to do. We will keep acting responsibly. We will keep protecting each other. And if we keep doing these things—and as we keep doing these things—we will get through this.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, I want to start my ministerial response by acknowledging all the families who are still navigating COVID-19 within their families and to express condolences from all of us in our caucus to the families of those who are struggling with the loss of a loved one due to COVID-19.

We recognize that since the first presumptive case of COVID-19 was—landed in Manitoba on March 12th, Manitobans have been tasked with making major adjustments to the day-to-day comings and goings and ins and outs of their lives in order to flatten the curve here in our province.

I want to acknowledge all of the Manitobans—all Manitobans who have been navigating this time with care and with sincere commitment to following everything from public health orders, practicing physical and social distancing, ensuring that they're self-isolating when necessary, restricting gathering sizes, et cetera. It—over the past number of weeks, we know it's been increasingly challenging for folks to—whether it's provide homeschooling and continue to go to their jobs or navigate not being able to go to work and also provide care, and increasing bills that are piling up as a result of having folks at home more often, and also trying to sort out how to stay connected to loved ones and community members, all while ensuring that we're practicing all of the things that we need to be to stay safe.

Manitobans have truly risen to the occasion and are doing what is necessary in order to flatten the curve in Manitoba and really give our health-care system the best opportunity to make sure that everybody who is working within it can keep each other safe, put patient care at oftentimes what we're seeing, you know, ahead of their own safety and well-being to make sure that Manitobans are getting the best care they possibly can within the system and that the system is able to manage these increasing challenges.

And so I commend Manitobans for the tremendous amount of work that they're doing and showing up for one another. I want to thank the minister for his ongoing efforts throughout this pandemic to keep Manitobans informed, to keep all members of this House informed and up to date as to their decision making and what's going on. I want to make sure that I thank Dr. Brent Roussin for his ongoing efforts, chief nursing officer Lanette Siragusa for her efforts, the incident command team for their ongoing work. And I also want to thank, Madam Speaker, the indigenous leadership and expertise that has been informing the decision-making and strategy development throughout this pandemic. We look at the cases of COVID-19 and we recognize that community spread, thankfully, in Manitoba has not been what it's been in other jurisdictions, that rural and northern communities haven't been impacted the way we've seen in other jurisdictions. And that is a direct result, Madam Speaker, of the expertise of those in communities, and certainly in—a reflection of the invaluable voices of indigenous community members and leaders and experts in health care who've been contributing to policy development and strategy throughout this pandemic.

Madam Speaker, I know that we are all so thankful to the front-line workers and essential service workers who continue to fight to help us return to whatever our new normal will be. I think we can all recognize that when we get through this pandemic there will be a new normal. We won't return to the way that things were, and I don't think that we should. I think there's a lot we can learn through this, you know, evolving situation, and there are changes that we can implement and decisions that we can make that will collectively be better for all Manitobans once we get through this time.

And so I'd like to make sure that we thank the front-line workers, essential workers who are working 24-7 to help get us through this time, thank the nurses who have continued to work throughout this pandemic

without a contract, Madam Speaker, and without a commitment to no longer force nurses to work mandated overtime as a staffing tool. These are things that we need to see changed.

And I want to also acknowledge the health-care aides and home-care workers who continue to provide care without adequate access to PPE, nurses and workers in the city, in the North and in rural areas who are being forced to stretch the use of their personal protective equipment and do this without having clear information or details around the true availability of PPE in our province and what supplies actually exist.

Madam Speaker, the government must do better by our health-care workers, and I say that wanting to acknowledge the concerns that are being brought forward to, I'm sure, all of us from health-care workers in all of our communities who are expressing their experiences and sharing their concerns—not from a place of anger, but genuinely from a place of concern and desire to see themselves safe, their patients safe, their communities safe and to see a health-care system that really and truly is equipping its workers with the resources they need in order to do their jobs to the best of their abilities.

Madam Speaker, I would like to speak to a point the minister mentioned in his ministerial statement that I think is really important, and I appreciate the minister providing updates in a number of areas, but specifically, the minister spoke to the changes to prescription drug dispensing limits, a 30-day cap on what folks can have dispensed at their pharmacies.

This is something that we continue to hear or I continue to hear from my constituents about on a regular basis. This is something that has had significant consequences for many, many, many Manitobans, and when we look at the reasoning for that, I can certainly appreciate that pharmacies need to have an adequate supply of medication for folks to be able to access during this pandemic. I can really understand that.

But I also understand the realities for many Manitobans, that incurring greater costs related to this change in dispensing limits is something that many Manitobans just cannot actually—don't have the capacity to deal with right now. The realities of having to go back to the pharmacy and dealing with dispensing fees, the realities of having to pay for transportation to go and get those medications from the pharmacy—these are all additional costs that many Manitobans simply can't afford.

The risk associated with leaving their homes in order to go and get these prescriptions, Madam Speaker, I hear from senior citizens in my constituency, I hear from folks with disabilities, I hear from people with acute and severe and persistent mental health issues who are all struggling right now to actually access their medications, not due to a shortage of the medication but due to the fact that they cannot afford the additional dispensing fees, due to the fact that they cannot afford the extra trip to the pharmacy on the bus, due to the fact that their anxiety or the stressors around having to make those additional trips are prohibitive to them being able to access the medication they desperately need in order to be healthy and well.

And so these are all issues that I sincerely hope we'll get some clarity from this government and the minister in regards to, to make sure, Madam Speaker, that all Manitobans are able to come through the other side of this pandemic as well as possible and without incurring undue harm or harm that could have been avoided had their needs been thought of and considered when these policies were being developed?

* (14:00)

And so I'll go back to a previous point that I made in terms of our new normal after this crisis resolves. This is an example of that, Madam Speaker, that when we develop policies that are important, to ensure that we do have adequate stockpiles of medications for all folks to be able to access, that when we make those decisions we are taking into consideration the folks that will be potentially negatively impacted and putting provisions in place to ensure that they do not face those—the impacts of that.

And so I'd like to also speak to a point that was brought up, and that is the loosening of restrictions. Madam Speaker, I think that Manitobans should be very proud of the way that they have been dealing with this pandemic and recognizing that the loosening of some of the restrictions we saw on Monday is a direct result of the efforts of people in our province to make sure that they are putting the health of themselves, their loved ones and their neighbours at the forefront. And so as a result we've seen some ability to go back to doing some things that we were doing, like going to the park with our kids, like being able to access some of the amenities that we haven't been able to for many, many weeks.

Now, Madam Speaker, I've been hearing a lot from folks, and I'm sure we've all been seeing from

many, many people in our communities some of the anxieties around the loosening of these restrictions, many folks feeling like it might be too soon or concerned about how they can keep themselves safe, some folks, who, you know, don't really think that, for whatever the reasons are, going to get a haircut is a No. 1 priority right now.

But, ultimately, I think we can all appreciate and understand where some of those anxieties come from for people. And I'd certainly have heard from folks, as well, that would help alleviate some of those stresses and anxieties about the loosening of restrictions is clarity around what protective equipment, around what safety measures are being put in place in all of these areas where restrictions are being lifted and how are, for example, businesses that are able to now reopen their doors for folks, what supports are they being provided to ensure that they have access to the personal protective equipment they need so that folks can be safe in their establishments?

So there are lots of questions that folks have, Madam Speaker. I've certainly heard from a few folks in community-based organizations who are still waiting for answers and clarity from this government in regard to PPE so that they can continue to provide care and resources to communities who are underserved and making sure that they have their needs met during this time.

And so, ultimately, I think that the loosening of these restrictions is a direct result of the good work of Manitobans, and I do think that it's a great step to lift some of these restrictions and ensure that we can start moving in a direction where folks can have more freedom of movement. And we know that the impacts of self-isolating and quarantining, that the impacts of that itself can be detrimental to folks, and so it's important over the next couple of weeks that continue—that people continue to do their part in practising the physical distancing and restrictions on group gatherings, et cetera, that have gotten us to this point.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to acknowledge that this past Friday, public health began collecting race-, ethnicity- and indigenous-based data for COVID-19-positive cases. This is a very good step in our public health-care system. It's something that is being advocated for across the country in many other jurisdictions, and it's something—it's an action that is being advocated for because it foundationally recognizes discrepancies in health care that affect some communities more than others, that recognizes

that in order to make sure that we have accurate health interventions for communities that we are recognizing what's actually going on in all communities, especially during this pandemic.

And so I'd like to acknowledge the efforts of those who worked very hard to see that action taken, and I look forward to getting information and reports on this side of the House from the minister and from the government in regard to what that data looks like when we get through this, Madam Speaker, and what will it look like moving forward in terms of public-health data collection.

Ultimately, Madam Speaker, with these steps to slowly reopen Manitoba, I think that we can all be confident that Manitobans will continue to do their part and ensure that the safety and well-being of Manitobans is first and foremost, and I look forward to this government providing more clarity and information around things like PPE and also this government doing more in terms of direct action to support families and individuals who are disproportionately impacted by this pandemic.

The welfare and the well-being of all Manitobans and their families is something that's going to be a long-term commitment and effort from all of us, but, certainly, this government providing what is necessary for us to have long-term positive health outcomes.

Thank you.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I ask for a leave to speak in the response to the minister's statement.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave for the member to respond to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Lamont: We are very concerned with the COVID-19 crisis. We want to thank everyone who's been working so diligently with such courage and determination over the last few weeks keeping people safe.

Our condolences to all those who lost a loved one, including, of course, the Premier (Mr. Pallister). It's an extremely difficult time for so many people, and the fact that people are not able to gather and—together and mourn is yet another sign of just how difficult this crisis is for so many people.

We are still, however, political opponents. I understand the Premier wasn't sure exactly what we were doing as an opposition, but I want to reassure him, and I'm sure his ministers can tell him, we've

been filling their inboxes with concerns, complaints, suggestions and unsolicited advice, and we've been working overtime to do so.

Back on March 2nd, more than two months ago, the MLA for River Heights and I called for a COVID-19 response plan to protect personal-care homes, First Nations communities, help for people with low incomes on quarantine, cracking down on hoarding and price-gouging, and making sure that this Legislature could continue to function.

We called on this government to freeze evictions, as well as extending the eviction date, and both made their way into legislation. We suggested using hotel space for hospital workers, which also took—which also happened. We advocated for changes and better support for early childhood education, and people working in that sector told us they saw those changes after we had asked for them.

We called to extend services for children aging out of care, which the government also did. We believe more could be done, especially when it comes to supporting people with insulin pumps who are aging out of care. We wrote a letter to the Minister of Education (Mr. Goertzen) asking them to make online high school courses free, which also happened.

We called for greenhouses to be covered as an essential service. We heard that people who are on EIA may—inadvertently ended up being cut off of their medical benefits if they applied for CERB. We reached out to the Minister of Families (Mrs. Stefanson) and they—and she responded.

We advocated for seniors and others whose dispensing fees have doubled and tripled for their prescriptions. Unfortunately, we have not seen action on that. We've also called on the government to release a plan for how to operate—meat-packing plants to operate safely, and that still has yet to happen.

We've echoed small businesses' call for grants so they can cover their expenses, hibernate and reopen. Unfortunately, many businesses still do not have the help they need and face insolvency. We encourage the government and—to step up and do more.

We've also warned this government against the dangers of austerity and cuts. We've defended First Nations, universities, researchers, colleges, farmers, fishers, small-business owners, seniors, teachers, students, artists—all the people who have been doing their part to keep our province strong and safe, including by staying home.

At every turn, we have advocated not just for the best public health response to make sure that as many Manitobans as possible survive COVID-19, but that as many businesses, institutions and organizations, including not-for-profits and the post-secondary sector, make it through this crisis intact so they can be part of the rebuilding.

That should be the goal in our House, not finding ways to dismantle or defund institutions so the Province can be leaner. This crisis has exposed just how fragile our social safety net has become, but it has also shown the very best in Manitobans in seeing how tough, strong, caring and resilient they are in stepping up and helping one another. There is a time—not every time—where only government can step up because there is something—not because there is something inherently good about government, because as human institutions governments are as fallible as any of us.

* (14:10)

It is because democratic government by design is the only vehicle for the common interests and common good that can act in the interests of all Manitobans, not just a few. This is critical because in times of crisis, government is the only institution with the capacity and the obligation to stand up for all Manitobans. And that is the great value of democracy.

There are times—times like these that, if governments shirk their responsibilities to people, no one else will step in. This is a scary time for a lot of people, but this province has endured pandemics, war and economic crashes before. I'm confident Manitoba will make it through all of this but, to do so, we will need a stronger government response that will benefit all Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Bonivital Ringette Teams

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): I rise today to recognize members of our four Bonivital Ringette Association—or BVRA—teams that were city champions at the 2020 Winnipeg Ringette League playoffs.

These four gold medal teams are comprised of a number of people from my neighbourhood who proudly represented our community. Their success was earned with many hours of discipline, dedication, practice and hard work, along with the crucial support from their coaches and players' families.

Ringette exemplifies what it means to be a community; it fosters lasting relationships that go beyond the sport itself, amongst players and supporters alike. It is a family sport that one can be involved with for a lifetime, whether as a player, a coach, official or a volunteer.

Like hockey, it is truly a Canadian sport. It was developed in 1963 by Sam Jacks out of North Bay, Ontario, as a means to give girls and young women an ice-skating sport of their own: one that was fast paced and encouraged participation. Over the years, it has flourished into an international sport that is played in a number of other countries, including the United States, Sweden and Finland.

Since the establishment of the Manitoba Ringette Association in 1972, Ringette has grown to include nearly 3,000 players across our province, ranging in age from three to 50.

The four teams I am recognizing today are BVRA U10 A, BVRA U12 A, BVRA U14 AA Angels, and BVRA U19 B. I would like to add that the BVRA U14 AA Angels were slated to represent Team Manitoba at the western Canadians, which was to take place on March 25th in Prince Albert, BC. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the cancellation of this event; nonetheless, I believe their achievements are to be applauded.

Today, we have players, coaches, families representing these teams watching via live-stream. I would ask my colleagues in the Manitoba Legislature to please join me in welcoming them.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Lagimodière.

Mr. Smith: Madam Speaker, I'd like to ask leave to place the names of the players and coaches of all four teams into Hansard.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to include all those names in Hansard? *[Agreed]*

Bonivital Ringette Association U10 A, city champions. Players: Kennedy Adolph, Addison Champagne, Zoe Freynet, Ava Hepburn, Sarah Holmes, MaryAnn House, Ava Machnicki, Serena Morgan, Kennedy Nault, Sloane Palmer, Claire Radford, Karsyn Wilkes. Coaches: Ryan Bannerman, Sophie Farkas, Yvan Freynet, Sarah Lazaruk.

