

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

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Speaker*

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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 13, 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.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

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

I have several leave requests to make. I would ask that you consider these requests.

Is there leave of the House to consider and put the questions and all remaining stages of Bill 43 today?

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to consider and put the questions on all remaining stages of Bill 43 today?

Is there leave?

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, is there leave to allow Bill 43 to be considered today in the Committee of the Whole rather than a standing committee?

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to allow Bill 43 to be considered today in the Committee of the Whole rather than a standing committee?

Is there leave?

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Is there leave to waive—oh, pardon me.

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, is there leave to change the members' statements rotation for today only as follows: two members' statements from the government caucus, two statements from the official opposition caucus and one statement from an independent member?

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to change the members' statements rotation for today only as follows: two members' statements from the government caucus, two statements from the official opposition caucus and one statement from an independent member?

Is there leave?

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on House business.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Is there leave to consider all remaining stages of Bill 206, The Louis Riel Act, this afternoon during government business, including: second reading; committee consideration in Committee of the Whole; concurrence and third reading; and for the House to not see the clock today until questions have been put on all remaining stages of Bill 206?

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to consider all remaining stages of Bill 206, The Louis Riel Act, this afternoon during government business, including: second reading; committee consideration in the Committee of the Whole; concurrence and third reading; and for the House to not see the clock today until the questions have been put on all remaining stages of Bill 206?

Is there leave?

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 215—The Digital Contact Tracing Advisory Council Act

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I move, seconded by the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey), that Bill 215, The Digital Contact Tracing Advisory Council Act; Loi sur le Conseil consultatif sur la recherche numérique des contacts, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, many jurisdictions around the world, and even some private corporations,

are starting to use mobile phones to do contact tracing to track the coronavirus outbreak. It's currently being contemplated in Manitoba. However, this raises numerous questions around privacy, civil liberties and impacts on specific community organizations.

This bill proposes to establish an expert committee with advice on human rights, cybersecurity and the insight into affected communities so that the government will have good advice before they proceed with any such plan.

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

Further introduction of bills?

**Bill 214—The Workers Compensation
Amendment Act
(COVID-19 Presumptive Coverage)**

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Fort Rouge, that Bill 214, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act (COVID-19 Presumptive Coverage), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Lindsey: Bill 214, The Workers Compensation Amendment Act, will give Manitobans peace of mind while going to work. Workers that provide many essential services, such as health-care workers, transit, grocery store employees and many others, are at increased risk of contracting COVID-19 and they deserve the assurance of knowing they will be protected if they do contact the virus.

Bill 214 presumes that if individual falls ill with COVID-19, that they are—that they contracted it from their place of employment unless deemed otherwise.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Madam Speaker: I do have a tabling for the House.

In accordance with section 19 of The Legislative Building Centennial Restoration and Preservation Act, I am tabling the long-term restoration and preservation plan, which includes current annual implementation plans for fiscal years 2019-20 to 2028-29.

Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. James (Mr. Sala)—oh, Assiniboia, pardon me.

1st Crestview Scout Group

Mr. Scott Johnston (Assiniboia): Let me first say what a pleasure it is to be back in the Chamber with all of my colleagues, and, Madam Chair—Madam Speaker, I wish you certainly well as we journey through this challenge that we have in Manitoba, which we all get through together.

Madam Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging for all of our communities. As members of the Legislature we seek to recognize the everyday actions of those who help to make our communities a better place.

Madam Speaker, the 1st Crestview Scout Group has been very active, contributing to Assiniboia. This comes as no surprise as they have consistently been contributors to our community, pandemic or not.

With the closures of schools and daycares due to COVID-19, the Crestview Scouts saw this as an opportunity to help. They organized a socially distant food and funds drive for Winnipeg Harvest. Their goal was to be able to support families in need. The Scouts had collected more than 1,400 pounds of food as well as numerous financial donations.

Scouts is more than just outdoor activities for kids. It is creating leaders. Madam Speaker, we must also acknowledge the Scout leaders and their contributions to all make—to make this all possible.

* (13:40)

Madam Speaker, every single member of the 1st Crestview Scout Group is an inspiration to our community. In times like these, young girls and boys show their true colours.

Madam Speaker, I ask the Legislature to recognize the 1st Crestview Scout Group and their leaders: Will Huggard, Dawn Wojtowicz, Ian McCausland and Phil Reimer.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Madam Speaker, I rise—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Oh, pardon me. Leave has been denied today for the Liberals to have a member's statement.

Further members' statements?

Allied Healthcare Professionals Recognition Week

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, in the spring of 2018, this Chamber passed the Allied Healthcare Professionals Recognition Week. Our NDP caucus proposed setting aside the week of May 14th each year in Manitoba to demonstrate our gratitude for the work that those in the allied health-care field do every day.

During this global pandemic, I cannot think of a better time to thank these professionals for keeping our health-care system moving. In this Chamber, we have thanked the doctors, nurses and pharmacists for the work they've done in the fight against COVID-19, and today I would like to extend that gratitude further.

Manitoba's allied health-care professionals practise in diverse areas of expertise, including physiotherapists, chiropractors, audiologists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, dental hygienists, optometrists and dietitians—many of whom have had to suspend or significantly change they way they deliver services during the pandemic.

They also include professions that have been top of mind as of late, who are on the front lines of the pandemic. These are respiratory therapists who have been keeping people with severe COVID-19 symptoms breathing and who help the lungs heal once a patient has begun to recover. They are the lab technicians who continue to put themselves at risk day in and day out to test and confirm all of our COVID-19 cases in Manitoba. They are also the medical radiation technologists and diagnostic medical sonographers who perform our diagnostic imaging, and who work closely with COVID-19 patients.

It's disheartening that the government didn't take this opportunity today to recognize these health-care professionals that are working day in and day out to help our beloved province, so I will say thank you. Thank you to these folks who are the unsung heroes of our health-care system. Thank you for keeping us all safe and healthy. We, on this side of the House, are working to support you and your efforts to get this through—to get us through this pandemic.

I have great respect for the work that all of our allied health-care professionals do, and I look forward to continuing to stand up on your behalf.

Recognizing Riel Constituency

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Municipal Relations): It gives me great pleasure to rise today and pay tribute to the generosity of the people living in my constituency of Riel.

Whether it is answering to the call that has been created through this global pandemic, where we have seen people in need—needing food, we have had people—an outpouring of support from community members in Riel making donations to Winnipeg Harvest. And I just want to thank all the members who have come to my constituency office and placed items in the Winnipeg Harvest bin outside of my office. Last week, I was very honoured to deliver 275 pounds of food to the Winnipeg Harvest on behalf of my constituents in Riel.

My constituents have also been very generous in providing much-needed clothing and other supplies, using my office as a drop-off point, and I very happily make those donations on their behalf to organizations such as Centre Flavie-Laurent, who is answering the call for Winnipeg's vulnerable community groups day in and day out, as well as the Salvation Army, to name but a few.

We know that the generosity extends to the number of volunteers coming from the constituency of Riel. Just a few weeks ago, we had the clean up on the Bishop Grandin Greenway. And while this year it was done a little differently, to comply with social distancing, we had members coming out offering to clean up the greenway in a socially distant, responsible manner. And many people came out for that.

We know that in other areas in the community, such as Henteleff Park, for their annual tree planting, members of the community are very quick to volunteer their time to contribute to these very worthy causes. And so I'm very proud to represent this area and very honoured to call Riel my home.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Punjabis for Covid19 Relief

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): The Punjabi community is known worldwide for its dedication and service to humanity. In times of hardship, this community always provides aid in the form of volunteering, fundraising and food provision. Winnipeg's Punjabi community has proven to be no different during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The volunteer group called Punjabis for Covid19 Relief has been delivering free packages of non-perishable food items to Manitobans in need. These individuals have been sparing time, energy and money to buy, pack and deliver food to people and families who lost their income, are experiencing mobility issues, international students under economic stress and to organizations like Sscope Inc.

Relief volunteers have done nearly 400 deliveries composed of food, protective gear and other essential items, including 70 pizzas to front-line workers at Health Sciences Centre, who were so thankful for their act of kindness.

The volunteers want to thank the Winnipeg South Sikh Centre, Guru Nanak Darbar, Singh Sabha Winnipeg, Guru Nanak Mission Centre and other Sikh gurdwaras who have also stepped forward and provided aid.

Many Punjabi businesses have also contributed donation items to Punjabis for Covid19 Relief. Thanks to Johal Driving School, Altoba Freight, SET Transport, KEEN Transport, Rajeev Sehgal from Divine Mortgage Group, realtor Amritpal Dhillon, Bright Sky Immigration, realtor Sunil Garg, Taj East Indian Cuisine, Keewatin Pizza, Grand Royal Legacy, Royal Brothers, Garson Route 44 Eatery and 204 hand sanitizer company. And another thanks to Khalsa Aid Winnipeg and Hindu Society of Manitoba, who are doing great social work to support people amid COVID-19.

I also want to recognize and thank the Seven Oaks School Division and Winnipeg School Division, who—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

An Honourable Member: Leave.

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

Mr. Brar: I also want to recognize and thank the Seven Oaks School Division and Winnipeg School Division, who are providing food and Chromebooks to the families in their areas.

Please join me in thanking Punjabis for Covid19 Relief and every Manitoban doing the selfless work to help our province make it through these uncertain times.

Thank you.

Impact of COVID-19 in Manitoba

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Education): I am giving this statement on behalf of the member for Tyndall Park (Ms. Lamoureux), who was denied leave by the NDP.

During this time of crisis, we have seen Manitobans band together and demonstrate kindness, compassion and generosity in so many ways.

We have strong and determined health-care workers who are risking their lives every day to protect all of us. In addition to our health-care workers—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: —we have essential workers who are keeping society open so that Manitobans can continue to have their needs met. This includes, for example, truck drivers and grocery store workers who make sure that our grocery stores have food on the shelves.