Bonivital Ringette Association U12 A, city champions. Players: Daphnee Butterworth, Rielle Champagne, Shayla Daurie, Isla Fraser, Isla Hawthorn, Lexie Martens, Anabelle Nault,

Ryann Nault, Brooklyn Rodstrom, Avery Sutherland, Breanna Wilson, Caylee Wilson. Coaches: Rick Champagne, Payton Gilkes, Jennifer Nault.

Bonivital Ringette Association U14 AA Angels, city champions. Players: Au Avery, Ryley Bloomfield, Riley Brouillette, Madison Holtmann, Ella Howard, IzaBelle Johnston, Tessa Labelle, Ariel McPeek, Sofia Morgan, Eden Naismith, Taylor Stronciski, Audrey Tessier, Brooke Vachon, Chloe Walker, Camry Wilkes. Coaches: Jade Boyechko, Rachel Cherka, Rob Cote, Lexi Ellis, Karen Morgan, Jeff Tokar. Manager: Marnie Walker. Parents: Adrienne and Tim Au, Blair and Jane Brouillette, Erika and John Bloomfield, Carrie and Stewart Holtmann, Jennifer and Michael Howard, Blair and Jodi Johnston, Dave and Jenn Labelle, Kenton and Marianne McPeek, Bobby and Karen Morgan, Dana and Ryan Naismith, Marcie and Scott Stronciski, Luc and Tina Tessier, Geoff and Leanne Vachon, Keith and Marnie Walker, Dan and Diane Wilkes.

Bonivital Ringette Association U19 B, city champions. Players: Rheanne Badiou, Katrina Dean, Mia Griffiths, Peyton Hebert, Megan Holden, Jaylee Huebner, Lidia Imbrogno, Maya Kattenfeld, Josee Kornelson, Julianne LaRocque, Alyssa Lonee, Paige Moritz, Jordan O'Leary, Chaisee Robbins, Charlee Suchar, Mikhaila Wills. Coaches: Chantal Badiou, Neal Griffiths, Scott Hebert, Janelle Kornelson. Parents: Karen Holden.

Eugene Kostyra

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I regret to inform the House that a former MLA and Cabinet minister has passed away.

Eugene Kostyra was a remarkable person. He was a self-described high-school dropout who rose to become this province's minister of Finance. Mr. Kostyra combined the pragmatism he learned as an electrician with the sophistication he picked up in climbing to the highest offices in this province. And yet, those achievements never changed him. He liked a beer, a burger and his tunes until the end.

After his time in elected office, Eugene remained active politically—both in the NDP and in the union movement. Mr. Kostyra cultivated generations of progressive activists, political operatives and elected leaders—myself included. The huge number of people he mentored tells you something important about his character.

I remember one time, after imparting some of his wisdom to me about helping working people, about

managing the economy fairly, about being responsible with public money, he asked me point-blank: Are you going to run for leader? I told him I thought I'd have to run an insurgent campaign against the old guard, and Eugene simply replied: Well, I'm part of the old guard, and I will support you. Every time I saw him after that, even before I announced, he'd greet me with: How's my leader doing?

That's who he was—authentic and direct. In the prism of those interactions, I came to know the Eugene that so many others did. He personified the best of Manitoba: hard working, good natured and straight up.

Mr. Kostyra's life embodies the promise of our province was founded some 150 years ago: the possibility of rising from modest means to great achievement and a commitment to stick around this place to give back so you leave it better than you found it for the generations to come.

To Jeri, to their kids, to their family, thank you for lending us so much of Eugene for these many years. Our hearts are with you.

See you again.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Kinew: I would like to request that we observe a moment of silence in honour of the late Eugene Kostyra.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to have a moment of silence at this point? [*Agreed*]

Please rise.

A moment of silence was observed.

Liz Crawford

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Municipal Relations): I rise today with great pride to recognize a remarkable woman in my constituency of Riel.

Liz Crawford is an entrepreneur, a passionate advocate for several local and national charities and causes, and is a strong voice in the fashion and modelling industry where women are predominantly overrepresented, but often undervalued and unheard.

As a successful fashion model but as someone who saw the dark side of modelling, Liz's first foray into advocacy occurred when she went to Ottawa several years ago to speak to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women about the lack of regulations in the modelling industry, the

sexual exploitation that occurs in the industry and the age of consent for sexual activity. She spoke honestly and with conviction about the sexual exploitation she witnessed as a young model. Her advocacy, in part, led to the adoption of Bill C-2, an act to amend the Criminal Code to raise the age of consent for sexual activity from 14 to 16 years of age.

Her work continues to this day in creating a better, safer industry for women and girls, and she never hesitates to take action where she sees exploitation and inequalities in the modelling world. To that end, in 2007 she founded Swish Productions, using her knowledge and expertise in fashion to open a full service marketing and public relations firm here in Winnipeg. Swish has worked with local clients such as EQ3, Harry Rosen and Cadillac Fairview Polo Park shopping centre, to name a few, all the while ensuring equality, fair treatment and a harassment-free environment for all those she represents.

Liz has had a very diverse career, including as a fashion stylist, movie actor, event planner, fashion show producer, freelance journalist and international model and CEO, and she has fought for industry standards and equality in every sphere.

She's also devoted to several charities in Winnipeg, and in 2008, after her youngest son was diagnosed with Hirschsprung's disease, she dedicated herself to affecting—to helping those affected by this disease.

Liz and her colleagues and family could not join us in the gallery today because of social distancing, but I know she is watching at home, and I ask all my colleagues to help me honour Liz Crawford for the contributions she has made here in Winnipeg and around the globe.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Recognizing Citizens Contributing During Pandemic

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I've been so touched at the many different ways citizens have taken care of one another during this global pandemic.

I had the opportunity to volunteer with the St. John's High school food bank program a couple of weeks ago where outreach workers transformed the program by delivering food hampers to 150 families in need.

The Gwen Selter Creative Living Centre adapted their programming to deliver healthy meals to seniors unable to leave their homes.

Community is offering mental health and spiritual care, like Pastor Tom Campbell from Zion apostles church or the Native Women's Association of Canada's call-an-elder service.

Last week, Tracy Ball, the executive director for Sinclair Park Community Centre, called me and expressed concern for a family of five young, small children struggling with food security. I put a call out on social media for donations. Donations came in not only from Manitobans but across Canada, and with those we were actually able to support five additional families with over 20 children and two soon-to-be moms with baby items that they will need. Manitobans have supported several GoFundMe pages for small businesses currently struggling. Neighbours continue to check in with seniors.

* (14:20)

Manitoba health-care providers and essential service workers have shown us that they deserve more than just our thanks; they deserve fair wages. Non-profit organizations and public servants continue to serve communities while subsisting under the weight and duress of austerity-driven cuts.

When we reflect back on these uncertain times Manitobans will remember how we took care of one another, the acts of love we demonstrated and the protection offered or not offered to those most in need.

Miigwech to all Manitobans who have risen to the challenge. Together we are all in this together.

Miigwech.

Doris Hovorka

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Vérendrye): During trying times that we are all facing today volunteerism is more important than ever. I rise in this House today to honour an individual that has dedicated her life to serving her community and at the age of 80 continues to play an active role on the many committees she volunteers on.

I would like to congratulate Doris Hovorka from Sprague, Manitoba, on being one of the six individuals being presented the Lieutenant Governor's Make a Difference Community Award and the recipient of the 2020 Lieutenant Governor's Vice-Regal Volunteer Award.

Mrs. Hovorka was born and raised in the Sprague area and has made volunteering a lifelong commitment. She has always had the best interests of her community in mind. This is shown by the number of

different committees she has been involved with over the years.

Mrs. Hovorka has been the president of the Sprague Community Centre for well over 20 years. She holds the presidential role for the Sprague & District Historical Museum and is also an active member of the East Borderland Community Housing committee. She was a teacher and later principal of Ross L. Gray School, where she made sure her students had access to sports programs and after-school activities.

Personally, I have known Mrs. Hovorka for many years and she has always been committed to the betterment of her community. Whenever there is something happening in Sprague she has always had a positive input. She does not know what the word quit means. She is always there to lend a helping hand and inspire fellow community members. Her passion for the community is very deserving of these awards.

Thank you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Public Sector Layoff Concerns

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, in the midst of a pandemic the Premier has handed down the biggest single-day budget cut in Manitoba's history: \$860 million have been cut from the services that Manitobans rely on in their time of need.

Now, this is a decision that will take money out of the pockets of families at a time when they are already struggling and this will delay our economic recovery. What's worse, the Premier won't actually tell us how many people are being put out of work, how many people are going to lose a chunk of their wages, and whether or not these cuts are permanent. Instead, he sends out his ministers to try and spin percentages and ratios, but there is nothing left in their wake but opaqueness. He should be direct.

Will the Premier tell us today how many workers will lose their jobs?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I thank the member for raising the topic of us retaining 100 per cent of our core government employees through this pandemic in spite of the reality that over half government offices are either fully or partially closed. We have continued to pay generous benefits and wages to all our government core employees.

In terms of Crown agencies, Madam Speaker, apart from Liquor & Lotteries there have been zero layoffs to date and it is our intention to continue to work with our unions to keep people at work through the small amount of utilization of the work-share programs offered through the Employment Insurance program over the next few weeks, potentially, we hope, or months if absolutely necessary.

This is our measure, Madam Speaker, to ensure that we keep people at work and that we help people as much as possible during this unprecedented pandemic.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, instead of protecting jobs and helping people, this Premier is ordering layoffs. In the month of April alone he directed more than 5,000 people to lose their jobs. These have all been reported publicly in the media—5,000 jobs—and then this week they announced that there are more cuts to come.

We are asking that the Premier be honest and tell us where these cuts will be made, how many positions will be affected and whether or not those who have lost their jobs through this period, already, will have lost those jobs permanently and, if not, when can they expect to come back to work. These are the sorts of questions that Manitobans rightly deserve to know but also would give greater confidence for us to know when the economic recovery in Manitoba is to begin.

How many people will lose their jobs because of the \$860-million cut that this Premier has ordered?

Mr. Pallister: It appears that the member's attempting to combine social distancing practices with distancing from the truth, Madam Speaker, and the fact of the matter is that the sum total of the impact of these temporary measures is less than 3 per cent of our wage bill.

The fact of the matter is also that I have had correspondence from dozens of front-of non-front-line workers in the civil service of our Province offering to take time off to support our front-line workers, and we will continue to stand up for our front-line agencies and find savings to redirect there while the members opposite do nothing of the kind.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, there were 1,500 public sector jobs lost in March, a further 5,000 public sector

layoffs ordered by this Premier and his Cabinet in the month of April, and then this week they announced that there will be \$860 million cut, which is the biggest cut ever delay-delivered on a single day in this province's 150-year history.

Now, we know what these job losses mean. These are the EAs who are helping our children be able to access food or to be able to access homework online. These are instructors who educate young people. These are government employees who keep Manitoba running. The Premier has ordered hundreds of millions of dollars of cuts to these front-line workers.

Will the Premier tell the House today how many people he intends to put out of work and whether those cuts will be permanent?

Mr. Pallister: The dull repetition of false information doesn't give it an element of truth. The member ought to do his research, Madam Speaker, that apart from some card dealers that were let go by Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries, as a consequence of the closure of casinos, we have retained 100 per cent of core employees.

Now, a number of government offices are closed, either totally or partly, and a number of front-line workers need support.

Madam Speaker, rather than continue to not use the Employment Insurance fund, we are looking to use it, in partnership with the management of all government agencies, because we put \$2 billion into it as Manitobans over the last decade, and so we may need to use some of that money on a temporary basis. What the member is advocating is that we just throw away \$2 billion and don't use it when we could use it to support our workers across government to some degree, less than 3 per cent.

I repeat, Madam Speaker, 97 per cent of workers not impacted whatsoever; there would be three impacted—3 per cent of the wage bill will be impacted to some degree. That's the transparency the member asked for, not the phony misinformation he just put on the record not once, but twice.

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

Mr. Kinew: What we advocate for on this side of the House, Madam Speaker, is to fight for every single job in Manitoba right now.

All this side is able to muster are excuses for handing out pink slips.

Laying people off during a recession is the worst thing that you can do. It will prolong the economic misery. Fewer people working, earning less money: that means fewer dollars to spend at the businesses which are hoping to reopen and return to normal, starting this week. It is a recipe for failure.

The Premier stands in his place again today and refuses to provide the exact numbers. We know already in the month of March there were 1,500 positions lost, 5,000 in the month of April.

How many specific positions will be cut as a result of the \$860-million announcement this week? Will those permanent—will those cuts be permanent, and how many others will lose a portion of their wages?

*(14:30)

Mr. Pallister: Again, the dull repetition of false information by the member does not get his statement any closer to the truth, and the truth has been stated already.

The truth of the matter is, of course, that we are moving forward with numerous support programs which put us—according to the Privy Council Office in Ottawa, which is the head of the bureaucracy in Ottawa—at the lead of Canadian provinces in terms of our supports for tenants, for small business, for students, for seniors, for those who depend upon supports from our Crown agencies and many, many others.

We have moved significantly with dozens of efforts to keep resources in the hands of Manitobans at this time, not just in the public sector which the member continues to focus on, but with the quarter of a million Manitobans directly and indirectly impacted on their payrolls, in whole or in part, in the private sector as well. And we'll continue to take efforts to make sure that we rejuvenate our economy to the best of our ability, something the NDP has never been able to focus on in their entire history.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, what we're suggesting is that at this time we should be fighting for every single job in Manitoba.

What the Premier is proposing is, instead, that his government should hand out pink slips, should direct the recipients of those pink slips to then apply for federal programs, and then we are sure that he's going to go down to room 68 and shame the recipients of

those federal dollars. This is unconscionable and it is a recipe for economic failure.

Madam Speaker, we know that for every job lost over these past number of months, for every person who is forced into losing a chunk of their wages, that that will prolong the recession and flatten the economic recovery.

Will the Premier stand in his place today and tell us specifically how many jobs will be lost, how many people will lose a portion of their wages and whether those cuts will be permanent?

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, the member demonstrates zero concern for anyone apart from the public sector union bosses that own his party and that got him his position.

Madam Speaker, there's a private sector out there too, and there are a quarter of a billion people out there that have been impacted directly already, and we'll wait for the new numbers to see where the labour force is now. But the fact of the matter is an honest day's work for an honest day's pay was the creed of the union I was involved in, and that'll stay the way it is here.

We have a bunch of offices closed. Three per cent of our people aren't needed right now. We have offices that don't need receptionists. We have vehicles that don't need to be evaluated because they haven't been in an accident. We have tons of administration that doesn't need to be done because the public doesn't need those services right now, and if the public service exists—and I believe it does—to serve the public, then here is an opportunity to the tune of less than 3 per cent to do that.