Madam Speaker, while Manitoba is stopping the spread of the virus, we are aware that many people and businesses really need our help. That is why if you are in the position to buy local, please do. There are many options across Manitoba to buy local and practices that have been set up such as curbside pickup.

We also know depression and anxiety has gone up at this time, so if you are struggling with your mental health or know someone who is—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: —please use the resources that are available here in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, to wrap up, I just want to say that, to the residents of Tyndall Park, that my staff and I will continue to assist as much we can. This crisis has been such a unique experience and I am incredibly grateful for you and those who have sacrificed so much for the betterment of our economy. It is a true honour serving and representing all of you.

And, Madam Speaker, on a lighter note, I cannot wait until I can get back into my weekly McDonald's meetings with constituents.

And this was written, and I read it on behalf of the member for Tyndall Park.

Speaker's Statement

Madam Speaker: I have a statement for the House.

Yesterday, May 12th, 2020 marked the 150th anniversary of the day the Manitoba Act received royal assent in the Canadian Parliament. This act created the Province of Manitoba, and, accordingly, May 12th has been designated as Manitoba Day.

* (13:50)

In honour of this historic occasion, as we have done for the past several years, our Sergeant-at-Arms carried our original Manitoba mace in today's Speaker's parade.

Carved from the wheel hub of Red River cart by a soldier with the Wolseley expedition in 1870, this mace made its first formal appearance on March 15th, 1871, of the first session of the first Manitoba Legislature, held in the home of A.G.B. Bannatyne in the Red River settlement. The Bannatyne home was destroyed by fire in December 1873, but thankfully the mace survived.

Incidentally, a commemorative copy of excerpts from the Votes and Proceedings from that first-ever sitting day of our Assembly in 1871 has been provided to all members.

After 13 years of service, our original mace was retired in 1884 when our current mace debuted. The original mace has a permanent home on display outside of the Speaker's Office, coming out of retirement again for this celebration. This important historical artifact sits on the table today as a tribute to the rich history of our province.

In addition to the original mace, the star blanket cushion and the beautiful beaded mace runner—gifted to us by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs in 2010—are also on display today to help celebrate Manitoba Day and to honour Manitoba's indigenous heritage.

These artifacts also serve as a reminder that this Assembly Chamber and Legislative Building are on Treaty 1 territory, the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe and the homeland of the Metis people.

I am pleased that we are able to include our original mace in the celebration of Manitoba Day, and I hope that this tradition continues.

On this historic 150th anniversary, I want to take a moment to relate some notable information to members and to all Manitobans.

Since March 1871, our Assembly has met during 169 legislative sessions, for a total of 8,280 sitting days, including today.

Members may not be aware that from 1871 until 1876 Manitoba was governed by a bicameral legislature, consisting of an appointed Legislative Council of seven members and an elected Legislative Assembly of 24 members. The upper chamber was short-lived, however, as it was abolished as a cost-saving measure at a Council meeting in February 4th, 1876, in which Colin Inkster, the Council Speaker, cast the deciding vote in favour of abolition.

From 1871 to 1873 the Assembly met in a house owned by A.G.B. Bannatyne. Over the next 10 years the Legislature met first in a courthouse, and then later in the old Law Courts Building.

The first Manitoba legislative building—that is, the first building solely purposed for this Legislature—held its inaugural sitting on March 13th, 1884. The building was located on Kennedy Street south of Broadway, on the northeast corner of the current grounds. As members know, the current Legislative Building held its first sitting on January 22, 1920, and we marked that 100th anniversary in March of this year.

Fourteen Clerks of this House, along with many Deputy Clerks and clerk assistants, expertly managed each of these sessions. Twenty Sergeants-at-Arms have carried one of our maces into the five different rooms which have served as the Chamber for the Manitoba Assembly.

Further, in the last century, 851 citizens, including only 65 women and one non-binary person, have served in this room as members of the Legislative Assembly. Of those 851 MLAs, 30 have served as Speaker of the House and 22 as premier.

As the 30th Speaker of this Assembly, I have the privilege of serving all members and ensuring the proper functioning of the proceedings of this House.

What happens in this Assembly matters to every citizen of this province, it always has and it always will. I would encourage members to reflect on the solemn responsibility we all share to serve our constituents, and recall that whatever heated debates we have here are part of a long legacy of service to the citizens of this province.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Public Sector Layoffs PC Election Platform

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, there have been a

tremendous amount of cuts handed down by this government, including 700 jobs cut at Manitoba Hydro this week.

Now, in total, we know that this government has cut \$860-million worth of people's jobs and programs that help Manitobans during the pandemic—\$860 million.

I'm going to table the Progressive Conservative election platform from last fall. Do you know how much the value of the cuts they outlined in this document was? Madam Speaker, \$856 million. This proves that these cuts have been planned all along, that everyone losing their job right now, it's not because of the pandemic.

Will the Premier simply stand in his place and admit today that it's always been his plan to put these people out of work?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you for reminding us of our responsibilities and role here and the history of the Legislative Assembly.

I wanted to begin in offering my thank-you sincerely to the Leader of the Opposition for his note of condolence to my family. It was much appreciated.

I would also say to him and to all members of the House, this is a real pandemic and it requires a real recovery strategy. This isn't a time for hyperbole or partisanship. This is a time to focus together on the job at hand. That is exactly what this government will continue to do.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, what Manitobans are looking for are leaders who will stand up and fight for every single job that is being lost at this time. There are people in the private sector who are losing jobs; we must fight for them. There are people in the public sector who are losing their jobs unnecessarily, and we are going to fight for those jobs too.

Now, we know that all the cuts that have been handed down by this government were predetermined. I will table the election platform document that lays out some \$860-million cuts for a second time.

Will the Premier stand in his place and admit that the cuts he's making have nothing to do with the pandemic and have simply been part of his plan to put Manitobans out of work all along?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I will assure the member that I am not imagining the pandemic, nor is this government imagining the pandemic. It is real, and our responses to it must be balanced and reasonable and sincere, and they must not be focused on rhetoric, but rather on the reality of what's facing Manitobans right now, and they have been and they'll continue to be focused on that reality.

Madam Speaker, I would say it is because of that willingness to focus on the challenges before us that we are second in the country in terms of the lowest number of COVID cases, and I would say that's a tribute to our front-line workers, a tribute to the leadership of this government and this Health Minister, and a tribute to Manitobans who are following the directives of Dr. Brent Roussin in terms of their conduct and making sure that all of us, themselves included, remain safe in this beautiful province.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, the reality is that experts are saying these job cuts will hurt our economy. Business leaders are saying that these job cuts will make the recession longer. We know that all 700 Manitoba Hydro employees who are losing their jobs means fewer customers to support those businesses out there in the private sector struggling to get by. The proper thing to do is to fight for every single job and to keep every single Manitoban working that we possibly can.

Instead, the Premier plows ahead with this predetermined plan to put Manitobans out of work. It is simply wrong and it will make the recession being caused by the pandemic worse.

Will the Premier admit that this has been his plan all along and that nobody being fired from the public sector today actually should be losing their jobs?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I will continue, Madam Speaker, to replace fear mongering with logic and with facts; and the fact is under this government we have been among Canada's leaders in growing our economy. We have been among Canada's leaders in growing jobs for Manitobans and we have every plan to continue to do that. Our approach during this pandemic is one that bears in mind the fact that we are going to face challenges as we recover, but that we must do our best to recover and to make sure that it's a V on the graph, not an L.

* (14:00)

What the member proposes, frankly, Madam Speaker, only promises to prolong the depth of a recession post-pandemic, and what we are embarking upon is a recovery plan, a serious recovery plan for a serious province. A real pandemic deserves a real recovery strategy, and that is what this government is advancing.

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

Manitoba Hydro Layoffs Economic Recovery Concerns

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, I am here to fight for people's jobs. My colleagues on this side of the House are here to fight for people's jobs. On the other side of the House, they are plowing ahead with a pan—a plan for pink slips and pain.

Madam Speaker, there is a broad economic consensus that governments have to keep people working during recessions, otherwise they risk turning them into a depression. What is worse is that these 700 jobs that are being cut at Manitoba Hydro, according Manitoba Hydro themselves, will lead to longer wait times, more frequent and longer outages as well.

There are more Manitobans spending more time using electronic devices, ovens, televisions, at home than ever before.

Why would the Premier put people out of work at a time when people are turning to Manitoba Hydro more than ever before?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, again, Madam Speaker, I'll replace hyperbole with reason and say to the member opposite and to all members that an analysis across the country has shown that Manitoba has some of the broadest and richest support programs to get us through this pandemic of any Canadian province. And so that data was compiled by the Privy Council Office in Ottawa. That is a nonpartisan agency.

And I would say to the member that our responses have been, I think, not only sensitive to the vulnerabilities of the present, but also have focused on how we can recover better as a province going forward. And we'll continue to advance programs that will assist Manitobans in need, as we have, because we believe that supporting the most vulnerable in our province should remain our focus, as it has been.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, it's a sad reality that under this Premier, Manitoba, unfortunately, is one of the provincial leaders when it comes to job cuts and layoffs. That is simply wrong. Every job lost right now delays the economic recovery.

Everything that we spend right now to invest, to keep people working, brings the end to the recession closer to us. It promotes a recovery. This is a broad consensus shared not just by economists and business leaders here in Manitoba. Even former Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper understood that governments have to keep people working during a recession.

It is clear that this government is not only ignoring economic advice and business advice, they are even ignoring the experts within their own party.

Will they simply abandon their plan to lay off 700 people at Manitoba Hydro and commit to keeping every single Manitoban working that they possibly can?

Mr. Pallister: Let me replace the member's fabrication with facts, Madam Speaker.

There have been—there has been more displacement of public sector workers in British Columbia than in Manitoba, in Alberta than in Manitoba, in Saskatchewan than in Manitoba, in Ontario than in Manitoba, in Quebec than in Manitoba, in Labrador and Newfoundland than in Manitoba, in PEI than in Manitoba.

The member is simply wrong, and the fact of the matter is we're asking for a 2 per cent contribution from our public sector because all the work isn't needed right now, so we can help the 50 per cent displaced people in the private sector, and our front-line workers continue to help us win against COVID.

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

Mr. Kinew: The problem with the Premier's rhetoric is this: that's not what's happening.

Every person being put out of work by his Cabinet orders, that's a—one less customer to support the business that is struggling to stay alive. Their cuts means pain for the businesses out there in the community. It means more job losses for the Manitobans that are trying to keep their families'

heads above water when it comes their financial situation. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: We know that these cuts will prolong the economic misery. When you cut 700 jobs from Manitoba Hydro, that's not going to help the front lines of health care. That's only going to hurt the bottom line for everybody in our province.

Will the Premier simply stand in his place today and accept the expertise of economists and business leaders and even members of his own party who are saying we have to keep every single Manitoban working that we can?

Mr. Pallister: In our minds, when there are 100,000 Manitobans in the private sector who've lost their jobs, when there are a quarter of a million people in the private sector who have lost wages and time at work, it's not too much to ask for a 2 per cent savings when people don't have the work that they usually do; and that's the contribution we're asking: 2 per cent from the public sector to help the 50 per cent in the private sector.

The member's idea is that we can get out of this thing by just having a bigger public service. If that's such a good idea, as he claims, Madam Speaker, why is no one else doing that? No one else in Canada, no one else in the Western world, no one else in the planet is doing that.

The member is simply bowing down to the very people who he depends upon to keep his position, when he should be working for Manitobans. That's precisely what the people on this side of the House are doing to keep doing.

Manitoba Hydro Layoffs Request to Reverse

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Madam Speaker, after cutting 18 per cent of Hydro's workforce, Manitoba Hydro said that further staff reductions would present risk to public and employee safety and compromise the corporation's level of service to customers. Now the Pallister government is demanding that Hydro cut an additional 14 per cent of employees from the payroll, not the 1.8 per cent they claim.

Why is this government misleading Manitobans about the cuts, and will they back down from this misguided plan?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Our goal is to redirect as much money as we can to the front

lines to make sure that Manitobans are protected. We continue to look for creative solutions to work with unions, to work with all entities to make sure we can put as much money as we can to protect Manitobans. That is our No. 1 goal, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Sala: Madam Speaker, 700 people supporting 700 families are now facing layoffs, and that's what this government calls a creative solution. We disagree on this side of the House. This is after hundreds of Manitobans have lost their jobs at Hydro since 2016. We need to maintain staff at Hydro because it's an essential service, not cut or contract out in an attempt to privatize.

Not a single cent of these cuts at Hydro will go to the front lines, as this government is suggesting, and we know that these cuts have been part of the Premier's plan all along.

Will the minister back down and keep Hydro strong when we need it most?

Mr. Fielding: To take advice from a party that somehow tried to almost bankrupt Hydro, in terms of the amount of massive debts that they brought on, is a little rich for even the members of the NDP.

Our government is looking to redirect as much resources as we can to the front line to protect Manitobans. That is our plan. We've been successful at that. We're going to continue that plan to make sure that Manitobans are protected, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Sala: Madam Speaker, the minister knows that not a single red cent of these cuts will go to help our health-care system. They're being made for craven, political reasons, and here's why that's obvious: 700 Manitobans are receiving a pink slip while Brad Wall gets paid \$2.5 million to do a partisan political review at this government's bidding.

The minister might want to start looking at the contracts he's handed out to his friends to find cost savings rather than laying off hundreds of Manitobans. Shame on this minister.

Will this minister do the right thing and reverse these cuts to Manitoba Hydro?

Mr. Fielding: In these times of a 'pandemic'—pandemic happening, Manitobans want a common sense approach. Thank goodness that the NDP are not

in charge of the finances for Manitoba during this important process, important time 'frames'—frame in terms of Manitoba aspects.

We are spending billions of dollars. We'll be spending billions of dollars to protect Manitobans. That is our utmost goal: to make sure Manitobans are protected. We think a 2 per cent is not anywhere near—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fielding: —what was highlighted and was fear-mongered by the NDP in terms of job cups that are there.

We need to support Manitobans and put as much money to the front line as we can to protect Manitobans.

* (14:10)

Environmental Organizations Request to Restore Funding

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, last week the Premier (Mr. Pallister) used the pretext of the pandemic to cut the programming provided by several environmental organizations, including the Green Action Centre, Climate Change Connection and the Manitoba Eco-Network. But environmental protection is not optional; it's more important than ever, considering Manitobans' emissions continue to go up under this government.

These organizations are small and is—as is the amount of government funding. It's clear the cut is about ideology over fiscal common sense.

Will the minister reverse the cut to environmental organizations?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate): I appreciate the question from the member opposite. Households are all reassessing where they are directing their spending based on needs.

Our government is no different. We are looking at the needs of this province and—including our need to address climate change and address the environmental needs in this province, and we will continue to do so in a responsible manner. And I will say that there have been no communication of cuts to this point to any organization from our department.

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

Ms. Naylor: Madam Speaker, the Pallister government is looking to change environmental licensing to reduce environmental compliance, so it's clear what they value, but loosening environmental protections and cutting important environmental programs is so short-sighted. After all, we are going to need a healthy environment to continue to help keep people healthy into the future.

Yet, the minister and the Premier are set on silencing the voices of those who might oppose their reduction of environmental protections.

Will the minister reverse the cuts that these organizations believe have happened for these important services that they provide? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: And, again, I appreciate the question from the member opposite, and I'd be happy to sit down and have further discussions with the member to clarify that there at no point will be any threat to any of our environmental licensing requirements.

However, I will point out that we are in an unprecedented time at this point, and a number of organizations and a number of groups have struggled not only to have people on site for various requirements, but also to contribute some of the data that is very important.

So we are working very closely with all organizations and anybody who reaches out to us to express their struggle, and we will work together to keep the environment safe but, as well, to recognize that everybody at this point is struggling and we are here to help.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Naylor: Madam Speaker, I want to be very clear on this point. At the same moment as the Pallister government is looking to loosen environmental protections, they are cutting funding to the exact organizations who monitor government actions in this area.

These are small grants to organizations that do very important work. They deliver good programs and they advocate for the protection of our environment, something we actually need now more than ever.

The minister needs to reconsider and reverse these cuts. Will she do so today?

Mrs. Guillemard: And just to put a few clarification points on the record here, we have delayed our grant portal opening due to the COVID pandemic that—a lot of changes have had to be made.

We have not cut our funding. We have not denied any organizations. We haven't yet received a proposal, so I look forward to all the proposals that will come before our department. I will assess them based on how they are going to benefit all Manitobans, and they will hear from us shortly.

Thank you.

Flin Flon General Hospital Request to Reopen OR

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): This Pallister government sure has an interesting way of handling health care, particularly in the North, during a pandemic. Permanently shutting an operating room and making it more difficult for people who fall ill with COVID-19 or other respiratory illnesses to get the care they need is the last thing the minister should be doing in a health-care pandemic.

So these are irresponsible cuts, Madam Speaker. The minister needs to be working fast to replace the lost surgeon and anesthesiologist and make sure no one is turned away.

When will the minister reopen that OR in Flin Flon?

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

I was pleased to reach out personally to the member and to have a conversation about the decision in this case by the regulator, by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. That member knows that the doctor in question is no longer registered to practice in Manitoba. The member also knows that similar concerns were—to the anesthetist. These are not decisions that the government took; these are decisions of those agencies that had the responsibility to keep all Manitobans safe.

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

Mr. Lindsey: It's interesting how they spin the fact that these doctors don't have licences anymore. It's a sort of a self-fulfilling prophecy on their part.

So, I'll table a document that shows five front-line-worker jobs are on the line because of the minister's decision to shutter the Flin Flon operating

room. So not only are the minister's cuts resulting in residents being turned away from accessing health care that they need in Flin Flon, now more people are potentially losing their jobs and being forced to relocate during a pandemic.

So, when will the minister reopen the OR so nobody has to lose their job?

Mr. Friesen: Well, to be clear, Madam Speaker, Northern Health did undertake to make the decision to suspend the surgeries because of those licensing issues that I pointed to. I would further correct the member and let him know that when it comes to affected nurses, they were offered vacant nursing positions elsewhere in northern region.

But when the member is talking about the nature of the commitments that our government is making to Northern Health, they are there, including the \$27-million new emergency department for Flin Flon hospital that we know is serving that community very well.

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

Mr. Lindsey: These cuts are sending a bad message to the residents of the town of Flin Flon and all the neighbouring towns that depend on that hospital. Everything we've seen from this government, from when they first took power, has been to cut that service, particularly in Flin Flon.

They keep getting rid of doctors and saying they don't have licences because they fire them, and the doctor can't maintain his licence if he doesn't have a job. They cut obstetric services and told us, well, it's going to be part of the plan, stay tuned. Next they privatized Lifeflight, making it harder for people to actually get health care. Now they've shut the OR.

When will the minister reverse his cuts, restore obstetric services and get that operating room back open?

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, the member is so gloomy, but he knows that we have been making good investments in the North in health care. He knows that the cornerstone—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: —of the Province's provincial Clinical and Preventative Services Plan is exactly to bolster service delivery closer to home for people who live in the North.

But that member knows something else. He also knows it was the NDP government that actually closed 14—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen:—obstetric programs, including eight in the North.

Dauphin Correctional Facility Closure Request to Build Healing Lodge

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): In the midst of a global pandemic, families shouldn't be forced to relocate, exposing themselves to possible community transmission of COVID-19, particularly when we're supposed to be physical distancing.