Madam Speaker, we are not interested in layoffs. We are interested in work-share programs to give people the opportunity to keep secure and to have ongoing incomes. But we're also interested in fairness for everyone else in this province, and so borrowing another billion or two or three or five, as the NDP made a habit of doing—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Kinew: I think he was getting to the part where they borrowed \$5 billion last month, Madam Speaker. And, again, on this side of the House, we're fighting for every single job in Manitoba whether that's in the private sector, the public sector or in the not-for-profit sector. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, again, the Premier just can't help it. His natural inclination is to cut jobs and then to try and force people onto federal programs and then shame those people for accessing the very program that he has forced them into taking up in the first place.

This is not how to run a government, Madam Speaker. The Premier ought to be—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —fighting for every single job in Manitoba, whether it's in the private sector, the public sector or at not-for-profits. Because only when we have people working and we have leadership that fights for every single job will we pave the way for an economic recovery.

Will the Premier do his part today and tell us specifically how many positions have been cut, how many people will see their wages cut and whether or not these cuts are permanent?

Mr. Pallister: The NDP led the country in creating debt and deficits and in raising taxes while we've been among the leaders as a government in creating jobs, Madam Speaker, and we'll continue to be because we are responding to support our small-business community, because we are responding to support additional training investments for our young people to get them into universities and community colleges so we can continue to support those who grow our economy in this province, including those who work in our public sector.

Madam Speaker, when 3 per cent of our resources can come from backrooms in the public service and go to the front line, that's good for the front line and that's good for Manitobans too.

Post-Secondary Education Staff Layoff Concerns

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): The Pallister government is laying off thousands of people in the midst of a pandemic. We just had the largest single-day cut in the history of our province.

Now, these cuts alone, to reporting entities such as school divisions and universities, would be enough to pay the salaries of, for example, 5,000 sessional 'instructures' for four months. Now, this would do long-lasting harm to our post-secondary institutions right now when we need them the most.

Why is the Pallister government cutting our post-secondary institutions in the midst of this pandemic?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Following the lead of his leader, Madam Speaker, the member puts more false information on the record. The fact is contrary to what he has just said.

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

Mr. Moses: Madam Speaker, you know, we need to get this clear. We need to get clear information on what this government is actually cutting. Jobs of thousands of people are on stake here.

Now, we need to increase our investment in Manitoba's universities during this time of economic recession, this crisis, and to prepare our workforce for the economy of the future for our recovery. Instead, the Pallister government is laying off people and cutting our universities.

Now, let me be clear: this is about jobs.

And so will the minister and the the Premier be clear? How many staff at our universities are being laid off because of this government's short-sightedness on cuts?

Mr. Pallister: We lead the country in new programs to support post-secondary students. We have quadrupled the amount of money available for scholarships and bursaries for young people pursuing their education. I would repeat for the member opposite: we quadrupled the investment.

We have maintained investments in our post-secondary institutions, whereas other provinces across the country have reduced theirs.

And, Madam Speaker, while all these questions are centred—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —on the public sector, we have also found ways to reduce the tax load—the tax burden on Manitobans the NDP rose 15 times in 14 years—so that the private sector could have some chance to grow as well. And they have, Madam Speaker, and they will again, thanks to the efforts of this government and their own entrepreneurial ability.

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

Mr. Moses: Madam Speaker, no other province in Canada is cutting so deeply in the midst of this pandemic. And, certainly, any sensible government

understands that our post-secondary institutions are critical to economic recovery. Yet the Pallister government is beginning and bringing forward the largest cuts to the institutions in our province's history. It makes no sense now and it makes no sense for our future.

Will the minister and the Premier account and tell us and be clear about how many staff at our post-secondary institutions are being cut because of this government's decisions?

Mr. Pallister: It's clear, Madam Speaker, that the members opposite pre-wrote their questions a week ago and didn't update them with the facts that were revealed on Monday by the Finance Minister. It is clear also that this is a political organization opposite who fails to acknowledge the reality that in the last six years of office, they doubled the provincial debt, they took our rainy day fund—our savings account, which could be used to support students in need or families in need or vulnerable people—down from close to \$1 billion to \$100 million. And now they're experts in saving money and in investing.

Madam Speaker, the actions of the previous administration and of these critics of this administration don't demonstrate that they understand how to manage anything. And the fact is that, thank goodness for the rainy day fund in our province that we set aside so we can invest in the future of this province, as we are doing, according to the Privy Council Office, to a greater degree than most other provinces across this great country.

* (14:40)

School Divisions Staff Layoff Concerns

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): COVID-19 has changed the way our children learn and what work looks like day to day for staff in our education system. And while these times are already stressful and uncertain for many, unsurprisingly the Premier is making a bad situation much, much worse by more looming job cuts.

Thousands of jobs across school divisions have already been lost over the last two months, Madam Speaker. And now, with the Premier's Monday announcement, we know that more layoffs are to come.

Will the Premier tell us today how many more Manitobans he plans on firing in the school divisions?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Education): I want to commend the work of the school divisions. I know they've had, like many different sectors in society, had a challenge to rise up to, and they have done it, Madam Speaker.

There's been great efforts that have been taken, even in these challenging times, to ensure that students continue to learn, and particularly for those who are in grade 12 who are missing out on their grade 12 year, they've taken great strides to ensure that, in the best way they can, they celebrate those grade 12 students, Madam Speaker.

So I really commend each of those who are working in our school divisions and continue to provide learning and celebration where it needs to be celebrated.

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

Ms. Fontaine: Staff across all school divisions are finding meaningful and important work for their employees. EAs are working hard to continue food programs while bus drivers are delivering hampers to families who would otherwise go without. But all of this could end with the government forcing further layoffs in all our school divisions.

Will the Premier (Mr. Pallister) commit today to reversing his plan to force these layoffs in our school divisions?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, there's no question that school divisions have had to make some difficult choices, and school divisions across Canada have. And, of course, every sector in society has, because of the pandemic.

But I would say, Madam Speaker, that our school divisions, our teachers, those who are working within the education system—and I would include those who are working within the Department of Education, my deputy minister, Grant Doak, and those who work with him—have done a tremendous job of stepping up and ensuring that students in an unprecedented and unforecast situation are continuing to learn in a way they've never had to learn before. They have done yeoman service in ensuring that our students are supported in many of the ways that the member opposite spoke about and will continue to learn during these unprecedented times.

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

Ms. Fontaine: Education continues to be cut by this Premier every single year since he took office.

Let's be clear, Madam Speaker, the Premier is using this global pandemic to finalize his austerity plan for Manitoba: \$160 million in cuts to schools, universities, municipalities, non-province—profits, public servants and now the K-to-12 education system.

Will the minister and the Premier just stop their plan and reverse their plan and force layoffs in our education system—and not force layoffs in our education system? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: The—order—the honourable Minister of Education.

Mr. Goertzen: I'm not surprised the member can't keep her story straight, Madam Speaker.

Let's be clear—let's be clear. The economic recovery began in 2016 when the NDP lost government. That is when Manitoba's economic recovery began, because that is when the 'deficit' in—deficits in good times or bad times continued under the NDP. It took this government to come in and bring some fiscal sanity to this province.

And not only did we do that, Madam Speaker, but we looked at the education system, saw that it was underfunded for many years under the NDP, including capital for schools. So we started to build schools—something that didn't happen under the NDP.

More money for operation, more money for school, more money for everybody in society, Madam Speaker, and hope for Manitobans, which they didn't have under the NDP.

Manitoba Municipalities Government Relations

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, cities, towns and municipalities need supports to maintain necessary services during this COVID-19 pandemic, yet they don't have the same powers that the Province does to mitigate some of these challenges. So, rather than step in with assistance in this unprecedented emergency, we know that this Pallister government only has one solution, and that is to force more cuts to services, to supports and to jobs. Our communities deserve better, Madam Speaker.

Why is this government doubling down on its austerity agenda at this most critical time?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Municipal Relations): I am pleased to take a question about our

government's relationship with municipalities and really want to assure all Manitobans that we are working directly with our municipalities through this pandemic, as we have every step of the way throughout the year to ensure that we have a good relationship with our municipalities and to ensure that there is direct information.

I know that several of my colleague ministers have been available to work directly and answer questions and provide information and support. We've been doing that on a regular basis.

I want to thank all the municipal leaders throughout the province of Manitoba for their contribution in helping Manitoba get through this pandemic.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Instead of truly looking to work with municipalities, Madam Speaker, this minister instead sent a letter to them last month simply directing them to find cuts in jobs and to make significant cuts in the services that they deliver.

It's show-so short-sighted, Madam Speaker. Families are relying on those services that our communities are able to deliver. Municipalities are looking for a partner that they can stand with who will work with them and provide that exceptional funding that they're looking for to mitigate this particular crisis. Rather than stepping up and working with municipalities, this minister refuses to listen to them.

Why is she refusing to listen to municipalities?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): This minister's done tremendous work in reaching out to the municipalities. She didn't call them howling coyotes; she didn't go out and shut down a third of them without telling them they were going to do that. That's what the NDP did.

We've assured the municipalities we're maintaining their funding. We've done that in the face of, perhaps, a 30 or 40 per cent reduction in our own. We've done this to assure the municipalities because the municipalities face challenges and we're partnering with them to make sure they can face them. And we're going to work together with them in a way that was never demonstrated by the previous administration in 17 years.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Not only is this minister disrespecting municipalities, she is, in fact, overstepping her bounds by forcing them to cut jobs at a time that will affect our economy in the worst way possible. This is short-sighted, Madam Speaker.

We know that both Winnipeg and Brandon have already been forced to lay off hundreds of workers because of this directive from the minister and we know that this will only extend the damage and dampen our recovery here in this province.

Will the government simply give more supports to our communities during this exceptional crisis?

Ms. Squires: You know, this member talks about disrespecting municipalities and I'm certain that that is an area that he is an expert in. Our government has respect for our municipalities. We have the most generous funding for—force municipalities in the province of Manitoba, unconditional funding for our municipalities. We've worked very closely with them to ensure that they've got the resources to work through this pandemic and we'll continue to work them throughout the year. And instead of creating panic—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: —during a pandemic, we are providing resources for municipalities when they need it the most.

Reopening the Economy Request for Child-Care Plan

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Madam Speaker, one thing is clear: no plan for reopening our economy will be successful if we don't have a child-care plan.

Unfortunately, our child-care centres don't have what they need to meet this challenge. There is great uncertainty about how they can keep kids and early childhood educators protected when they don't have the personal protective equipment that they need.

Why did the minister not include a comprehensive plan for child care when the government decided to reopen the economy?

* (14:50)

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Families): I thank the member for the question, and, of course, we have worked very closely with the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, who came forward and stated that it was fine for child-care centres to open up to 16 people—and home-based centres to open up

to eight spots for child care. So we'll continue to work with the provincial public health officer.

I also had an opportunity to work with him where we reached out to those childhood educators, the centres, and was on a call with him where he was able to answer their questions about all of the things that the member opposite is talking about. Things like washing your hands, things like social distancing and all of those things are the things that he continued to say to them. And so we'll continue to work with him as we move forward in this plan.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Notre Dame, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, the minister's plan to open 6,000 homes to child care in a matter of weeks has been a failure. The \$18 million devoted for this purpose is not being spent and we don't have child-care capacity to meet demand as Manitobans return to work.

How can we reopen our economy if workers and their children don't have reasonable access to child care?

Can the minister be clear: How many of the 6,000 home child-care centres she promised have actually opened, and will she finally address the challenges faced by our licensed child-care centres?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I'd like to, first of all, thank all of the early childhood educators who are currently looking after the children of health-care workers and many front-line service workers who were called to duty in the critical care areas, and so I want to thank them for that.

There has been a number of early childhood educators who have taken upon themselves to apply for this program. I want to thank the Manitoba chambers for their advice and working with early childhood educators to ensure that there is child care there for Manitobans when they need it.

We have been successful in matching all of those so far who have needed child care, and we will continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure that the child care is there for Manitobans when they need it.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Notre Dame, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, here's what other provinces are doing: they're providing personal protective equipment for child-care workers and they

are providing free emergency child care to essential workers and front-line health staff. The Pallister government has done none of this, instead exclusively relying on creating 6,000 home child-care spots as a solution that is not materializing.

I ask the minister again: How much of the \$18 million reserved for 6,000 home child-care spots has actually been spent, and will the minister redeploy these unspent funds towards our front-line child-care centres?

Mrs. Stefanson: Certainly, things are evolving very quickly during these extraordinary times, sometimes day by day and hour by hour, and so we will continue to work with the provincial public health officer as he gives advice to us on how many spots will be open in these centres and we'll continue to take his advice on PPE and other things like washing your hands and other advice from him when it comes to public health issues—not from members opposite. And this kind of fear mongering doesn't do anything to move things forward in this area.

We want to ensure we work with the Manitoba Child Care Association, that we work with parents to ensure that child care is there for those who need it when they need it.

Economic Recovery Use of Rainy Day Fund

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): There is no question the COVID-19 pandemic is having the brutal effect on our economy. Treasury Board released a slide deck of propaganda with some very questionable claims asking for about \$1.25 billion in cuts.

The cuts the Premier is now asking for total about \$860 million, which is \$860 million that won't be making its way onto the tables of Manitobans who are going to have to break open their piggy banks instead. It's \$860 million that won't be putting anyone to work.

But we do have a rainy day fund, Madam Speaker, and Noah's ark spent 40 days and nights with less rain than this.

If the Premier is going to tap the \$800 million—is the Premier going to tap the \$800-million rainy day fund to spare Manitobans \$800 million in payment cuts, or is he waiting for something even worse?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, I appreciate the member referencing the tremendous amount of work and effort that went into creating that rainy day fund which we now need because of the rainy days

we're experiencing. I'm curious as to why the member would deny that these are rainy days.

Because, quite frankly, Madam Speaker, this is an historic pandemic and that is why we're taking historic steps as a government to address this pandemic. We're taking steps to strengthen our front line and the resources that we're providing are of an historic nature, and we're proposing to go billions of dollars into debt this year to address the effects of this pandemic. And, quite frankly, the steps we've taken to offer supports for our small-business community, our students, our seniors are more generous than any other province in Canada.

So I'm not sure what the member is getting at. Most certainly, we're prepared to incur additional debt in this province as a consequence to the pandemic. That is precisely what we're going to do—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

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

Provincial Finances Government Record

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): This government has made some truly incredible about-faces in the last few weeks.