Madam Speaker, we know the Dauphin correctional facility needs to be replaced. During an economic downturn the Premier (Mr. Pallister) should be investing in a healing lodge offering restorative justice approaches to Manitobans in conflict with the law.

Will the Premier postpone the closure of the Dauphin correctional facility and build a healing lodge?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I appreciate the question in respect of Justice, and, first of all, off the top, I do want to thank our senior management and our front-line staff for the tremendous work they're doing in terms of managing this pandemic situation.

* (14:20)

Our priority is to make sure that our staff and our inmates remain safe through this crisis. We're working very closely with the public health officials. In fact, Dr. Atwal from the public health office has been assigned to work with Justice.

And I will tell you, Madam Speaker, no cases of COVID-19 in our jail systems at this time. Very positive so far.

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

Ms. Fontaine: During a recession, when businesses across Manitoba are struggling to keep their doors open because of a lack of financial assistance from this Premier, he's decided to continue ahead with his plan of a loss of 80 jobs in the city of Dauphin.

We know that communities across the province will continue to feel the true economic and social

impacts of COVID-19 for months and years to come, Madam Speaker.

So will the Premier invest today in a healing lodge and support the city of Dauphin and invest in a restorative justice approach for Manitobans in conflict with the law?

Mr. Cullen: I do want to take the opportunity to thank all of our stakeholders within Justice who are embracing change, and this pandemic has forced change upon us—and I think change for the better.

It has allowed us to enhance and expedite our criminal justice modernization strategy. We've been able to focus on the inmates that are in remand waiting for sentencing. We've been able, through that process, to drive down our custody counts. And our custody counts are down across the province and all of our institutions, including the one in Dauphin. I think at today's count in Dauphin we're less than 20 inmates actually in Dauphin at this particular time.

And I just, again, want to thank our stakeholders for the great work that they are doing across the province.

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

Ms. Fontaine: Communities deserve to feel safe and successful by making meaningful investments during a pandemic and taking a new approach to the justice system.

The community of Dauphin is simply asking the Premier and the minister to listen, to hear their concerns about the increased stress on Manitobans in conflict with the law and for staff forced to relocate during a global pandemic, Madam Speaker.

Will the Premier build a new healing lodge and postpone the closure of the Dauphin Correctional Centre today?

Mr. Cullen: I will say that our department is working very closely with the individuals that will be impacted as a result of the pending closure of the Dauphin correctional facility.

And when the member talks about restorative justice, we do have a very robust restorative justice program in Manitoba. We are expanding the restorative justice program in Manitoba throughout the communities that she references. We've been very encouraged with the dialogue we've had with a number of communities, especially in northern

Manitoba, about enhancing restorative justice in northern Manitoba.

And, again, quite frankly, this pandemic has allowed us to really move the needle on restorative justice in northern Manitoba.

Provincial Finances Update Request

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): The Premier has been making some outrageous statements at press conferences that are increasingly hard to believe—or, as we call it here in Manitoba, Tuesday.

The Premier keeps throwing around numbers for cuts, but he hasn't produced a single credible document to back up his claims. What are these numbers based on? Why 700 layoffs at Hydro? Why 2 per cent cuts or 30 per cent cuts?

Will the Premier provide a written plan with actual numbers to explain his government's bloodletting and projections of their impact? The original envelope, a napkin, anything will do, because we have yet to see anything that is remotely credible from this government.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, just as an example of credibility, to help the member reflect, a week ago the member was very vocal and harsh in his criticisms of the government for introducing a \$200 payment out of respect to our seniors in the province. He put on record a number of comments.

Just yesterday, the Prime Minister copied our program. I'm just curious if the member's position is the same today as it was a week ago, and, if it isn't, I'd like him to put on record what his position currently is.

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

Public Sector Workforce Reason for Layoffs

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

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamont:—one of the things that's happened in this crisis is that the line between government and countless arm's-length organizations has effectively disappeared.

Manitoba Hydro, MPI, Workers Compensation, universities, colleges, municipalities and school

divisions—they have two things in common. First, they are all designed to be arm's length from this government to protect from political interference; and, second, every single one of them is being smashed open like a piggy bank and used as a slush fund for this government, just like the NDP did.

We heard that both U of M and Manitoba Hydro found the savings asked of them, but that this government demanded layoffs anyway.

Can the Premier confirm this, and if that's the case can he explain himself?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, as far as arm's length is concerned, I think one of the things that should always remain arm's length from political influence would be the appointment of judges. Maybe the member'd like to comment on that today.

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

Children in CFS Care Access to Online Education

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, it is shocking that there are children in the care of the government's Child and Family Services who are not going to school online during this pandemic.

Schools and CFS agencies are not tracking down all children who've moved. Not all organizations operating group homes are ensuring all children in their care are going to school. The same disaster of kids not going to school happened under the NDP. Then, only 33 per cent of children in care graduated from high school.

The Premier is a former teacher. He says he cares about children and schooling.

Will he act today to ensure every one of the 10,000 children in CFS care who's of school age has the technology and the support and is going to school online?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Education): I thank the member for the question. It is an important a question.

Representatives from my office have met recently with the Manitoba child's advocate and—to ensure that we're doing all that we can in unprecedented and difficult times, in times that nobody could've predicted only a few months ago, to ensure that all students, not just those in care, but—are being as

connected as possible to the education and the school system. We will continue to have those discussions with all those who care about this issue, which I think is all Manitobans, including the member opposite.

And in difficult and unprecedented times we know that there are many who are doing their best, working their hardest and achieving great things in a relatively short period of time.

Green Team Programs Government Investment

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): Our government recognizes the importance of Manitoba's community-based, not-for-profit organizations and their important role in building thriving, sustainable communities. We also know that as we move into the recovery phase of the pandemic it's important to support employers and to help students gain critical work experience. That's why our government is increasing the support available for Green Team projects right across the province.

Can the minister please update us on the details of this important announcement?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Municipal Relations): I'd like to thank my friend from Portage la Prairie for that question.

Our government was very proud last week to announce the doubling of The Green Team programs to support community organizations, provincial parks and municipalities. This doubling of The Green Team investment from our government will help get more youth back to work. We're creating more than 2,000 jobs this summer and also assisting many of our not-for profit agencies, who will be receiving 100 per cent of their wages covered through this program with the post-pandemic economic recovery here in Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Manitoba Fishing Industry Financial Support Programs

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): COVID-19 is causing huge disruption to food production and food services in our province.

We've recently received word that Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation has seen such a drastic drop in sales that they are no longer buying fishers' walleye. It's an absolute disaster for dozens of communities along Lake Winnipeg and in northern Manitoba.

Fishers need support today, and the Province's programs just aren't sufficient.

Will the minister commit to direct financial aid for—from the Province to our fishers?

Hon. Ralph Eichler (Minister of Economic Development and Training): Absolutely, the fishermen and the fish marketing is very important to our economy. We continue to work with them on a regular basis in order to ensure there's a market now and into the future.

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

* (14:30)

Mr. Bushie: The Pallister government's whole approach during this pandemic is to wait and see what the federal government is doing rather than show leadership to meet the growing concerns of Manitoba families, and what programs they have developed are missing the mark.

The Province's so-called gap funding program allows Manitoba fishers and many other businesses to fall through the cracks because they have no business number. It's a provincial program designed to fail the people who need it—who need help the most. It makes no sense.

Will the minister commit to direct financial aid for our fishers? Yes or no?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): We're very proud of the gap program. There is a number of businesses that are falling between the cracks of the federal program. What I am very pleased to announce is over 2,289 businesses have applied for the gap program.

That's over close to \$14 million of money that is needed by Manitoba businesses are being supported by this government and, more importantly, Madam Speaker, they're getting it extremely fast in their hands, in their bank accounts. That's real progress for Manitoba businesses.

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

Mr. Bushie: So I take that answer to be no.

The minister's response to the economic pain to fishers is to say that they are not unique, but that's not true, Madam Speaker. Fishers and other small businesses that don't have a business number are excluded from the only programs the Province has on

offer. This so-called gap program is failing fishers and Manitoba communities.

It's not too late. We need exceptional supports for our fishers in their hour of need.

Will the minister step forward with a plan?

Mr. Fielding: As the Premier mentioned earlier on, the federal government to the Privy Council has talked about the supports that provinces had offered. In fact, Manitoba is one of the leaders in terms of supporting, whether it be businesses, whether it be people. The gap program is an important program: \$120 million to support businesses that are having problems that have—fall between the cracks.

Again, more than 2,200 businesses have money in their bank account to support their businesses because of this important program. The government is there and we're there to support small and local size businesses. That's what this program does, Madam Speaker.

Public Sector Layoffs Economic Recovery Concerns

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, I want to return to the topic of the job cuts being ordered by this government, because the non-answers we've heard so far simply don't cut it for those families that are losing their income.

The Premier's arguments that because some sectors of the economy are hurting, that we should therefore take a hatchet to those remaining sectors of the economy that are still working simply don't make any sense. These cuts will make the recession worse and will push more and more families—particularly those this week we've heard, those who work for Manitoba Hydro—into hard times.

When we think of the consumer's perspective, we know that this is going to lead to more outages that will be more frequent and last for longer. That is another bad move during a pandemic.

We will fight for Manitobans' jobs, but will the Premier stand in the House today and tell us that, once and for all, he's going to reverse his plan of cuts and instead stand up for the average working family in Manitoba?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, the member's thesis—which falls apart under even the most shallow of analysis—is that if we simply grow the public sector, we can get out of this pandemic

unscathed. What he ignores is the reality of the real assistance needed by real people right now in Manitoba.

That's the kind of assistance we're offering with our gap program—\$120-million budget, with our summer student wage subsidy program to help small businesses and young people get employment—\$120 million. By deferring provincial income and corporate tax filing, that's another major contribution.