For the last four years, this government has frozen investments in health, education and infrastructure while running a deficit and borrowing billions to pay for tax cuts. I've spoken many times about the fact that this government has ignored the explicit warnings of rating agencies. The result is that we have weak investment, more debt and less capacity to cope in a downturn. It's a hat-trick of fiscal incompetence.

In March, after the pandemic was declared, the government claimed the most emergency-ready budget ever. Now the Finance Minister says we have to cut because Manitoba is the single most vulnerable province in this crisis.

Can the Premier explain this flip-flop and why Manitoba could be facing its third credit downgrade on his watch?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I welcome the topic the member addresses today, though he addresses it with false information.

We came into government having seen our debt as a Province double in the six years—the last six years of the NDP administration. We took steps to reduce our deficits while at the same time increasing

investments in health care, education and social services over our first term by more than a billion dollars collectively.

So we have received the first positive comments about our fiscal management in this province as recently as four months ago from the very rating agencies he now cites. That is a tremendous accomplishment, and thank goodness that happened, Madam Speaker, because we were better prepared for this pandemic than we would have been in the absence of such diligent efforts by my colleagues.

Prescription Drugs for Seniors Dispensary Fee Waiver

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Madam Speaker, since the pandemic began in Manitoba, we've been calling on this government to cover the additional dispensing fees that many Manitobans are having to pay. These additional fees are because pharmacies can only fill month-long prescriptions rather than the regular three-month prescription.

Our online petition has generated lots of support and feedback from constituents. For example, a senior contacted our office and shared with us that they have to pay over an additional \$1,000 in dispensary fees, even with the \$200 cheque they will now be receiving.

Madam Speaker, will this government cover and retroactively pay back Manitobans who have been charged additional dispensary fees?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): That member knows, like all members know, that it was all provinces and territories that undertook to respond to advice by the Canadian pharmaceutical association and other groups, including the Public Health Agency of Canada, to limit the ability to take a prescription length due to concerns around global distribution and production.

We continue to monitor the situation very carefully. We're in conversation with the federal government and our provincial and territorial counterparts on this issue, and we are—we're very aware of the situation; continue to monitor.

Gap Protection Program Support for Manitoba Businesses

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Vérendrye): Madam Speaker, the COVID-19 crises have a significant impact on small and medium-sized businesses in Manitoba, and those businesses are the backbone of our economy.

Two weeks ago, our government introduced the Manitoba Gap Protection Program that will provide support to small and medium-sized businesses.

Can the Minister of Finance provide us more details about the gap program?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Well, what a great question from the member. And our government was extremely pleased when the Premier (Mr. Pallister) announced the Manitoba Gap Protection Program that's going to support more than 20,000 businesses in Manitoba that fell between the gaps through some of the federal programs that's there.

* (15:00)

The Manitoba Gap Protection Program will support businesses to the tune of \$6,000, up to \$120 million, and if we need more, Madam Speaker, we're going to do that.

I'm very pleased to report that the first intake of the applications have been processed and more than 831 businesses have received more than \$5 million of support from this government that are in their bank accounts right now, helping them—to support them through this pandemic, Madam Speaker.

Health-Care System PPE for Front-Line Workers

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, on Monday the Finance Minister said, and I quote, the cost of personal protective equipment alone could reach \$1 billion. Yet, on that very same day, Shared Health put out guidance on their supply, saying it's volatile, and directed all staff to conserve equipment. That doesn't sound like a health system receiving \$1 billion in PPE. In fact, nurses and Home Care workers are having to provide care with far less equipment than they are comfortable.

Will the Finance and Health ministers get on the same page and ensure much-needed PPE is here for our front-line health workers?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): The member has just described the situation that is being experienced in every single country across the globe, including here in Canada, which is a desire for personal protective equipment and the recognition that even though heroic efforts are being undertaken every day to provide and supply those protective equipments, they are in short supply. And that is why our government has acted. That's why we are procuring actively; going from a

regular list of 50 providers, we're engaging with 500 providers of equipment. We're testing, we're acquiring, we're bringing that equipment in and distributing it in a way that makes sense and gets the equipment to those who most need it.

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

Home Care Services During Pandemic Protection for Workers and Clients

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, I look forward to the minister confirming that \$1 billion in PPE is on its way to Manitoba.

For now, unfortunately, our front-line workers are having to do with far less, as confirmed by Shared Health's own guidance. In fact, right now in Home Care, workers don't have what they need to do their jobs. The results are cuts to services, including baths and showers, that families describe as inhumane.

What steps is the minister taking to meet the needs of Home Care clients and ensure their needs are being met during this challenging time?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): We're meeting those needs, we're in active conversation with Home Care, and we're doing everything we can.

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, we have many, many families writing us, saying that important services for their loved ones are being cut. Seniors and people with disabilities are having to do without baths and showers and basic services. Families are concerned that their loved ones aren't getting the basic care that they need. Workers need necessary supports to do their jobs safely.

When will the minister restore Home Care services and ensure our Home Care workers can do their jobs safely?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): This minister's done an exemplary job of demonstrating in a real way our support for our most vulnerable in society.

Speaking of which, it is, Madam Speaker, important to recognize the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands, when historic Canadians helped to free the Dutch people. After years of harsh occupation, a proud victory came at a terrible cost. And it should be remembered by all of us.

And so I would hope all of us would take a moment to reflect on the incredible sacrifices of those veterans who stood by people around this world when

they were needed, just as our front-line workers are doing now for all of us.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Dauphin Correctional Centre

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly:

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The provincial government plans to close the Dauphin Correctional Centre, DCC, in May 2020.

The DCC is one of the largest employers in Dauphin, providing the community with good, family-supporting jobs.

(3) Approximately 80 families will be directly affected by the closure, which will also impact the local economy.

(4) As of January 27th, 2020, Manitoba's justice system was already more than 250 inmates overcapacity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Justice to immediately reverse the decision to close the DCC and proceed with the previous plan to build a new correctional and healing centre and expanded courthouse in Dauphin.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with our rule 133(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

Personal-Care Homes

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Manitoba elders and seniors have built this province and should receive a high level of support, having earned the right to be treated with due respect, dignity, understanding and compassion as a fundamental human right.

Seniors who reside in personal-care homes have more diverse and complex physical and brain health issues today than those who were in similar homes even just five years ago, yet the staffing formula, or minimal personal-personnel requirement, is over 20 years old.

The issue of the changes to, and more complex nature of, care is being exacerbated by the provincial government policy of discharging people out of hospitals more quickly, leaving many residents still in need of a high level of care.

Manitoba does not have enough health-care aides and nurses specifically trained to care for seniors with high and complex levels of physical and mental issues such as those with dementia, coupled with multiple chronic conditions.

The added complexity of care with such residents is putting additional stress on doctors and family members, as it may take six to eight weeks for a doctor to see a resident in a personal-care home.

Unfortunately, the lack of quality care received by many residents is not unique, causing one person to say that: It was easier to watch my dad die in the personal-care home than to watch him live in the personal-care home.

Staff are so overworked that they are forced to tell senior elders and residents in need: Go in your diaper; I can't help you; or: You will get food eventually.

Relatives are also being told that residents in care homes should not ever expect to walk again after hip or knee replacement surgery because care homes are not set up for rehabilitation.

The provincial government has allowed personal-care homes to serve food that is warmed from frozen instead of being freshly cooked, depriving seniors the taste of good food, which is one of the few real pleasures that they would be able to enjoy at this time of life.

Although residents enter personal-care homes to have the best possible quality of life in their last few days, weeks, months or years, relatives repeatedly hear the words: He came here to die; and: She came here to die.

Relatives are regularly angry, frustrated, disappointed and shocked at the care their loved ones now receive in Manitoba's personal-care homes.

Administrators in personal-care homes respond to complaints by stating they need more and better-trained staff.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to increase training and staffing requirements for personal-care homes in Manitoba to ensure residents receive high-quality, nutritious food as well as compassionate care.

Signed by Peggi Talbot, Lloyd Talbot, Daniel [phonetic] Nelson and many others.

Dauphin Correctional Centre

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the member—to the Legislative Assembly:

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government plans to close the Dauphin Correctional Centre, DCC, in May 2020.

(2) The DCC is one of the largest employers in Dauphin, providing the community with good, family-supporting jobs.

* (15:10)

(3) Approximately 80 families will be directly affected by the closure, which will also impact the local economy.

(4) As of January 27th, 2020, Manitoba's justice system was already more than 250 inmates overcapacity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Justice to immediately reverse the decision to close the DCC and proceed with the previous plan to build a new correctional and healing centre with an expanded courthouse in Dauphin.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Boniface.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise—

Madam Speaker: No. We're on petitions.

Mr. Lamont: Oh—

Madam Speaker: Are there are further petitions?

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly:

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government plans to close the Dauphin Correctional Centre, DCC, in May 2020.

(2) The DCC is one of the largest employers in Dauphin, providing the community with good, family-supporting jobs.

(3) Approximately 80 families will be directly affected by the closure, which will also impact the local economy.

(4) As of January 27, 2020, Manitoba's justice system was already more than 250 inmates overcapacity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Justice to immediately reverse the decision to close the DCC and proceed with the previous plan to build a new correctional and healing centre with an expanded courthouse in Dauphin.

Signed by Mabel Sanderson, Russell Sanderson and Regan Wilkinson, and many more Manitobans.

Miigwech.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government plans to close the Dauphin Correctional Centre, DCC, in May 2020.

(2) The DCC is the largest employer in Dauphin—excuse me—the DCC is one of the largest employers in Dauphin, providing the community with good, family-supporting jobs.

Approximately 80 families will be directly affected by the closure, which will impact the local economy.

As of January 27, 2020, Manitoba's justice system was already more than 250 inmates overcapacity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Justice to immediately reverse the decision to close the DCC and proceed with the previous plan to build a new correctional and healing centre with an expanded courthouse in Dauphin.

And this has been signed by Linda Skwark, Charlene Flatfoot and Diane Chaychuk.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further petitions?

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly:

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The provincial government plans to close the Dauphin Correctional Centre, the DCC, in May 2020.

The DCC is one of the largest employers in Dauphin, providing the community with good, family-supporting jobs.

Approximately 80 families will be directly affected by the closure, which will also impact the local economy.

And as of January 27th, 2020, Manitoba's justice system was already more than 250 inmates overcapacity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Justice to immediately reverse the decision to close the DCC and proceed with the previous plan to build a new correctional and healing centre with an expanded courthouse in Dauphin.

This has been signed by many Manitobans. Thank you.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government plans to close the Dauphin Correctional Centre, the DCC, in May 2020.

(2) The DCC is one of the largest employers in Dauphin, providing the community with good, family-supporting jobs.

(3) Approximately 80 families will be directly affected by the closure, which will also impact the local economy.

(4) As of January 27th, 2020, Manitoba's justice system was already more than 250 inmates overcapacity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Justice to immediately reverse the decision to close the DCC and proceed with the previous plan to build a new correctional and healing centre with an expanded courthouse in Dauphin.

And this petition, Madam Speaker, is signed by many Manitobans.

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Madam Speaker: I have been notified that a member wishes to bring forward a matter of urgent public importance.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I move 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 urgent attention to discuss the proposed cuts and layoffs announced earlier this week to government and government entities, as well as the need for the Province of Manitoba to provide an accurate financial update.

Madam Speaker: Before recognizing the honourable member for St. Boniface, I should remind all members that under rule 38(2), the mover of the motion on a matter of urgent public importance and one member from the other recognized parties in the House are allowed not more than 10 minutes to explain the urgency of debating the matter immediately. As stated in Beauchesne's citation 390, urgency in this context means the urgency of immediate debate, not of the subject matter of the motion.

*(15:20)

In their remarks, members should focus exclusively on whether or not there is urgency of debate and whether or not the ordinary opportunities for debate will enable the House to consider the matter early enough to ensure that the public interest will not suffer.

Mr. Lamont: Madam Speaker, this is the first time I've had a chance to address this issue because the news and events that have come to light since our last sitting on April 15th. Manitoba Liberals first called for an economic update from this government on March 16th, nearly two months ago. During that

time there have been a whole series of measures introduced and what I would call government by stealth.

On the last time we—the last time we sat in April this House voted to grant the government an allocation of \$1 billion and permission to borrow a further \$5 billion, but in the following days we learned that ministers were already sending out letters that day across Manitoba demanding massive cuts from municipalities, school boards, and other organizations, non-profits that are outside the—that are actually outside of core government.

They made the request that—the demand, really, that organizations find between 10 and 30 per cent in cuts or the government would follow, and if those cuts were not made, the government threatened to impose legislation and bring them in that way.

We've been asking for an economic update for this government for a number of weeks, and it's absolutely critical for us as legislators to be able to do our jobs properly and for the sake of the public to be aware of the actual financial state of the Province, what the budget is going to look like now, and to discuss and debate the impacts of these proposed cuts which, as we've heard, are on the order of \$860 million.

The fact is, Madam Speaker, that we are extremely concerned with the messaging that's been coming out as well when it comes to the issues around this that we don't—one of the most important things—there's a very famous writer, who studied the 1918 pandemic, said: One of the most important things in a crisis is that people have to be told truths, including hard truths, and we are extremely concerned that many of these—many of the statements that are being made, including the Treasury Board document, have since proven to be very inaccurate, to say the least.

So we do believe that it's critical for us to have a debate on this matter at the time. The other is that even just to say that there have been a number of statements which, I believe, as I said, are manipulative and inaccurate when it comes to what—the government going on the record to justify these cuts. It's been suggested that these cuts are necessary, which is a matter for debate. It's been suggested that these cuts have to happen in order to redirect funds to the front line of health care, but the fact is that that is also a matter for debate, that these are questions that need to be discussed because it's just as probable that those—that we actually dispute the fact that any of these cuts

need to be made and that any of these funds are actually going to health care. This is about deficit reduction and not reallocating funds to the front line.

This is an absolutely critical decision when we talk with the magnitude of the cuts being discussed, and, again, we simply do not have a—we don't have an idea of what the picture of this—of the Province's financial situation. We don't know where the recommendations and what consultation took place in order to make these recommendations and whether there are any projections on the impact from independent sources who are able to judge the impact of \$860 million lost from the provincial economy.

So, again, I—Madam Speaker, that this is the first time we've had an opportunity to discuss this matter. This is the first time back in the House because of these extraordinary circumstances, but extraordinary circumstances require extraordinary oversight and we believe that's why we should be having an emergency debate on this matter of urgent public importance.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew), or the honourable Government House Leader. Okay—

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): On the matter of privilege—

Madam Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader.

Mr. Goertzen: On the MUPI—sorry; there's so many matters that are raised you sometimes get confused. On the matter of urgent public importance, Madam Speaker, while I do appreciate the leader of the Liberal caucus bringing forward the MUPI, because I don't think anybody would dispute that the issue of COVID-19 and the response, and people can have different views on the response, is an important issue, and I don't think anyone would suggest otherwise. It is certainly something that all of us are finding is probably one of the most challenging things that we have had to deal with as a government, and I would suspect that members opposite would say it's some of the most challenging things they've had to deal with just as individual MLAs. My experience has been in my constituency office that the number of emails has gone up four or five times the normal amount because people have questions and want to know procedural questions and have questions about some of the different announcements that are happening. So I would never dismiss the member opposite's comments

that this is an important issue. It clearly is an important issue.

The issue of whether it rises to the level of a matter of urgent public importance is something different, though, Madam Speaker. When we're talking about whether or not something qualifies as a MUPI, it really is about whether or not it is so urgent that the matters of the day have to be set aside, because there is no other reasonable time to raise the issues that the member opposite has put into his MUPI, but, in fact, we just went through a question period, a regular question period of 40 minutes, where all of the questions focused on the issue of the pandemic; each one focused on that issue. And that is as it should be. And so there's been that opportunity to question government fully in that question period on the response of government when it comes to the matter of 'urgic' public importance, including the Liberals, who had the opportunity himself and another member of his caucus to ask questions about the response to the pandemic.

And so I don't dismiss that it's an important issue, Madam Speaker, but the member opposite has not been denied his opportunity to ask questions on this important issue. He's been given that opportunity. He may even be able to reference in some way the pandemic on debate that happens this afternoon, depending on what happens with other debate in the afternoon. And so he is not devoid of opportunity to raise questions and to raise points on this important issue, but I don't believe that it satisfies the requirements of a matter of urgent public importance.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I rise in support of this being considered a matter of urgent public importance, and so I support the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont) in him advancing this as a topic of debate for this afternoon.

Now, I want to begin by acknowledging that matters of urgent public importance usually never succeed in winning the day as the topic of debate. Typically, we just proceed with the normal government business that is called. However, I think that we all recognize in this Chamber that we are currently in a very unique situation. The pandemic is an unprecedented context through any of, I think, our lived experiences, and we also have to acknowledge that not only is there a pandemic, there's also a recession which has been caused by people participating in the public health orders that have been implemented and the restrictions on work and travel and commerce that have resulted.

Now, when we consider that there are two crises facing our province right now at the same time—a public health emergency in the form of a pandemic and a very, very difficult recession that has been caused in the wake of that pandemic—it seems to me that the debate on one of the few days this month that we are permitted to gather here in the Legislature should be devoted to those topics.

So, again, I think the current context suggests that what is happening outside the Legislature should direct the proceedings within the Legislature to take up what normally would be considered extraordinary means. Normally, a matter of urgent public importance, that thing succeeding, that would be extraordinary. However, given the unprecedented and, indeed, truly, you know, life-changing situation that we see outside this building, I suggest that the time is right for us to allow a matter of urgent public importance to be considered.

My esteemed colleague, the Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen), a short time ago, said that these topics could have been raised in question period and, in fact, were, according to his discourse. And it is true, we did raise the topic of the \$860-million cut many times in question period. We pointed out that this is the largest single-day cut in Manitoba's history. We asked specifically—and this is the part that's germane to why this is a urgent question and why the timeliness criteria should be fulfilled—we asked several times specific, pointed questions that I believe Manitobans are entitled to have answers to. Specifically, we asked how many layoffs have been directed by this government.

* (15:30)

We also asked, because the government has made much public fanfare about the possibility of reduced work weeks, more unpaid days off for public sector workers—so we asked, well, how many people will be taking home a reduced paycheque as a result of the government's orders. And then finally, we also asked questions about whether these cuts will be permanent.

In their entirety, these questions can be taken as us standing up for jobs in Manitoba. Of course, we have many ideas for how we can support jobs, many ideas about how we can advance private sector job creation, how we can keep people working in the public sector, not-for-profit space. And, indeed, I propose that these conversations about how we should support jobs in Manitoba right now should be the subject of debate in the Legislature this afternoon.

However, when we brought forward these questions to the government on many occasions—personally, I asked the Premier (Mr. Pallister) six times. Other critics asked the government multiple times on post-secondary issues, on health-care issues, on child-care issues, on municipal issues, on education issues. Not once was a specific, direct answer provided.

And, by the withholding of this information which is known to the government—certainly, the government is aware of how many layoffs they've ordered, of how many people will be taking home a reduced paycheque during the pandemic, of how many people will be facing the prospect of having these job losses made permanent—the very withholding, the lack of disclosure of that information to this Chamber tells us that we have been denied the opportunity to fulsomely debate this topic, the topic of jobs, the topic of an economic recovery in Manitoba, and the questioning of this government's mishandling of our economy in the wake of this pandemic.

So, because the government's answers were evasive and did not respond directly to the substantive points that were raised many times in question period, I propose to you, Madam Speaker, the question period was not, in fact, an able venue for us to carry out this debate.

As a result, we must have the opportunity in this Chamber to dive deeper and to pose these questions to government again. We will continue these measures outside of the Chamber, but when we have only one day a week to come in here and examine these matters, I suggest that we ought to be permitted at this time, given the hundreds of thousands of people who are losing jobs or wages outside, that we ought to focus on those issues inside this Chamber.

The question of timeliness, to me, also raises the spectre of our limited time here in the Chamber and whether or not our time here is being devoted to serving the people of Manitoba to the maximum extent. The government is preparing this afternoon to call forward a bill that would deal with the building codes, that would deal with permitting, that would deal with electrical standards.

Now, certainly, we can have a debate about the merits of that bill, and we will bring up many, many valid criticisms that we've heard from Manitobans in the community with disabilities, about Manitobans who are municipal leaders, about Manitobans who have other concerns.

Certainly, we will bring those criticisms forward, but, again, considering the fact that we are in an unprecedented pandemic and a recession that many economists are predicting could be as bad or even worse than the great financial crisis of 2008 or perhaps even on the scale of the Great Depression, to me, we ought to be talking about jobs and the economy in this Chamber today.

These bills that the government is trying to call for debate are not the most urgent topics that the public wants us to be dealing with. These standards around permitting, they can wait 'til after the pandemic. These other bills that the government has in mind to bring forward, they can wait 'til after the pandemic. They will not substantively affect Manitoba's ability to combat the pandemic with public health tools, nor will they substantively aid Manitobans to usher in the economic recovery that I believe we all want.

What would advance those interests is a substantive, meaningful and fully articulated democratic debate in this Chamber about jobs, about the people who are losing jobs in the private sector, about the layoffs that are being implemented in the public sector by this government, about what strategies we ought to implement so that we can pave the way for a recovery.

We know that the province is reopening some sectors of the economy this week. That makes a discussion on jobs and the economy perfectly timely. If you were to ask the average Manitoban outside this Chamber the topic that we should be debating here today, should it have to do with amendments to the Building Code, which I suggest would probably lose the interest of this person you're asking within a few seconds of you posing the question; should we be debating topics about the Building Code; or should we be in here fighting for every single job that we can in Manitoba, I am certain that one hundred per cent of Manitobans would tell you, you should be talking about jobs. You should be dealing with the economy. You should be pressing the government on what plan that they have to put the economy back in motion.

So I think that when you examine the criteria of timeliness and you consider that point within the context of the current recession in which we are faced, and you weigh that relative to the great impact that those who are being put out of work are feeling, I believe that this matter of urgent public importance does, in fact, fulfill the timeliness criteria and

therefore should be the focus of our debate in the House this afternoon.

Madam Speaker: I thank the honourable members for their advice the Chair on the motion proposed by the honourable member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont).

The notice required by rule 38(1) was provided. Under our rules and practices, the subject matter requiring urgent consideration must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if the matter is not given immediate attention. There must also be no other reasonable opportunities to raise the matter.

I have listened very carefully to the arguments put forward, as this is an issue that some members may have a keen interest in. Unfortunately, this motion does not fit the criteria as a matter of urgent public importance, as there are other opportunities that can be used to raise this issue, including oral questions, members' statements, petitions and grievances.

With the greatest of respect, the motion is out of order as a matter of urgent public importance.

GRIEVANCES

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a grievance.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): It's unfortunate that I have to raise some of these issues that I'm going to raise in this fashion as a grievance. It's just that the answers, when we do get them from various ministers, are so lacking that it has to be brought to the public's attention of what's taking place.

Currently, in Flin Flon, as, Madam Speaker, I'm sure you are well aware, the obstetrics department is shut down. So we know all about that. But since we've last sat in this Chamber, this government has now shut down the operating room in the Flin Flon General Hospital as well.

Now, the odds of two positions having performance issues at the same time strikes me as odd, to say the least. I wouldn't want to go much further down the road of how odd that strikes me, but here we are in the middle of the worst health crisis that this country has ever seen, and this government allows the surgeon to depart from Flin Flon—well, they didn't allow it, they made it happen—and they've gotten rid of the anesthesiologist. Now, I can understand, okay, there's something wrong with the surgeon—and I'm not saying there was, because we don't have any facts to deal with because everything's a private matter, of course—but then to get rid of the anesthesiologist, who

could do so many other vital functions in this COVID-19 pandemic, that now we don't have that opportunity, not just in the city of Flin Flon, but it's in the entire catchment area.

* (15:40)

I'm not sure if, Madam Speaker, you follow the news out of Saskatchewan—of course, I follow it a little closer seeing as half the city of Flin Flon is in Saskatchewan and our friends and neighbours live in Creighton just over the border. Right now, in what's called the far north of Saskatchewan, which are neighbours to Creighton and Denare Beach and a few of the other First Nations communities that come into our community for health care have seen some of the largest spikes in COVID-19 cases anywhere of late in Saskatchewan or Manitoba. There are well up over 90 confirmed cases.

A goodly portion of those people come to the Flin Flon General Hospital for medical care. If they're having breathing issues, they come to the Flin Flon General Hospital. But there's no point coming there anymore because they've let the anesthesiologist go. And that was one of his primary functions, right, was to help with ventilators, to help with those kinds of issues, amongst a bunch of other things. I mean, he wasn't just there to help with surgeries, although certainly that was a major part of his function.

So, when I first heard of this, it was really through the rumour mill that we'd first heard it, became aware in our constituency office. So I immediately reached out to Helga Bryant, the CEO of the Northern Health Region, the Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living (Mr. Friesen) and the chairman of the board of the northern regional health authority. And I will table that letter that I sent. That was on April 23rd that I sent that. And I would suggest maybe wait, because I've got a bunch of letters to table.

So I sent that. While I was awaiting a reply, which I did finally get on April 29th from the CEO—and it says the usual things that they say every time we've lost a doctor in Flin Flon, whether it's in writing or just on the phone, that, well, we have a hard time attracting doctors and we'll do everything in our power to try and get doctors and, you know, it's on and on, it's—they have a short-term contingency plan. So really, we were asking, will this be a temporary thing, or will this be a permanent thing? Well, they have a temporary contingency plan and, you know, they're going to work on something.

So right now I know of at least one case where a person from Flin Flon showed up at the Flin Flon hospital with breathing problems—sorry, can't help you. Now, the only part of the story I don't know is did she go by ambulance or did she have to drive herself to The Pas, and I suspect she drove herself there or had her significant other drive her.

So they talk about—Helga, the CEO, talks about this sustainable solution. There must be an expectation and, indeed, a requirement that a reasonable call schedule for OR physicians that involves having upwards of a group of four specialists. And she goes on to say, you and I both know deep down, 'despite' our most optimistic hopes, that's not feasible, affordable or possible to organize for this region.

So then I'm left to ask the question, well, why isn't it? Other hospitals in that region have surgeons. Thompson hospital, part of the Northern Health Region, has surgeons, has anesthesiologists, has everything they need. Well, The Pas, where they're now sending our people, has surgeons, has anesthesiologists, has an operating theatre. When Thompson's operating rooms were shut down, they didn't send those surgeries to Flin Flon, they sent them to Winnipeg. I guess the surgeons in Thompson sat with their feet up for a couple of months.

So the question is, what is it that stops us from attracting surgeons to Flin Flon, and the answer is it's the desire by this government and this health region to not attract doctors, surgeons or anesthesiologists to that hospital.

So, when the minister phoned me a week after the fact to give me a heads up, which was a little late, to say the least, I asked him what's wrong at that facility. Well, he'd never heard any complaints. So, clearly, he hasn't been listening for the last four years because there's been nothing but complaints.

And, before I go too far off on that, I want to also table a letter in response that I sent to the Northern Health Region, again to CEO Helga Bryant, regarding our seniors homes, because one of the issues that I was first involved in here was the shortage of staff in those homes, and that was a number of years ago. So I was concerned now, listening to the conditions that seniors are exposed to and the death rate in those seniors homes elsewhere, do we have sufficient staff in our health-care homes, in our seniors homes in Flin Flon?

And the answer I got back was: file a Freedom of Information request. That's the kind of care that people in Flin Flon get from this government, Madam

Speaker. They should all be ashamed of themselves. They should all hang their heads.

But, no; it's just somewhere in the North, so they don't care. And I'll table all those letters and responses now. The Minister of Health made disparaging remarks about northern MLAs in the last sitting here, and I'm here to speak up for people in the North because this government clearly doesn't know what takes place north of the 53rd parallel, or outside the Perimeter of Winnipeg.

I could go on a lot longer about things that this government is ignoring, or worse than ignoring—purposely shutting down, which is what it appears to be they're doing with the Flin Flon General Hospital. It appears their whole intent is to turn it into a nursing station and ignore the people on both sides of the border in Flin Flon that need to have proper health care. They should all be ashamed of themselves, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Oh, are there any further grievances? There being no further grievances, orders of the day, government business.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, would you please call for government business this afternoon, Bill 49, The Building and Electrical Permitting Improvement Act (Various Acts Amended and Permit Dispute Resolution Act Enacted).

SECOND READINGS

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

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider second reading of Bill 49 this afternoon.

I will now call, then, Bill 49, the building and—I will now call second reading of 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 Education (Mr. Goertzen), 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 la résolution des litiges connexes (modification de diverses dispositions législatives et édicition de la Loi sur la résolution des litiges en matière de permis), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been advised of the bill, and I would like to table her message.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Municipal Relations (Ms. Squires), seconded by the honourable Minister of Education (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 49, The Building and Electrical Permitting Improvement Act (Various Acts Amended and Permit Dispute Resolution Act Enacted), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been advised of the bill, and the message was tabled.