Putting more money in the hands of working Manitoba families is something the NDP was never very good at, Madam Speaker: 15 tax hikes in just 14 years proves that. But we're increasing scholarships and bursaries for post-secondary students. We're assisting small businesses. We're bolstering our Green Team projects. We're doing a number of programs to put more money in the hands of working Manitobans and students as well.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, the No. 1 way to put money in the hands of working people is to ensure that they have a job, and yet they are putting people out of work by decrees that every single Cabinet minister signs off on at their weekly meetings: thousands of Manitobans so far, hundreds of Manitoba Hydro workers just this week alone.

Again, this will cause a spinoff effect. It already is: fewer customers at those businesses, more job losses in the private sector for those who are already struggling to get by. This plan for cuts is a recipe for a prolonged economic recession. We have learned from every recession in recorded history that when governments pursue austerity, their jurisdictions feel pain. Instead, when governments invest, they have a quicker recovery.

Will the Premier simply tell Manitobans what they want to hear: that they will change their plan and instead fight for Manitobans' jobs?

Mr. Pallister: The member imagines a simplistic solution, Madam Speaker, which does not exist. He imagines that we can solve an unprecedented pandemic's economic realities by simply growing the size of the public sector and everyone will have a job and it'll—all the problems will go away.

It's just imagination, Madam Speaker. Let's replace it with some reality. The reality is we're in the middle of a recession caused by an international pandemic, a virus that is nefarious and sneaky

and dangerous. We're reacting intelligently and thoughtfully, and we are definitely spending money.

Anyone who would equate the word austerity to potential four–5 billion potential deficit doesn't understand what the word austerity means. What it means, Madam Speaker, is bleak. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: And what would be bleak would be to listen to the advice of the member and dig us, the most indebted people in the country, into a bigger debt hole while investing in—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —something totally unproductive, Madam Speaker.

Throwing money at a problem never made it go away. We're throwing money at solutions instead.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation Incorporation Act

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) An act to incorporate the Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation was assented to on June 30th, 1982.

(2) In 1990, the act was re-enacted bilingually as The Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation Incorporation Act.

(3) In order to modernize the act, the Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation requires that certain amendments be brought forward.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To amend The Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation Incorporation Act in order to (a) change the composition of the board of the foundation, (b) enable the board of the foundation to establish an investment policy and retain external investment—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —managers to administer the foundation's assets in accordance with that policy and (c) make minor administrative amendments.

The Winnipeg Humane Society Foundation, per Timothy S. Dewart, board member and legal counsel.

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

Further petitions?

Dauphin Correctional Centre

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

(4) And as of January 27, 2020, Manitoba 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 Dauphin Correctional Centre and proceed with the previous plan to build a new correctional and healing centre with an expanded courthouse in Dauphin.

Madam Speaker, the petition has been signed by Megan Morran, Rhonna Rodriguez and Gabriel Rodriguez.

Crown Land Leases

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Many farmers, specifically cattle ranchers, will be negatively impacted by the changes to leased Crown land announced by the provincial government on September 27, 2019.

(2) Farmers previously had the ability to strategically plan out the way in which they utilized their leased Crown land.

(3) The announcement reduced leaseholds by 35 years to 15 years, and these changes will create great uncertainty, having the potential to impact an entire farm's operation and even existence.

* (14:40)

This uncertainty will take away the incentive for farmers to safely invest in their Crown land leases.

The potential of losing these leases without the afforded time to plan ahead will create additional stress for the current farming generation and the ones to follow.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Agriculture to reconsider the changes to Crown land leases and instead create an agreeable strategy that satisfies all parties, specifically ranchers;

To urge the Minister of Agriculture to recognize the value of agriculture in the province of Manitoba and the value Crown land holds to farmers in sustaining their livelihood;

To urge the Minister of Agriculture and all honourable members to understand the importance—important role farmers play in the Manitoba economy, and to allow them to take part in discussions that directly impact their livelihood.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Thank you.

Dauphin Correctional Centre

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The following—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 justice system was already more than 250 inmates up 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.

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

The background to the 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.

And this petition, Madam Speaker, has been signed by Elizabeth Taylor, Laurie Hanbria [*phonetic*], and Nicole Sonwieta [*phonetic*], along with many other Manitobans.

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

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Madam Speaker, in accordance with rule 38(1), I move, seconded by the member for Flin Flon, that a regularly scheduled business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter

of urgent public importance, namely, the failure of the provincial government to provide financial assistance to livestock, grain and other producers that are facing an unprecedented crisis due to the disruption to production, processing and supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic after previously increasing their financial burden due to Crown land rent increases and making their ability to access credit and insurance services more difficult by ordering a 20 per cent cut to Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation.

Madam Speaker: Before recognizing the honourable member for Burrows (Mr. Brar), I should remind all members that under rule 38(2), the mover of a 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 Beuchesne citation 390, urgency in this context means the urgency of immediate debate, not of the subject matter of the motion. 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. Brar: I want to bring a matter of urgent public interest to your notice. It's about our farmers. It's about our grain producers, vegetable producers, beekeepers, livestock producers, family farms and fishers.

Every single producer has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether we talk about cash flow, input purchase costs, availability of labour, driving licensing issues, health checkups, transportation, food demand, housing of seasonal workers, supply chain, social distancing or lack of markets for freshwater fish, all of these things are impacted by the disruption of COVID-19. Today we are calling on the Pallister government to take real action to help our producers. We are also calling on the government to immediately assemble a panel of industry, government and the official opposition to develop solutions that will work for our agricultural community.

Our livestock producers are facing economic hardship due to packing plants either closing—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order.

There are conversations that are going on in the House. It's making it difficult for me to hear the member. So I wonder if the conversations can be

directed to the loge or just quieten down a little bit, please.

Mr. Brar: Our livestock producers are facing economic hardship due to packing plants either closing or running under capacity. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak among workers at Cargill's processing plant in High River and JBS meat plant in Brooks in Alberta, food supply chains have been impacted badly. Hundreds of workers have been tested positive for COVID in these two plants. These two plants roughly account for 70 per cent of federally inspected beef in Canada. A few other plants have also been impacted similarly by this pandemic.

Plants closing or running under capacity means less demand for cattle. As a result, hundreds of thousands of cattle are stuck waiting to be sold. Farmers are in need of money, but there's no one at the auction mart to buy their cattle. In the recent past, some auction marts have had as less as three animals for sale. Producers are upset to see this scenario.

Farmers are losing up to \$400 per cow if they have to sell them to pay their bills. If they decide to keep them on the farm 'til the prices go back to normal, then they need to feed them. So the producers are losing money in all situations. To add insult to injury, these producers are facing huge bills for Crown land leases. Due to the Crown land lease regulations change, lease rates have increased significantly. The farmers are extremely stressed.

I got a chance to talk to a few farmers who are caught up in similar circumstances. I would like to share a part of the statement from a producer who farms north of Dauphin, and I quote: The new Crown land changes announced after the provincial elections were a shock for me to hear. It really felt like the government purposely imposed this on us, hoping to just drive us out of the area. I'm not sure how I am going to pay my bill this year, never mind next year's increase. End quote.

* (14:50)

The producers are being forced to give back a part of their Crown lands because they can't afford to pay the lease bills. A farmer who used to pay \$30,000 before the lease rate increase took place is now paying over \$50,000 for the same piece of land. This producer was so upset with the changes and said, and I quote: We have tried to give some land back to the Province, but they're reluctant to take it unless we give up everything. We have no choice but to try to go on for this year. I feel bad for some young neighbours who

won't make it. Please help us to understand how Manitoba will benefit by destroying small businesses. It is so frustrating. I am ashamed to admit that I voted for this government. End quote.

Madam Speaker, recently, I got to talk to one of my Manitoba Agriculture clients who I used to deal with in the Interlake in the past. During the conversation, he mentioned the word suicide to define this scenario and state of mind of producers facing this crisis.

Madam Speaker, I strongly suggest this government to roll back the Crown land lease rates right now. I would urge the Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development (Mr. Pedersen) to commit to this and announce this rollback to save our livestock industry at the time when it's urgently needed.

So many other producers are impacted by this pandemic. For potato growers, almost one third of Manitoba's 2019 harvest is still in storage because of processors cutting back on production. Restaurants are closed. Where do the spuds go? Nowhere, Madam Speaker. They have nowhere to go.

I want to share with everyone in this Chamber that our potato growers had huge harvest losses for the last two years due to bad weather. Keystone Potato Producers' Association has demanded financial assistance from this government. Agriculture and food sector must have priority access to non-medical-grade masks and gloves to protect their workers from possible infections. Farmers are demanding access to CERB and EI for workers on Manitoba farms and Manitoba food businesses to ensure there are incentives to work in support of Canadian food security during the pandemic. They want EIA programs modified to permit benefit recipients to seek full-time employment in the agri-food sector while retaining access to benefits.

The Pallister government's response to this is perverse. Their so-called gap program allows our producers to fall right through because only those who have a business number are eligible. As the government knows, many, many family farms do not incorporate and don't have a business number, and so they would be ineligible for financial support from the Province. This needs to change immediately.

The Prairie Fruit Growers have asked assistance similar to that provided to the Direct Farm Manitoba to develop online you-pick platform for fruits and vegetables. Vegetable and honey operations are demanding some adjustments to work with seasonal

workers. This could be conditional upon the submission of a risk management plan approved by local health authorities.

Members on this side of the House have already asked this government to advance a \$100,000 interest-free loan to our farmers for purchase of imports before the seeding season.

Last but not least, our Manitoba fishers have approached us to raise their concerns to this government. Our fishers are working hard to support their families and Manitoba economy for hundreds of years. Due to the depression in demand for fish markets, the supply chain is being impacted badly. This situation will have significant impact on the incomes of fishers going forward. At the time—at the same time, fishers are facing significant costs due to recent regulatory changes that are putting a strain on our fishers.