* (15:50)

Ms. Squires: I am very delighted to rise again to put some comments on the record about Bill 49. This bill establishes a new permit dispute resolution act and makes a variety of amendments to The Buildings and Mobile Homes Act and The Manitoba Hydro Act that will create process to hear appeals of permitting decisions and orders related to the building and electrical codes, as well as allow for the establishment of service standards for permitting authorities in Manitoba.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

The bill implements some key recommendations made by the Treasury Board Secretary in the Planning, Zoning and Permitting in Manitoba review that was published last June, 2019, by establishing avenues for technical appeals and service standards. It will bring Manitoba in line with our other Canadian jurisdictions which already offer technical appeal mechanisms on code issues.

This means that permit applications and building owners aggrieved by code compliance decisions of building and electrical permitting authorities will have the ability to appeal to a technical adjudicator. Adjudicators' decisions will be made publicly available and serve as a guidance to code users and enforcement bodies, following best practices from other Canadian jurisdictions.

These proposed changes will ensure greater consistency, transparency and accountability of

appeals across the province. The bill will allow for the adoption of service standards that will require building and electrical permitting authorities to process permit applications within time frames established by regulation. This follows Ontario's model where building permits must be processed within 10 to 30 business days, depending on the complexity of the building.

Additionally, this bill will require that Manitoba adopt future versions of the national model construction codes with—within fixed time frames to improve harmonization with other jurisdictions and ensure that Manitoba meets commitments under the Canadian Free Trade Agreement.

The bill will ensure that there is only one electrical code for Manitoba, ensuring consistent code application between the City of Winnipeg and the rest of the province. Other changes to The Buildings and Mobile Homes Act will streamline administrative processes and allow for the modernization of mobile home requirements.

I'd like to also thank the numerous stakeholders, municipal leaders and members of the opposition who attended many Zoom briefings on this bill. It was very challenging to go through a very technical bill via other online platforms but I appreciate the patience and the willingness of the members to work together so that we could conduct these bill briefings, and I look forward to the debate on this bill.

Thank you, Madam—Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Questions

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A question period up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be asked—addressed to the minister by the member of—the following sequence: first question by the official opposition critic or designate; subsequent questions will be asked from each of the independent members; remaining questions asked by any opposition members; and no questions or answers shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Maybe the minister could begin by simply tabling or listing the organizations and individuals that her department consulted with and reached out to with regards to this piece of legislation.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Municipal Relations): Well, I can assure the member that we did consult with subject matter experts; large

corporations; construction; hospitality; manufacturing; food processing and agribusiness industries throughout the province; the Winnipeg Metro Region; Economic Development Winnipeg; engineering firms; trade and professional associations; construction and homebuilders' associations; cottagers; project management consultants; and current and former City of Winnipeg executives.

Mr. Wiebe: Perhaps the minister could provide more detail with regards to some of those consultations, perhaps in a tabled document as the process goes forward.

One group, of course, that I heard missing from that list were accessibility organizations, such as Barrier-Free Manitoba. I'm wondering if the minister had consultations with that particular organization or any other organizations concerned with accessibility for Manitobans here in the province.

Ms. Squires: I assure the member that when we adopt national building codes in consistent—that are consistent with what are—what is laid out in the code as well as what other jurisdictions are doing across the country, accessibility advocates will be very pleased, and it will certainly enhance the lives of those who have challenges addressing—or, accessing premises in the city and the province that are not working to updated code.

So I look forward to the member's support of this bill so that we can ensure the adoption of National Building code standards on a very timely basis to benefit the accessibility communities.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's my understanding that the National Building Code of 2015 has not been accepted yet by Manitoba.

I would ask the minister why she has—her government has delayed for so long, because that building code was brought forward in 2015. And is this to make up for the delay that her government actually was responsible for, to now try and accelerate things?

Ms. Squires: So we know that adoption of building codes is very important, especially if you're a builder or a developer or a property owner who lives in one of our border towns, such as Flin Flon or Creighton or Virden and Elkhorn versus Moosomin, Saskatchewan. We know that if you're building in Moosomin, Saskatchewan, you're going to have 74 different restrictions—or, in Manitoba, you'll have

74 different restrictions to build for hurricane standards that you won't find in Moosomin.

So the discrepancies are very challenging. We know that the building codes were not adopted in 2005, 2010 or 2015 by the previous government, and we're working to ensure an expedient adoption of the building codes. And that's laid out in this bill.

Mr. Wiebe: So I just want to note for the record, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the minister clearly said that she has not consulted with accessibility advocates here in the province, and I find that very concerning.

Maybe the minister could just expand on her knowledge and give us a bit more of an idea of how exactly this act will impact accessibility for Manitobans and the act which governs those regulations.

Ms. Squires: Well, I do appreciate the member's question and, of course, a consistent process for administering building and electrical codes will benefit all of Manitobans, particularly those vulnerable, such as the disability community. And I certainly wish that the member had this zeal for—of ensuring safe buildings were created in the province of Manitoba when his party was in government. They failed to update the Manitoba fire codes that required carbon monoxide detection in a variety of municipal and provincial buildings and put many people's lives at risk.

Our government is taking a different approach. We're trying to adopt standards and make our communities better, our buildings more accessible, safe and—for all Manitobans.

Mr. Wiebe: We know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that decisions of the board that will be appointed by the Cabinet are not subject to any kind of appeal of any sort according to section 12 of the act. Presumably, that also means on matters that have to do with the jurisdictions and law questions.

We, of course, have serious concerns about the legality of those clauses. What legal advice did the minister receive with regards to this extraordinary power of these particular members of the board?

Ms. Squires: As I had said—stated in a previous question, we did broad consultation. And we know that getting consistent standards and a consistent approach towards the adoption of building and permitting in the province of Manitoba will certainly create a better province for all.

Not only will we have more safe buildings throughout the province of Manitoba, we know that unnecessary permitting delays have had a \$2-million negative impact per day on municipal and provincial revenues. That's \$2 million a day in lost revenue that provinces and municipal treasuries have endured due to these unnecessary delays and inconsistency in permitting.

So what we've done is we've created a consistent process where we can have a more reliable framework that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time is up.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, again, Madam Speaker, we're talking about commissioners who are appointed by this minister and then who cannot be removed for any reason, and so have extraordinary powers. They have the ability to make these decisions without any kind of scrutiny. There's no ability to appeal any of their decisions. And these—this could have serious legal implications.

* (16:00)

So what I'm asking is for the minister to talk about the legal opinion, which she received, which gives her confidence that, in fact, this structure would, in fact, be something that would uphold the stringent requirements under the law, which, at this point—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Ms. Squires: Well, I appreciate the member's interest in the move—the proposal to move towards adjudicators instead of an appeal board, and we know that creating an independent adjudicator role will provide a similarly effective third-party technical appeal process while focusing on technical facts. When people are hearing an appeal of a building code infraction, there are a lot of technical—there's a lot of technical information presented, and one needs to be a National Building Code expert and have the technical expertise to be able to efficiently and effectively hear those appeals. We've created a system where we would have experts in these appeal positions and not politicians.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, it appears that the minister is not interested in answering questions with regards to the legality of this decision. Maybe what she could just let the House know, and let Manitobans know, is who this government has spoken to. Who is this government looking to appoint as these commissioners? Who has

she spoken to? Who has the Premier (Mr. Pallister) directed her to speak to in order to sit on this particular appeal board and have any of those individuals agreed to sit on that board or agree to fulfill that role?

Ms. Squires: So, while the member is asking about a hypothetical question, and we have not even passed the bill nor have we developed the regulations, so we have not have—we do not have the appointment of the independent expert already lined up. I can assure the member that we have consulted, and we have a 14-member provincial working group that serves as our advisers in this role—includes Susan Thompson, who is a community leader, an entrepreneur, politician, diplomat, philanthropic fundraiser. We've got Karl Loepp, who is the chief operating officer of Private Pension Partners. We have Don Streuber, the executive chair of Bison Transport. We have Martin McGarry, who's the president and CEO of Cushman & Wakefield Stevenson. We have Michael Jack, the chief corporate services officer for the City of Winnipeg. We have Laren Bill—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time is up.

Mr. Wiebe: And I encourage the minister to continue her list, if she could; that would be very much appreciated.

Again, this isn't a hypothetical, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is a bill that this member has deemed as being so important here in the midst of a global pandemic that it is the first order of business that we need to debate here this afternoon, in fact, I believe, the only order of business that has been called by the Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen).

So it's a simple question: Who has this minister contacted? Who has the Premier contacted? And, if she'd like to table these documents to give more background for the House, I think I'd be very happy to receive those and we can proceed through this process in a way that gives us more information—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Ms. Squires: Again, I'm very pleased to have an opportunity to once again not only list into Hansard the names of the 14-member working group that has helped us with the collaboration and the development of this legislation thus far. But it also gives me an opportunity to personally thank them for their service and their dedication to the province of Manitoba.

So I'd mentioned that we have Laren Bill, the chair of Treaty Land Entitlement Implementation Monitoring Committee, on our working group; Dr. Annette Trimbee, president of University of Winnipeg, John Winthrop *[phonetic]*, the planner at Richard Winthrop and Associates; Dayna Spiring, president and CEO of Economic Development Winnipeg; Mike Scatliff, the director of Scatliff Miller and Murray; Christian Korell, owner and CEO of Barns & Duncan; Ron Hambley, president, Winnipeg Construction Association; and Colleen Sklar, the executive director of the Winnipeg Metro Region.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time is up.

Mr. Wiebe: In the minister's list of folks that she has consulted with, I noticed a few notable absences. Maybe the minister could talk a little bit about AMM's position on this particular piece of legislation, and maybe she could just update the House on the last time that she spoke to Mayor Bowman about this particular piece of legislation and share some of the thoughts that the mayor passed along and concerns he may have had of Bill 49.

Ms. Squires: The consultation process on this bill is very extensive, and it goes back to about a year ago, on June 11th, when the Treasury Board Secretariat had tabled its report, and we made that public and we did a lot of consultation at that time. And then it was part of our electoral platform, where we had a lot of engaging conversations with Manitobans at the doorstep while we were securing our second largest mandate—second biggest mandate in the province's history, and then shortly after the election in September we had a working group get together. We had a public luncheon where the mayor was present, and he also spoke and he got to meet Dr. Bill Murray *[phonetic]*, who was one of the advisers that we had worked with. And we had an extensive consultation process—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time is up.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, that's very telling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the minister couldn't identify the position of AMM with regard to this bill. And maybe more concerning, she is, I think, trying to claim that brushing by the mayor at a function constitutes some sort of consultation. If I'm wrong, I'd be happy for the minister to correct the record here this afternoon.

Did the minister consider any other enhanced dispute resolution process that was not so focused at the provincial level, and instead allowed for some input at the local level for disputes at all?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Ms. Squires: So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I apologize to the House. I misspoke in my previous answer. I had called our independent expert that we had obtained advice from, Bill Murray *[phonetic]*. His name is not, in fact, Bill Murray *[phonetic]*. It is Bob Murray. He's a consultant and president of the Grande Prairie Regional College. So I apologize for that mistake that I have made on the record.

And in regard to the consultation process, again, I can assure the member that AMM—all members of AMM, we've had extensive briefings and consultation with them as well as City of Winnipeg. I had a very—just recently I had a very productive conversation with many members of city council as we walked through the proposed bill and we've had consultations right up until the development of this bill. So I do believe that we have fulfilled our role to consult—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time is up.

Mr. Wiebe: So, I guess, you know, the minister has once again not put on the record any information about what she feels AMM's position on this bill is, refuses to name the mayor as one of the folks that she consulted with.

Maybe what I could just drill down on is could the minister give us some indication, if this bill was to go forward today or next week or the week after that or sometime this spring, during this global pandemic, how does she expect average Manitobans to have their say, to have their input and to get their concerns on the record with regards to Bill 49?

Ms. Squires: The member opposite raised a really important fact, and that's how we've been able to conduct hearings and public meetings throughout this pandemic. And the member would know that municipalities, for example, have obligations under The Municipal Act to hold their proceedings in a live format and to be very public with their proceedings. So we've enabled changes to allow councils to hear hearings and to meet, and I would anticipate that in the province we would do something similar and just work towards having the greatest transparency and accountability as well as allowing members of the public to come and present in a way that is safe.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for question period has expired.

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Debate is open.

Any speakers?

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is certainly an important bill to be debating here this afternoon and I am glad that we can spend some time in debate here this afternoon.

There are two—there's, unfortunately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, two fundamental issues with bringing forward this particular bill here this afternoon.

* (16:10)

The first is that I think if you polled any member here in this Chamber, if you talk to any member who is not able to be here this afternoon with the—because of social distancing requirements, I think every single one of those members would bring forward an entire—a whole litany of important issues that have been brought forward to them as local representatives.

I think it was mentioned earlier by the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) that, by his estimation, four to five times the number of emails are coming through to his office. I would concur with that. I'd say maybe the number is maybe even a little bit higher, you know, and that includes contact by social media, by email and every other way that folks are able to get in touch with us during this time.

What they're contacting my office about is they're concerned about their health first and foremost, about understanding the directives that are being given and understanding how, you know, in a province where we've seen unprecedented cuts to health care, are we ready and able to deal with this pandemic from a health perspective.

Second on that list, I would say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is jobs. You know, if it's not the individual who's contacting us, it's a loved one; it's a family member; it's somebody in their social circle. And we're hearing it across the spectrum whether it be in the private sector where we've seen wage cuts, reductions and layoffs, or in the public sector where now this government has turned its attention to begin the cuts—the deep and long-lasting cuts to our public sector at a time when economists are telling us it's the wrong move, at a time when Manitobans are counting on, you know, doing their part to help this crisis—help

us through this crisis. This is not the time to be cutting these jobs.

Manitobans are talking to us about child care, and it was, of course, raised here in question period this afternoon—concerns about, is child care available? Are those early childhood educators being compensated? Are they getting the protective gear that they need? Who's able to open and who isn't, and can we support those child-care centres who are losing revenue?

We're hearing about the economy. We're hearing about how our economy needs to be, you know, supported and kept afloat as much as possible, but in a way that supports workers first. And that's certainly been a message that we brought forward here.

Time and time again these are the issues that we are hearing, and I would say that if every member in this Chamber today stood up and gave a similar list of things that they're hearing at the constituency level, they would report similar issues.

So, when we get an opportunity to come to this place, to come to the Legislature and represent our communities and represent Manitobans and talk about the issues that they care about, do we get that opportunity? Well, maybe we do when the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey) gets to stand up, as his one grievance of the year, and spend 10 minutes fighting for the people of the North. Maybe we do when the Leader of the Opposition can speak to a matter of urgent public importance and talk about jobs, jobs and jobs here in this province. Maybe we do when the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) can stand up and ask questions about education, can ask questions that her constituents are concerned about.