I ask the government to consider all actions possible to support them.

As you know, the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation still has significant winter inventory that they would normally be selling at this time of the year, but are unable to do so because demand—because of demand disruption.

I also want to draw your attention to the challenge fishers are having in complying with recent net size changes on Lake Winnipeg. Fishers tell me that their supply chain for new nets are disrupted during COVID-19, and that the cost of replacing all the nets, at the same time as their income is catastrophically dropping, will be too much for them to bear.

I ask that the minister consider whether it's reasonable to ask fishers to bear such a large expense at this time or whether a delay in order. At the very least, Manitoba government should provide financial assistance that addresses this exceptional cost.

Thank you.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, I will only take a few moments to respond to whether or not this rises to the level of a need for a special debate, a matter of urgent public importance.

I do want to say that I think that is—it is an important issue. In fact, if there is some good that might come out of this pandemic, it may be that the NDP have rediscovered agriculture, Madam Speaker, and the importance of agriculture. I had to do a double take when I saw the notice that they're looking to raise

a MUPI on agriculture, because I don't ever remember them raising it in question period or any other areas of Manitoba, and suddenly they feel that it's so important that they should set aside debate in the afternoon.

Now, of course, it is important and I don't want to dismiss that, even though they've only found that importance in the last 10 minutes, Madam Speaker. That doesn't mean that it isn't important; it clearly is important. It's been important to members on this side of the House for many, many years. In fact, of course, we have many members of our caucus who have a strong history and a background in agriculture, many aspects of agriculture, and so we know full well the impact of this pandemic, and other issues that have come up in the past, whether it's been the BSE crisis, or droughts have had on agriculture.

The issue is whether or not it is so important there's no other time to debate this, and that is the criteria that you'll be asked to weigh, Madam Speaker.

And I referenced question period a little bit earlier and I did listen, as I always do, to all of the member opposites' questions during question period, and not one came about agriculture. They had their full set of questions, and not one member stood up, including the member who's raised this MUPI, and asked about agriculture, and if the criteria is, is there no other place to debate this issue, no reasonable place to debate.

Of course, this afternoon the member opposite may not know what bill we're going to call and it may not fit this afternoon, but there certainly was an opportunity during question period, and he chose not to raise it during question period.

So he defeats his own argument on whether or not this should be allowed as a MUPI by his own caucus's actions by not raising this during question period, so I would hope, Madam Speaker, that you'll see that this is an important issue, but not qualified under our rules as a matter of urgent public importance.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, is he looking for leave to speak to the—this issue?

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): To speak to the MUPI, yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to speak to the matter of urgent public importance?
[Agreed]

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, I rise to support this matter of urgent public importance—

An Honourable Member: Denied.

Mr. Gerrard: Too late.

During this COVID-19 pandemic, one of the important and essential areas to all of us in Manitoba and in Canada is having access to a good supply of food. In this context, our agricultural producers and our fishers are very important.

But it has to be noted that, in addition to our primary food producers, individuals and businesses which support those in agriculture or fishing industries are also important.

We also rely critically on our food processing and distribution businesses, including grocery stores. This whole network of food production and distribution is of critical importance to us today as, indeed, it is every day.

* (15:00)

I want to personally thank all Manitoba producers and all those who contribute to ensuring our food supply chain is intact and working well and that we have safe high-quality food. I say thank you, thank you, thank you.

Today our food producers are looking from help from our provincial government. And at this time when we have a COVID-19 pandemic, I want to talk first about the businesses which support food producers and the general help for small businesses, because in the last few days I have received many emails from people in small businesses in Manitoba, many of whom who support food producers.

And I will present—provide an example of the message from one of these letters. The letter says: small businesses are in desperate need of government support. The physical distancing requirements to protect the public from COVID-19 have had a devastating impact on small businesses. While small businesses were quick to close to help save lives, the government has been slow to provide basic support to ensure they're able to reopen. I'm seeking your support to protect small businesses. Without your help, many will be unable to survive.

The single greatest challenge facing small business owners is rent. If rent protections are not put in place, thousands of businesses will be forced to close. The economic impact of choosing not to support small businesses will be disastrous for both our local and national economy. Any plan to reopen must include rent support. Without most—without it,

most small businesses will be unable to do so successfully.

The provinces have the jurisdiction and the ability to implement two key mechanisms of support: (1) to issue a moratorium on commercial evictions, and (2) to work with the federal government to make the Canada Revenue Agency support for small businesses and their rent mandatory for landlords. Currently, it is less than 20 per cent of landlords who are expected to participate in this support and the provinces need to step up to ensure the small businesses, the heart and soul of our community, are protected. There is little time to act. I call on the government before it is too late.

For agricultural producers there are specific measures which are clearly needed, and as the Keystone agriculture producers are currently asking, the Province should put up its 40 per cent of the AgriRecovery costs so this program is fully available to Manitoba farmers. The federal government's 60 per cent is there. We are waiting for the Province to make its contribution. I call on the Province to contribute.

Producers want the interim payments for agri-stability coverage increased 85 per cent. This is a change that's under Manitoba's control. The Province should step forward and make this adjustment. I call on the Province to do so.

Thirdly, beef producers are asking for the provincial government to help with the premiums that they pay. Beef producers are struggling at the moment because the prices are down—we hope temporarily—because of the closure of quite a number of critical packing plants not only in Canada, but in the United States. The provincial government should step up to help. I call on the provincial government to step up and help in this area.

Fourthly, potato producers need help with their crop insurance premiums as a result of two years in a row of poor harvests. The Province should step up to help. I call on the Province to help.

For farmers renting Crown land, the government is dramatically raising the rents on Crown land at a time of the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time when farmers and producers can least afford it. The provincial government should postpone these increases to help producers. I call on the provincial government to postpone these increases and help producers.

The Province is making a 20 per cent cut to the staff of the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation. These cuts, occurring now, are occurring at a critical time because what happened as a result of last fall is that there are some crops which are only just being harvested now, and they need an urgent assessment. We need the full complement of people working at the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation to make sure that these assessments are done well and that farmers are helped promptly at a very critical time.

The provincial government has promised to set a time frame for further reductions in the education tax on farmland. It should do so.

There are concerns about access to hog and beef slaughter and packing plants. The plants in Manitoba need extra protection during the COVID-19 pandemic. The provincial government needs to work with the owners and managers at these plants to do what's needed to ensure that there are no COVID-19 outbreaks in these plants. These are measures which are critically important for farmers and the government, instead of waiting, should act.

There are also critically important measures which are needed for fishers. Fishers need extra storage capacity because of the current situation. There is an opportunity for the Province to work alone or with the federal government to make sure that there is that extra storage capability. I suggest to the members of the government that right now there is an incredible opportunity for fish and to market fish. In part, this is happening because of the closure of many meat-packing plants in the US and in Canada. Fish is an incredibly good source of protein. With a vigorous marketing effort, we could be marketing a lot of fish, I believe.

Furthermore, not only is fish an excellent food and an excellent source of protein, but studies have shown that eating more fish has been shown to improve the academic performance of children in schools because it's well known that fish is an important brain food. The government has been calling for a while to increase the academic performance of students in school. They should get to work and help market fish in Manitoba and elsewhere.

When I was in South Africa a couple of years ago, I came across a fish place where they sold fish, and there was a big sign in front, saying, eat fish to help your brain so you can be smarter and then you'll know that you should be buying more fish. The people in South Africa have got the message. Our government

needs to get the message to smarten up, buy more fish, eat more fish and let's get going in this province to help fishers.

Manitoba Liberals support our farmers and our fishers. There is now an urgent need for the government to act, and we are in strong support of the resolution, the MUPI that's being brought forward. We call on the provincial government to act and support urgently farmers and fishers in our province.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

Madam Speaker: I would point out to the member of River Heights and to the member of Burrows, in your debates, both members actually indicated that they were referencing quotes from a letter. When that happens in the House, it is the rule of the House that when you're quoting from a letter that you need to table three copies of that letter.

So I would ask both members to table their copies. I see the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) is tabling his right now and I would ask the member for Burrows (Mr. Brar) to do the same when he has an opportunity to get those letters. So it's three copies.

And I thank the honourable members for their advice to the Chair on the motion proposed by the honourable member for Burrows. The 90-minute notice—the 90-minute notice required prior to the start of routine proceedings under rule 38(1) was provided, and I thank the honourable member for that.

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.

* (15:10)

I have listened very carefully to the arguments put forward, and although this is, indeed, a very serious matter, 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 The Maples, on a grievance.

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): I rise today on a grievance for lack of provincial government support for the taxi owners and the drivers. As we are all aware, COVID-19 has impacted and is still impacting many industries in Manitoba. This virus has, of course, had its greatest impact on medical staff, including doctors, nurses, paramedics, police, fire-fighters, among many other front-line workers. However, the taxi industry has been forgotten. This industry seems to have flown under the radar. Taxi owners and drivers greatly contribute to the daily lives of Winnipeggers. It is only now during this 'panademic' that we are realizing the true value of taxi companies and their drivers as front-line workers.

Taxi owners and drivers are working every day doing their best to make sure health-care workers and many others still working to help reach their workplace safely, in a timely manner. Taxi owners and drivers are fully aware of the risk that they are taking every day while driving customers to their respective destination without knowing the fact if their customer is infected with the COVID-19 virus.

These owners and drivers deserve to be applauded. They're wiping down their vehicle and sanitizing seats between their trips to make it safer for the next customer. They work 12-hour shifts to cover expenses for their vehicle and to also help people to get to their places. They are not getting any financial support from any government but are still required to pay the same amount of expenses such as insurance and office expenses.

Taxi owners pray—pay approximately \$500 office expenses and \$1,000 a month for the vehicle insurance to MPI, and repair expenses are extra. So their approximately monthly expenses are around \$2,000 to \$2,200.