In those formats we can. But, when we get to the debate of the afternoon, the sole reason that this government has called us back here today, the first piece of legislation that this government brings forward is Bill 49. Now, that's curious, Mr. Speaker, and I do want to get down a little bit further into why exactly we're, you know, bringing forward Bill 49 here this afternoon.

But I think it just speaks to the way that this government is completely out of touch with the lives of Manitobans and of the people that they claim to represent. And it's shameful, Mr. Speaker, because we could be debating important issues and we could have an opportunity to bring those forward here today. But, instead, the focus of this government remains on Bill 49.

That is the first fundamental issue I have with the debate that we have here this afternoon. The second fundamental issue that I have with the debate around Bill 49 here this afternoon is that—and the—you know, the minister identified it a few times in her answers to my questions. It's consultation. Now, she had a list of folks that she consulted, but there were notable gaps in there. And, when I asked about those groups or individuals or stakeholders that were not consulted, well she had no answer. She had no answers. She had no reason why those individuals would not have yet been consulted.

Now that's just in, of course, the creation of this legislation, and I do—I would put forward that I do believe that the minister has an obligation now to go back and reach out to those individuals and those groups and maybe come back when we come back in this Legislature. If it's Bill 49 that remains the No. 1 top issue that these members opposite think that their constituents are asking for, so be it. Let's debate Bill 49 and bring forward the information that was gathered from those individuals. In fact, maybe propose options for amendments already that we can begin discussing and working through with those stakeholder groups in here in the Legislature.

But that's not what has happened to this point. And the most egregious part of this process happening now, as it is, is that even if we did have the ability or the interest in moving this forward, we don't have the ability, as a Legislature, to listen to the people of Manitoba in the way that we normally would.

Now I know that there's been discussions. I won't comment on the work of the clerks or the House leaders in terms of understanding how best to run the Legislature with regards to social distancing, ensuring that we, as legislators, have the ability to come in and represent our constituents, but, as far as I know, to this point, we don't have a solid idea about how members of the public can still have their say in the way that they have in the past, in a way that is very unique to Manitoba.

We don't know. We don't know how we can reach out to Manitobans, get their input and bring it forward and, hopefully, be able to change this legislation and amend it. We don't know.

And so, while I would, you know, I would say most Manitobans are concerned with bigger issues, well, most Manitobans, even if they aren't concerned with the issues I listed, are still stressed and aren't paying attention to the work that we're doing here in the Legislature in the way that they normally would.

This government is trying to push through this piece of legislation without the ability to properly consult with those people, and that's a major concern, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I think, on those grounds alone, I think it's incumbent on us as an official opposition to hold this bill, to continue to debate it, to make sure that our concerns and that the concerns of the stakeholders and the constituents that we've heard of—or, heard from, come forward and get brought up in this place, but that it—the minister, hopefully, goes back, seeks out that advice and brings forward a bill that addresses some of those concerns before we bring it back for debate here in the Legislature.

So I'm going to take a little bit of time now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just to outline some of the concerns that we've heard, some of the concerns that folks have brought forward to our caucus, and I would imagine to others on the government side. And I'd implore them to also reach out to the minister to, hopefully, give some good advice on how this bill can be amended and changed so that it could move forward.

First and foremost, as I mentioned, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is the absence of consultation, and not just a broad consultation with industry stakeholders, with businesses, but specifically with groups who understand the impact that the building code can have and, in this case, I'm talking about the disability community and the accessibility community.

These are folks who, as I said, understand the importance of the building code in its relation to The Accessibility for Manitobans Act and understand that when we're talking about making changes to the building code without consulting those groups, without getting their input, there is a major concern. Anytime we're looking at the building code, anytime that is opened up and especially in a way that's as fundamental as is with Bill 49, this—we should see this as an opportunity to work with those partners to see how we can best use the building code to meet the requirements that they have and the requirements that government has under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act.

* (16:20)

There is a wide gap right now between what the accessibility community has been asking for and what their concerns are and what is being talked about in Bill 49. And I think, as I said, if we're going to be doing this work, we should first and foremost hear

from folks in that community so that we can best have a path forward to address some of their concerns.

We also have heard from local officials in municipalities who see, once again, a government that is further taking control over the functions of the municipal governments without the proper consultation and without the input from those local authorities. It is so vital in a province as large and diverse as Manitoba that we listen to municipalities and that we trust the judgment of the local governments. That is the role that they play. They play an important role in understanding the nuances and the struggles and the concerns within their own communities. And, once again, we see a government that does not respect that work and instead looks to further consolidate some of the work and some of the regulation in itself.

This is a big concern because, as we know right now, during this particular pandemic, we've seen a minister who has, instead of offering help or assistance to municipalities, instead of working with them, giving them financial assistance, giving them broader powers with regards to borrowing, with regards to other financial tools, instead of going that route, respecting those municipalities, the minister has instead sent them a letter directing them to lay off employees.

Now how ironic is that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at a time when this government says that Bill 49 is the most important bill, that we should be talking about the expediency of building permits and electrical permits within the province. At a time when you would probably want your best inspectors, your best individuals out in the field at the municipal level doing the best work that they can, this government—this minister, is essentially saying, well, you should probably fire some of those people—you should probably get rid of some of those people because we're making cuts across the province.

That is an ironic situation for us to be in. We have a government that wants to direct and control more of this activity across the province and yet is not willing to give the resources to the municipalities to even execute that goal. It is unsustainable and it's disrespectful, I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Municipalities—and again, I, you know, the member—the minister said she consulted with every member of AMM with regards to this bill. *[interjection]* So—there's a confirmation from the minister that every member of AMM has been consulted with and,

presumably, is in support of this bill, Bill 49, as it stands right now.

Well, I think there's probably one particular member of AMM, and that is the City of Winnipeg—and that is the mayor of Winnipeg, who might take issue with some of the concerns with this bill. It's my understanding, in fact, that the mayor has yet to speak to the minister—I think she confirmed that in her answers—with regards to Bill 49. There's been no direct consultation.

Now I'm not saying that, you know, it's not the duty of the minister to take all interests into account and that it is not her prerogative to move forward if that consultation has been done with the right path for Manitobans. But that's not what's happening here. In fact, there's large segments of the municipal community that have not been consulted at all, and that's a major concern. And as I said, that's, I feel, a major disrespect to those municipalities who want to have their say and want to have input.

If we come to this with those bits of information, with those bits of advice from all stakeholders, potentially we could craft a bill that meets some of those requirements and actually is something that probably every member of this Chamber could support and could stand behind. However, we are not yet, obviously, at that particular point. So that is a major, major concern that I know that municipalities have brought forward to our caucus and to our members and we're happy to bring those forward here this afternoon and subsequent weeks if that is, indeed, the case with regards to this government.

The other major concern that we have with this bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is with regards to the power and jurisdiction that the commissioners that will be set up by the Province will have. Now, there's a major concern here. I was seeking some clarification, I was hoping that we would get some information on the legal opinion that was offered to the minister.

Perhaps that's something that she could bring forward here and could give us a better idea about exactly how it is that this Cabinet-appointed board cannot have any kind of challenge to its jurisdiction and its decisions, can be appointed and have no—there's no ability to change those commissioners or to make any amendments once those have been determined by the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and this minister. These are extraordinary powers and, you know, I would hope that maybe one of the further speakers to this bill here this afternoon could give us further information about exactly what other

jurisdictions have gone this route, what other areas of government have appointed such commissioners, because it's my understanding that that's completely out of the normal practice of government to give power, in that sense, to those members.

So that is a major concern, and what we hope is that there would be some ability for local government and local authorities to work with the Province and work with those commissioners to ensure that building codes and electrical codes across the province are being adhered to. Of course, this is what we would hope could happen, that there remained a local autonomy and a local authority while, at the same time, adherence to a broader set of standards that we all can agree on. This is a laudable goal, I would say, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What is missing here is any kind of input or control at the local level here in Bill 49. So it is not surprising that the minister cannot give us the position of AMM and cannot tell us here in the House exactly some of the concerns that AMM raised with her with regards to this particular bill.

What was very clear—and the minister mentioned it just a few times in her statement—was the genesis of this bill and the origin of this bill, and she mentioned that this was a directive that came from the Treasury Board Secretariat. This was a report created for the—by the Treasury Board Secretariat at the direction of the Premier (Mr. Pallister). So, once again, we have a Premier who, instead of working with municipalities, instead of working with partners, whether it be in the accessibility community, whether it be partners in other organizations, he wants to once again go it alone. And it's ultimately the minister who is left carrying the water here in the House trying to justify why this is the priority of this government on a day when our constituents are screaming about the job losses, the economy, the health-care situation in this province that has been decimated through the cuts and austerity of this government.

It's—it totally betrays the structure within the government that the Premier would push through his own agenda, push it through his own political operatives and then push it right out into the community regardless of consultation, regardless of input, bring it forward, give it to his minister and say, now it's yours and now you need to bring it forward here in the Legislature. Let's get it through. Let's get it passed this afternoon, lickety-split. No time for debate. Why would we bother go out and speak to Manitobans? Why would we bother at second reading, have our public hearings in the way that we normally

do? Let's just push this through and ram it through. Hopefully, nobody will notice.

* (16:30)

Well, we have noticed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We noticed and we noticed because we're listening to Manitobans. We're listening to the people that we represent. But, more than that, we're listening to all Manitobans; and there are certainly lots of Manitobans who, you know, I don't know what their politics are. I don't know how they vote come election time. But they do know that it's us that are standing up as an official opposition here in the House this afternoon. We're asking to talk about the issues that are important to them. We're asking that this government go back and look at this legislation, look at a way to bring it forward in a way that better meets the criteria that these groups are asking us to bring forward, and we're going to continue to do that. We're going to continue to do that because we want to represent all Manitobans, and that's certainly what we're doing here.

The Premier, on the other hand, has a go-it-alone attitude. He has the attitude that this is his way or the highway at every turn, and it couldn't be more clear in the way that this was brought forward and the way that they have tried to ram this through.

Now, I want to end some of my comments here this afternoon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to just talk a little bit about the individuals in my own constituency who contacted me with regards to this piece of legislation.

It was one of those serendipitous situations where an individual that I had an opportunity to hear from with regards to Bill 49 happened to email me last—I'm sorry, not last week, the last sitting day, the emergency sitting day of the Legislature. And if you'll remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we came back in the House. We certainly had a litany of issues that we wanted to discuss and debate, and—but we knew nothing about what the government would be bringing forward in terms of that emergency legislation. We're sort of left to scramble at the eleventh hour when that legislation was brought forward at first reading, and before that we actually knew nothing about what that legislation would look like.

So here we are, getting a—I think it was six bills, maybe more, maybe less, that were brought forward in an emergency capacity before the Legislature and we were—as I said—scrambling to try to read through the legislation, identify issues, work with the

government to get them passed. It was a chaotic day, to say the least.

But coupled with that were a few other bills that were thrown in for good measure, and Bill 49 was one of them. And we sort of sat around the caucus table, sort of discussed some of the pros and cons of the bill, tried to understand, you know, how is this what the emergency sitting, you know, would be about. Of course, we had more than enough work that could be done to do the work even just that was brought forward by the government, let alone the work that we could have done if we had the opportunity to bring forward private members' bills on the opposition side.

We're sort of scrambling through and trying to understand all this legislation, and I get an email in the Chamber—whoa, am I allowed to say that? I don't know.

I read the email in the Chamber, but maybe not in my seat. Anyway, I can't remember exactly where I was. *[interjection]* It wasn't during question period so I think I'm okay. That's a good point.

So I read this email and it's one of my constituents who's absolutely flabbergasted—maybe that's the best way I can put it—that we would be seeing Bill 49 come before the Legislature. Now, I'm not going to say that, you know, it's abnormal—well, I will say it's abnormal. It's abnormal for us to have constituents who are so closely following along the work that we're doing in the Legislature that even the nuance of what bills would be called that day would be something that would be on their radar. But, in fact, this was a constituent who was concerned about that, and what I was able to respond at that time was to say, no, we would not be moving this forward. We would not jam it through under the cover of all these other bills and all this other important work that needed to be done by the Legislature that we would be holding it up. And I said, you know, please continue to give me information on your concerns and we'll work through this. We have the time. You will have your chance to have your say.

Well, lo and behold, here we are this morning, and in the same way we find out at the eleventh hour exactly what bill would be debated here this afternoon, and when it was Bill 49, I reached out directly to this constituent once again. And it was—the constituent couldn't believe it, and I had no answers as to why this was the priority of the government, why this was being brought forward.

They felt that their concerns about accessibility, about the relationship between The Accessibility for Manitobans Act and this particular bill had not been addressed, had not even been looked at. And then to understand that this was once again coming forward and was once again being pushed by the government—that this could be passed here this afternoon and we move on and there's no issues—they were very concerned, to say the least, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I was proud that I was able to say to them that, no, we would ensure that at the very least that we have a complete debate here in this Chamber, that every member of the opposition that wants to stand up and bring forward the concerns of their constituents, that we would take the necessary time to ensure that that happened; that we would be on their side, to put it simply. I was able to assure them of that, and that is certainly our intent here.

Now, that being said, as I mentioned earlier, it is certainly possible that there are members of the government side who are willing to do the same and willing to stand up and not criticize the minister, not—you know, maybe not even go quite as far as I did in the criticisms of the Premier (Mr. Pallister). You know, the minister is good natured. I know that she can take it. You know, the Premier, maybe not so much; he does tend to get a little touchy about these things.

So maybe they want to present it in a different way, but I would implore them to bring it forward as friendly amendments, friendly suggestions that they're hearing from their own constituents because I can certainly tell you I'm not the only one. I know that's certainly the case on our side of the House. I'm not the only one that has been reached out to by those groups. I'm not the only one.

And, in fact, I mean, you have members who represent municipalities who are going to be directly affected by this, so maybe they want to stand up, talk about how they've talked to their municipal leaders. You know, they don't have to go into great detail about how upset municipal leaders are right now that they're seeing—they're being forced to cut at a time when their revenues are down and their expenses are up, you know.

That's maybe not something they want to bring forward because that might, you know, make it a little more touchy for the minister and the relationship that they have. So don't bring that up, but just simply mention that they've talked to their municipal leaders and they've heard these concerns come forward and

they want to ensure that that gets into the final draft here of the bill.

There is a lot that we can do better here. There's a lot that we can improve upon. And if this government is serious about moving this forward, whether that be, you know, during the session in the spring, next fall, the fall after—or the spring after that, the fall after that, remains to be seen, but I think it would be incumbent on this government to reach out to seek out that advice and then, hopefully, bring it forward in a way that that responds to those concerns.

As I said, we will do that at every turn. We will continue to do that, and I know that there are members, certainly members of the opposition, that are eager to have their opportunity to speak. I hope that there's also some input from the government side and altogether, maybe we can show that non-partisan nature that I think all of us are trying—are genuinely seeking out at this time when there are bigger issues, when there are bigger problems that our constituents are facing.

We'll continue to fight for those, for jobs, for health care. We're going to fight for the economy, for child-care workers, for—we're going to work for—we're going to continue to work for teachers, other people, essential workers on the front lines. That is going to be our focus, but at the same time, we can make these bills better and we are dedicated to that work.

So thank you very much for your time here this afternoon.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

The honourable member for Waverley West—I was going to say St. Norbert—Waverley. Waverley.

Mr. Jon Reyes (Waverley): Thank you for the opportunity to speak on Bill 49, The Building and Electrical Permitting Improvement Act.

First of all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for me, I consider it a huge honour and a privilege being here today, to get back to legislative work and practise what we are meant to do: democracy. As we heard a lot about the times we are in these days—these are truly unprecedented times.

* (16:40)

But, even during these times, we as legislatures are permitted to debate on bills and resolutions such as Bill 49 today, thanks to the freedom and democracy that many Canadians fought for.

I want to thank my colleague from Radisson for joining me two days ago at the Winnipeg Cenotaph here on Memorial Boulevard with the honorary consul of the Netherlands to pay our respects and to remember the Canadians who fought and for more than 7,000 soldiers who died for ensuring the liberation of the Netherlands.

I know my colleague was supposed to visit his grandmother in the Netherlands for the 75th anniversary of the liberation, and I do hope my colleague gets to see her soon.

Speaking of soon, sooner rather than later, Manitoba needs to really take a hard look at the inconsistent rules across the province when it comes to the development of Manitoba. Time frames for processing building and electrical permit applications are unnecessarily slow and lack consistency. This has a negative impact on Manitoba's economy.

Who does this affect? Builders, contractors, tradespeople, companies that want to establish for themselves in Manitoba and, of course, indirectly, homeowners, to name a few. Mr. Deputy Speaker, from the conversations I've had with these stakeholders, and from what I have been hearing, they want consistency, they want modernization in the process, they want timeliness, they want clarity. They want accountability—follow up and follow through.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

This act aligns electrical codes across the province by requiring the City of Winnipeg—and to adopt and enforce the Manitoba electrical code. Inconsistent electrical codes and delays in adopting the National Building Code cause unnecessary confusion and complexity for builders, driving up costs without adding any value. It costs them—the builders—time and money. And who also suffers if this were a home would be the homeowner. If this were an office building or a retail mall, then the tenants suffer because they want to go about their business by conducting business.

These groups contribute to the economy, and that is why the legislation creates service standards for these permits which builders have always wished for—standards, an adjudication process managed by appointed technical experts if applicants disagree with the interpretation of a building inspector.

I hear there is too much back and forth in the current process, and that is why this act aligns electrical codes across the province by requiring the City of Winnipeg to adopt and enforce the Manitoba

electrical code. It's too confusing sometimes when one has to work on a project in the city of Winnipeg and then you have a different set of rules for RMs and other municipalities, is what I'm told. So let's fix it with these amendments—amendments which will reduce confusion and duplication and allow development to proceed in a more timely fashion while remaining well-regulated, reducing costs for Manitobans.

What this act will also do is align electrical codes, as I've said, across the province by requiring the City of Winnipeg to adopt and enforce them so we can have consistency for builders. The act also addresses what I mentioned in one of my points, Madam Speaker—timeliness. Future versions of National Building Codes will be adopted within a fixed timeline.

The amendments of this act has to be enabled in order to provide builders assurance that there will be accountability in the form of proper follow-ups and follow-throughs. What I mean by this is from what I heard from a builder is that he requested a new electrical connection for a new property under construction. He was told someone would get back to him in two to three days, and it's been over two and a half weeks. And this is just one builder. Just imagine the other number of builders that are going through the same situation.

The bill will address the issue I just mentioned and it will allow for the adoption of service standards that will require building and electrical permitting authorities to process permit applications within time frames established by regulation. This follows Ontario's model where building permits must be processed within 10 to 30 days depending on the complexity of the building.

And back to being consistent, Madam Speaker, this bill will require that Manitoba adopt future versions of the national model construction codes within fixed time frames to improve harmonization with other jurisdictions and ensure Manitoba meets commitments under the Canada Free Trade Agreement.

I mentioned before that stakeholders interested in the bill want modernization. Madam Speaker, The Buildings and Mobile Homes Act will streamline administrative processes and allow for the modernization of mobile home requirements.

Madam Speaker, one of the fastest growing quadrants in the city of Winnipeg happens to be in my

constituency of Waverley. A lot of new buildings and homes going up in the area I represent, and I know in the rural areas I visited all over Manitoba as well this is happening.

We are fortunate that there are a lot—there's a lot of private investment in the areas to benefit Manitobans. The demand is there, and why we need to reduce red tape with these amendments.

Madam Speaker, as I mentioned from the conversations I've had with these stakeholders, they want consistency, they want modernization of the process, they want timeliness, they want clarity, they want accountability, follow-up and follow through. Bill 49 addresses these point. It will move Manitoba forward.

Madam Speaker, I just want to point out what we know, that a lot of events and gatherings and special occasions have been cancelled, delayed or rescheduled, and I would like to thank all the individuals involved in our province who are doing their very best to flatten the curve.

I also want to thank everyone who are doing their best in these times by staying home to protect our front-liners, including my wife, who's a nurse. My wife, my two children and I thank everyone.

Madam Speaker, I do also want to point out that—Special Envoy for Military Affairs, as a veteran, as a proud Canadian, let us not forget the many Canadians who fought, those who gave their lives so that we can have the freedom to debate these bills, to make these important decisions, to have the freedom we have so other nations such as the Netherlands, could have that freedom. Why remember—why we remember the 75th anniversary of liberation day and the upcoming Friday, on May 8th this week, VE Day—or otherwise known as Victory in Europe Day, celebrating the formal acceptance by the allies World War II of Nazi Germany's unconditional surrender of its armed forces 75 years ago.

I'm also hoping everyone in the House can take a moment today to also remember the six lives lost in the helicopter crash off the coast of Greece, to honour the recent fallen six military members and their families.

Lest we forget, we will remember them.

Madam Speaker, I ask you and the House if we can observe a moment of silence to honour our military members whose repatriation ceremony just—has just ended.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave as requested? Is there leave as requested? [*Agreed*]

Please rise.

A moment of silence was observed.

House Business

Madam Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on House business.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, on House business, I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations will meet on Thursday, May 28th, 2020, at 1 p.m. to consider the following reports: the Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015; the Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2016; the Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2017; the Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2018; and the Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2019.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations will meet on Thursday, May 28th, 2020, at 1 p.m., to consider the following reports: Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2015; Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2016; Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2017; Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2018; and the Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2019.

Mr. Goertzen: On further House business, I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations will meet on Thursday, June 4th, 2020, at 1 p.m., to consider the following reports: the Annual Report of the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation for the fiscal year ending February 28th, 2018; the Annual Financial Statement of the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation for the fiscal year ending February 28th, 2018; the Annual Report of the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation for the fiscal

year ending February 28th, 2019; and the Annual Financial Statement of the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation for the fiscal year ending February 28th, 2019.

*(16:50)

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations will meet on Thursday, June 4th, 2020, at 1 p.m., to consider the following reports: Annual Report of the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation for the fiscal year ending February 28th, 2018; Annual Financial Statement of the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation for the fiscal year ending February 28th, 2018; Annual Report of the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation for the fiscal year ending February 28th, 2019; and the Annual Financial Statement of the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation for the fiscal year ending February 28th, 2019.

The honourable Government House Leader, on further House business.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, Madam Speaker, on a final piece of House business, I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations will meet on Thursday, June 11th, 2020, at 1 p.m., to consider the following reports: the Annual Report of the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2017; the Annual Report of the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2018; and the Annual Report of the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2019.

Madam Speaker: It has also been announced that the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations will meet on Thursday, June 11th, 2020, at 1 p.m. to consider the following reports: Annual Report of the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2017; Annual Report of the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2018; and the Annual Report of the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2019.

Madam Speaker: We will now resume debate on Bill 49, second reading.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I want to speak briefly on Bill 49, The Building and Electrical Permitting Improvement Act, but I want to first put a

short word on the record with regard to our current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic.

We're four months into this pandemic, first identified as an outbreak in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. We are concerned about some of the measures the government has taken—the cutbacks at universities and colleges being taken at times when these institutions are critically needed to help us get through the epidemic and to do well coming out of the pandemic, concerned about the cutbacks to home care at a time when home care is critically needed, in part because individuals are being advised to stay home and in part because we want to keep individuals at home as long as possible, instead of moving them into personal-care homes, which are high-risk sites.

Yesterday, as an example, I received a call from an individual about a situation in a personal-care home—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

While I do appreciate that the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic is very important to everybody, I would have to indicate that the House business that is on the floor right now is second reading of Bill 49, and I would ask the member to be relevant to this particular debate.

Mr. Gerrard: I will move very quickly. Buildings of personal-care homes are parts of the building codes and they're very relevant in terms of this particular bill, and it is important that in the planning that we do, in terms of building personal-care homes into the future, that this be something that can be looked at very carefully.

We want to be sure that as the government moves forward, that it's fully aware of the importance of making sure that we have the most up to date and the most advanced building codes with respect to personal-care homes, which have been shown to be very high-risk sites in this current pandemic.

I'm concerned about various other things that are happening at the moment, but I will talk specifically about several items in this bill.

As the government is well aware, The Accessibility for Manitobans Act requires a review of accessibility of buildings, and the present government has decided that The Accessibility for Manitobans Act will not be looked at with respect to the building code. This, I would suggest, is a mistake and this mistake is continued and extended in this bill.

There needs to be an ability for Manitobans to be able to look at unique needs of Manitobans, rather than relying solely on the National Building Code, and I'll give three significant examples with respect to this.

First of all, with respect to individuals with disabilities, Manitobans should be moving forward in looking at—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order.

Mr. Gerrard: Manitobans should be moving forward in looking at whether changes to the building code are needed to build a more accessible Manitoba. We need to do this to create a better world for individuals with disabilities.

We need to do this to position our businesses at the forefront of design in this area so that we can be building the products of the future and have the products of the future, which we can then sell into an expanding market.

Second, living in northern Manitoba, I've heard for many years of the need to have a building code in Manitoba which recognizes the unique needs of people in northern Manitoba in having homes and buildings which last well in the northern climate; and having homes and buildings which are energy efficient in the North; and in having homes and buildings which are less susceptible to mold; and in having homes and buildings which use more materials from northern Manitoba.

It's important that we develop and expand on materials for our local markets. The lack of action of this area has resulted in buildings in the North which are not sufficiently energy efficient, which are too susceptible to mold and which are too reliant on material from outside of northern Manitoba.

Manitobans have found recently, to our dismay, that when we don't build local capacity, we lose. And we found this recently in a provision of a local supply of personal protective equipment.

We are now working in a crisis to restore this capacity and to be able to produce what we need locally. We should learn from our mistakes, not repeat them. We should make sure we're building local capacity and local materials in the North to help us out.

In the area of health and health needs, it has been shown in numerous studies that Manitoba has one of

the highest rates of radon being found in homes and buildings in Manitoba. We will need, perhaps, to look specifically at measures in the building code that would deal with mitigation of radon because we have such a high level of radon, which is a health hazard, in terms of causing lung cancer in our province.

In these areas and in others, we need to build up our research capacity to produce made-in-Manitoba products for made-in-Manitoba solutions to building issues. It's an advantage to us to have the ability to advance our building code when needed based on excellent research done here in Manitoba and not be solely reliant on the National Building Code.

It's time to recognize that we have incredible people in Manitoba who can do incredible things and we need to not limit Manitobans to building codes made elsewhere.

However, we need to be clearly faster in adopting many of the measures in the National Building Code. It's completely unacceptable that the National Building Code of 2015 has not been acted upon here in Manitoba and it is now five years later.

I have somebody writing in to me: As long as Manitoba continues to withhold adoption of the National Building Code for 2015, that it holds back progress in Manitoba compared to other provinces and territories.

The government should be ashamed that they've been in power since 2016 and they failed to act to

advance and make sure that we're up to date with other provinces.

We're concerned here about the bill providing ministerial discretion in appointing adjudicators. We're concerned about the bias that the minister may have in her choice of adjudicators.

Too often, ministerial 'distression' can bring in inherent biases of the minister, and we're concerned that what the government is proposing could lead to a bias toward the friends of the government.

We want to make sure that decisions which are made are truly impartial and adequately reflect the needs of the community which is being served, whether in Winnipeg or rural, southern Manitoba or northern Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to hearing the comments of presenters at committee stage. I have heard from some that some significant concerns about this bill may not come forward because people are fearful of retribution from the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his government: such is a sad commentary on the state of democracy in our province at the moment.

I want to thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak today and to comment.

Merci. Miigwech.

Madam Speaker: Debate will remain open on this bill.

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until Wednesday, May 13th, at 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 6, 2020

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Introduction of Bills		Reopening the Economy	
Bill 213–The Personal Protective Equipment Reporting Act		Marcelino	968
Kinew	953	Stefanson	968
Ministerial Statements		Economic Recovery	
COVID-19 Update		Lamont	969
Friesen	953	Pallister	969
Asagwara	956	Provincial Finances	
Lamont	959	Lamont	970
Members' Statements		Pallister	970
Bonivital Ringette Teams		Prescription Drugs for Seniors	
A. Smith	960	Lamoureux	970
Eugene Kostyra		Friesen	970
Kinew	961	Gap Protection Program	
Liz Crawford		Smook	970
Squires	961	Fielding	971
Recognizing Citizens Contributing During Pandemic		Health-Care System	
Fontaine	962	Asagwara	971
Doris Hovorka		Friesen	971
Smook	962	Pallister	971
Oral Questions		Petitions	
Public Sector		Dauphin Correctional Centre	
Kinew	963	Moses	972
Pallister	963	Personal-Care Homes	
Post-Secondary Education		Gerrard	972
Moses	965	Dauphin Correctional Centre	
Pallister	966	Asagwara	973
School Divisions		Fontaine	973
Fontaine	966	Lindsey	973
Goertzen	967	Marcelino	974
Manitoba Municipalities		Wiebe	974
Wiebe	967	Matter of Urgent Public Importance	
Squires	967	Lamont	974
Pallister	968	Goertzen	975
		Kinew	976
		Grievances	
		Lindsey	978

ORDERS OF THE DAY
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Second Readings

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

Squires 979

Questions

Wiebe 980

Squires 980

Gerrard 981

Debate

Wiebe 984

Reyes 989

Gerrard 991

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>