Well, how much the business has gone down since—compared to the last years this year? In March 2019, one of the biggest companies in Winnipeg was doing 244,332 trips, and in March 2020, it did only 177,881 trips. That is down 66,451 trips.

This year even got worse—this month got even worse than the last month. In April 2019, it did two thousand—220,109 trips, and in April 2020, it did only 76,223 trips. That's down 143,886 trips. They can't survive with this kind of business down. That's more than 75 per cent of their business has gone down, and it's getting worse every single day.

Well, I got some numbers from the second biggest company in Winnipeg. In March 2019, they did 135,879 trips. In March 2020, they did 100,800 trips. In April 2019, they did 120,000 trips. In April 2020, they did only 68,000 trips.

I think that just works out to around 95 trips an hour for the biggest company. And having only done—that's—you have to wait three hours to get one trip. So average trip is \$10. So with these kind of expenses—expenses has not gone down, they're still there. So it's going to get worse for the cab drivers.

Many of us, including the Premier (Mr. Pallister), is receiving email from the taxi industry for financial support because the federal government CEBA doesn't cover the taxis.

As earlier indicated by my friend from the Burrows, the taxis are not incorporated. Taxi owners, drivers do not qualify Manitoba Gap Protection Program or Canada Emergency Business Account because, example, Unicity, Duffy and many more taxi companies are registered and in good standing with the Companies Office and possess a valid business number and have an email address and valid business bank account, but taxi owners do not have an email address, valid business bank account. Taxi owners do have a business number, but they do not register with the Companies Office and don't have a business email address.

A special program needs to be started or changes need to be made in the Manitoba Gap Protection Program to include taxi owners, drivers so they don't have to worry about how will they pay office expense, insurance, continue to provide service to the front-line service providers.

By including taxis in the gap—Manitoba Gap Protection Program, taxi owners are able to pay four months' insurance and also approximately four months' office pieces.

Even during one of these—one of the news conferences, the Premier has indicated that there is an industry—if there's any industry left without support from the federal government program, he will look into that. Taxi industry have not received any help from the federal government. As I indicated, taxi industry do not qualify under Manitoba gap program. Our government cannot let taxi industry die.

There are so many people rely on taxi services. This will be a double blow to the taxi industry, as earlier this government have given no support to the industry when it transported the Taxicab Board from

provincial government to the City of Winnipeg. Before Taxicab Board was transferred from government of Manitoba to the city of Manitoba—City of Winnipeg, taxi medallion price was close to \$500,000. After taxi go—cab board transferred, it went down to \$150,000.

Taxi industry has not recovered from that blow, and now COVID-19 pandemic. If the provincial government don't introduce some kind of a package to the industry, it will die.

Not only are the drivers risking their lives, but they are also risking their families as end of the day when they go home, which can affect their family members, too.

*(15:20)

Just want to share one of the owners who just called me the other day, how their life is changed from what they were doing earlier. It used to be they go home, play with their kids, but now they can't do that. They go straight to the washroom, take a shower, and then he said he go into the basement. Now he can't play with his kids. He's worried about his kids.

So I'm asking from the government some kind of package to be introduced to help the taxi industry.

Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Could you please call for second reading Bill 43, The Civil Service Superannuation Amendment Act, and following that, for continuation for debate on 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 43 this afternoon, followed by second reading debate of Bill 49.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 43—The Civil Service Superannuation Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: So we will therefore start with second reading of Bill 43, the civil service superannuation amendment fund.

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Central Services): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 43, The Civil Service Superannuation Amendment Act, 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 table the message.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister for Central Services, seconded by the honourable Minister of Education, that Bill 43, The Civil Service Superannuation Amendment Act, 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.

Mr. Helwer: I'm pleased to rise and put some comments on the record on Bill 43. This bill is acting on recommendations from both the employer and employee representatives on the committee. This bill makes a variety of amendments to The Civil Service Superannuation Act that will align the Civil Service Superannuation Fund with pension best practices, reduce red tape and protect the pension plan for both retirees and current contributors to the pension fund.

The three most significant amendments to this act will: (1) change the method of calculation for costly commuted value payouts that weaken the pension plan for remaining members, (2) support parents by providing greater flexibility to make pension contributions for periods of maternity leave and parental leave, (3) encourage improved governance of the fund by permitting a simpler process and staggered appointments to the board for employee representatives.

The Employee Liaison Committee, a union-appointed committee established under the act to represent the interest of the 55,000 active members and pensioners, has formally recommended these key amendments. The Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union formally agrees with the changes proposed in this bill to help ensure the superannuation fund remains a strong and stable defined-benefit pension plan.

The Employer Advisory Committee has also formally recommended these amendments. This is a committee established under the act to represent the interests of the 44 employers who participate in the superannuation fund. The staff of the superannuation

board and the actuary for the superannuation fund also support these amendments.

So, as recommended by employees and employers, we are acting to protect the retirement benefits of all members in the fund. To quote the union-appointed liaison committee: the change regarding commuted value or CV withdrawals will bring fairer and more equitable allocations of pension values for members who are in the plan today and who retire from the Manitoba public service in the future.

We should highlight that members can still withdraw CVs after age 55, which is unique for defined benefit plans in Canada.

The amendment to change the calculation method of commuted value withdrawals would continue to allow all employees, including those at retirement age, to withdraw the commuted value of their pension but on a cost-neutral basis to the fund.

Employees can also continue to choose how they receive their pension, including guaranteed amounts to be paid to an estate.

No other major pension plan in Manitoba or in the country allows these types of large commuted value withdrawals that have significantly impacted Manitoba's Superannuation Fund in recent years. If changes are not made, all 29,000 active employees and 44 employers would need to make additional contributions to offset the impact of these withdrawals by members who pull their pension fund from the fund.

Alternatively, if changes are not made, pension benefits at retirement would need to be reduced, including the cost of living allowance, or COLA, to current pension recipients. Neither of these options are acceptable, Madam Speaker.

Our government is also reducing red tape in aligning with major—other major pension plans to allow the appointment, rather than election of employee representatives to the board. No other major public sector pension plan elects employee representatives. Instead, they're appointed by bargaining units or other employee groups.

The union-appointed liaison committee currently nominates candidates for election at present. The new appointment process will require staggered appointments to allow better continuity and effective board governance.

Amendments will also ensure that retired employees will be guaranteed representation on the

board. At present, there is no guaranteed representation for the over 22,000 retired employees.

To quote the union-appointed liaison committee: It improved the government's—the governance of the CSSB by allowing the liaison committee to appoint employee representatives on the board.

Another key of the amendment—another of the key amendments will support gender equity, equality and reduce red tape. Currently, an employee has to elect to contribute to their pension before their maternity or parental leave starts. When that leave happens sooner than expected, such as if an employee gave birth prematurely, they lose the opportunity to contribute during their leave. This means that female employees, in particular, can miss up to one year of pensionable service. While they can apply to buy that service back, it will cost the employee more at that later date.

Amendments would allow employees to elect to contribute before, during and for a 30-day period after their maternity or paternal leaves ends and have more flexibility on how to make payments. These changes allow employees more freedom to contribute for maternity or paternity leave, and they are long overdue and benefit everyone.

Other amendments would ensure the Manitoba government has legal authority to comply with pension-related provisions of the Teranet contract and can quickly—we can quickly implement pension-related changes as required through the judicial compensation committee process.

There are many minor amendments to modernize language, increase clarity, simplify administration and reduce red tape and remove spent provisions, some of them going back many decades.

In closing, these necessary amendments to the Civil Service Superannuation Fund help protect the pension promise to both retired employees who are receiving a pension and current employees who are contributing to the pension fund. Bill does not affect early retirement benefits, such as the retirement bridging benefit, the rule of 80 or vacation time banking at a time when other Manitoba public sector plans are reducing their early retirement offerings. The amendments are fiscally responsible to taxpayers and to the fund's participating employers. They improve gender equality for pensionable service and make decision-making easier for expectant and new parents.

The amendments also uphold government's contractual and legal obligations to devolve service providers, judges and other groups. They reduce red tape and simplify the work required by the pension fund's administrators.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Questions

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

* (15:30)

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Madam Speaker, I do have some questions about this bill, and we have some comments to make. But I guess my first question would be: Can the minister take some time and explain the difference between the solvency method and the going concern method for calculations?

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Central Services): I think that's something I would have to leave to the actuaries, and they've described what this will do to keep the fund in good shape. We want to make sure that it continues to be a very successful and viable pension fund. We know it is so now, and this will continue to make sure that that occurs into the future for the pension fund holders.

Mr. Lindsey: Well, I find that answer somewhat questioning, I guess, to say the least, that the minister's introducing a piece of legislation that he's unable to explain what one of the major changes in it means. So you know we perhaps need to spend some time talking about that then.

So why is it significant to extend the deadline to purchase, accrue—or accrue additional benefits? What's the significance of that deadline?

Mr. Helwer: I'm sorry, Madam Speaker. Could the member explain his question a little bit more? I mean, he's lost me on that one.

Mr. Lindsey: It seems that the minister's getting lost quite a bit with answering questions about this particular bill, which, again, should cause us all to be quite concerned about him introducing a bill that he

clearly doesn't understand. So why is it significant to extend the deadline to purchase additional benefits?

Mr. Helwer: You know, I—we had a—an opportunity for the opposition parties to attend and to ask all the detailed questions of the actuaries and all the fund managers. They certainly came to that bill briefing; they asked questions. We gave them opportunity at that time to ask the detailed questions, and the actuary was there to answer this question. I am not an actuary and I don't have the education to be one, and when I talk to the actuaries I don't think I have the brain power either.

So those questions were asked and answered at that bill briefing. We are presenting this bill for the Legislature with the support of both the employers and the employees—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Lindsey: Yes, there's—there were questions asked at the bill briefing, but we're not at the bill briefing now. We're in the House. We're in the Chamber where members have the ability, by the rules of this place, to ask questions and get them answered by the minister introducing a piece of legislation, and that's what we're doing. We've asked a couple questions already and, clearly, the minister doesn't have a good handle on the legislation that he's introducing.

So, I'll ask another question: Can the minister clarify service accrual changes during a leave of absence?

Mr. Helwer: Well, that is certainly something that we did discuss in the speaking notes there, and if the member is talking about the maternity and paternity leaves that we discussed, those opportunities will be changed and brought into modern practice. *[interjection]*

Mr. Lindsey: I hear the members opposite saying asked and answered. Well, it was certainly asked, but the answer was somewhat scant again.

So we ask for the minister to clarify service accrual changes and, yes, he may have done that or an actuary may have done that during the brief bill briefing that we had, but now we would like a matter of record for the minister to explain some of the changes that he as the minister is proposing to a very serious piece of legislation. So would the minister please clarify the service accrual changes during a leave of absence?

Mr. Helwer: Well, I think I did that, and perhaps my understanding and the member's opposite

understanding are different. And it was also—he was not present at the bill briefing. He—another member was—asked their questions. They were answered. Perhaps he did not have those answers relayed to this particular member.

So, you know, we have the support of both the unions and the employers to make these necessary changes, and if the member wants to stand in the way of that, he's perfectly able to do so, but I think he does it at some risk to the pension fund holders.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Lindsey: Well, I take exception to the minister making some kind of veiled threats to me when I'm asking questions, as allowed, and I'm asking the minister to explain changes that he's proposing in legislation. He seems either unwilling or perhaps unable to explain those kind of changes, which is then why we have things like question period, why we have committees, why we have all kinds of steps in this process.

So can the minister clarify now what changes are being made to individuals on long-term disability?

Mr. Helwer: Well, again, this is why we have bill briefings, so the members opposite can get all of the details that are necessary for that. We can certainly have the debate in this Chamber, as we are now. If the member wants additional information from the actuaries, I'm certainly more than willing to get him that information. That's always an option.

And he was—certainly, an option was to come to the bill briefing and ask those questions, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Lindsey: You know, I've asked four questions now for the minister to put on the record—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lindsey: —of this public Chamber why he's made certain changes to the legislation that he has proposed, and yet he is unwilling to answer one question that's been asked so far—or unable, which then calls into question why he's introducing a bill that he clearly doesn't understand.

Let's try again. Question No. 5: Why are marital relationships' status determined at the pension start date and not at the date of application?

Mr. Helwer: And again, these are questions that certainly could have been asked at the bill briefing had the member have attended. You know, these are all

things that are certainly covered, and if the member was interested in attending the bill briefing, he could have so—done so or sent the questions for the member that did attend because there were very good questions answered—asked and answered at that point.

And we—certainly, we listen to the groups that make recommendations on this—on the behalf of the holders of the fund and the members of the employers and we are following on those recommendations, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Lindsey: So I guess in baseball you get three strikes and you're out. Here, we've given the minister five strikes, and he's swung and missed each and every time so far. He just plain refuses to answer questions during question period about the bill he's introducing. He's deflecting. He's sliding off, saying should ask somebody else, should have been somewhere else.

Yes, there's bill briefings to very briefly go over it, and then when it gets introduced in the House, we have the opportunity to ask questions. That's what he's here for today is to answer those questions, so let's start again.

Can the minister explain the difference between the solvency method and the—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Helwer: Well, again, I didn't hear a question, Madam Speaker, but we'll assume that this was a question that the member might have answered had they attended the bill briefing. And I did not send a—set a timeline on the bill briefing. We stayed in the briefing as long as members were there to ask questions, and those questions were answered at that bill briefing.

If the member was not able to attend that briefing, I can't speak to that. They did have a member that attended and asked questions; they were answered, Madam Speaker.

* (15:40)

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I would argue that this is a refreshing display of candour and humility on the part of the minister we don't often see. It's nice to see that he's—admits that when he doesn't know something. That is actually something I struggle with myself.

I just did want to ask: How long has this legislation been in the works, or has it been—how long has it been proposed? Is this new legislation or has it

been—is it something that people have been calling for for a period of time?

Mr. Helwer: So both the liaison groups have been asking this—for this legislation for a number of years. In fact, portions of it were introduced by a previous government and died on the Order Paper. We have added to those changes that the liaison groups have asked for, and this is all at their request. And, if members opposite don't wish to work with the—both the pension holders and the employers, that's their decision, Madam Speaker. But this is at their request that we're bringing this forward, and it has been, as I said, a number of years.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Well, Madam Speaker, I don't know that I've ever encountered this particular scenario here in the Legislature, where a minister responsible for a bill, who's asking this Legislature, in fact, to set aside all business to consider this bill and was trying to move it forward from its first reading all the way through until royal assent this afternoon cannot answer simple questions with regards to the details of the bill.

Does the minister recognize that this is the question period portion of the bill debate and that it is his obligation to answer questions here this afternoon?

Mr. Helwer: Well, I didn't hear a question, so perhaps I can just answer an empirical question, and we have a question about how is the calculation method determined, and the CV calculation is calculated using the plan's discount rate or a going concern basis, and the discount rate is certainly based on the investment on returns that the plan expects to earn. It's recommended by the fund's actuary and approved by the board as part of key assumptions. So the current discount rate for this is 5.75 per cent, but perhaps that's too much detail for the members opposite.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lindsey: It's nice to see that somebody finally supplied the minister with the answer to the bill that he's introducing that he clearly doesn't have the answers. So he's read something off a sheet of paper that answers the question, sort of.

So can he explain what the impact of that change may be on people that are ready to take their pension and need to make decisions based on changes that the minister's proposed?

Mr. Helwer: Well, the impact on the individuals is something that they need to deal with their financial

adviser on, Madam Speaker. They know the parameters they're working under now. They understand from this bill with—working with their financial adviser what those parameters might mean to them. I am not a financial adviser. I recommend that people use those services so that they can find out what the impact would be on their particular circumstances, and it's different for everyone.

Mr. Lindsey: So when the minister was developing this bill that he's unable to answer questions on, was there an analysis done to determine what the impact would be on individuals who wanted to take a pension today, as opposed to waiting for a year or two? And if so, can the minister expound on what those impacts were and who advised him on the changes that he's made and how that affects individuals?

Mr. Helwer: Well, again, the recommendation was from the superannuation and insurance liaison committee, and the actuaries that work on this particular pension fund. It is a fabulous pension fund, I must say; I think the member opposite must know that. The details of the individual pension fund holders are where they need to get advice from people that are much more knowledgeable than—in this than I do. I can tell them that on average about 1,500 members do withdraw or transfer out of the pension fund every year to take the commuted value withdrawal, about 75 per cent for under age 55, and usually are changing employers.

So we can go on if he needs more information of that, but—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired, and the time for this question period has ended.

Debate

Madam Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): You know, we've just gone through a question and no-answer period with the minister. Really and truly what questions we asked were relatively simple to answer, but we didn't get answers.

The people who are about to take a pension have concerns, and those concerns can only be exacerbated by this government's desire to ram this bill through all in one day without the opportunity for people to come to a committee and ask questions. And, certainly, I appreciate the fact that the pension board and pretty much all parties on that board—the union folks, the

management folks—have all had their input and have all made suggestions towards this bill.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

And I understand also that for the most part they are in favour of the bill, but—and this is a—as an important but—we have a democratic process here; the minister clearly doesn't understand it. But his House leader does and his House leader is attempting to force this legislation through without the proper oversight, without the proper debate, without the proper opportunity for people to come out and say, yes, we support it, or, no, we don't.

And, certainly, while the overall opinion seems to be that it is something that should be supported, it's not necessarily a bad thing for the plan going forward. It may very well have huge impacts on people right now. There's implications that I realize the minister doesn't care about, individuals, and certainly doesn't care about workers. Otherwise, he would give those people the opportunity to have their say, and that's what we're attempting to do here today. At the end of the day, I suspect this bill will pass, but it shouldn't pass until people have had the opportunity to have their say either for or against.

So why does this government think that changing the pension laws is of such huge importance that during a pandemic this is what they want to talk about?

Well, there are some reasons why they want to talk about that today rather than things related to health care, rather than things related to personal protective equipment supplies, rather than talk about people that are suffering, people whose livelihoods have disappeared. We have heard earlier today about fishers, for example, that government doesn't want to talk about that. They don't want to talk about those individuals who are really caught in a no-win situation that—well, it's this government. It's that government. It's no government. It's they don't have a business licence. They don't do this. They don't operate the same as other people, so we don't want to talk about that.

We want to talk about what the minister would have us believe or some relatively benign changes to the superannuation pension plan for civil servants.

So there are implications for people that are ready to retire, and, certainly, we've been hearing from individuals that have some of those concerns. So should we just sit down and be quiet like this government would like us to and let them ram through

some legislation without fully exploring all the ramifications of that legislation. And I hear them all catcalling and cheering that, yes, sit down and don't raise the issues that individual Manitobans have.

*(15:50)

Well, I'm here to tell you, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, that that's not going to happen. It's not going to happen today; it's not going to happen tomorrow; and it's not going to happen any day as long as I'm a member representing people—representing people that have concerns, and while certainly, at the end of the day, this may make the plan stronger, and that would be a real legitimate concern, perhaps, if the government had been making all their contributions that they should have to keep the fund fully funded, but, of course, they haven't.

It's somewhat concerning that while we're on the cusp of unprecedented layoffs from the public sector that we know this government has fully intended to chop the public service, and while some of those individuals may very well say, well, you know what? I'm going to take my pension. I'm going to try and help my brothers and sisters and make sure that younger people can keep working.

But not with this government. This government has to rush through a pension change without giving workers the opportunity to understand the ramification of those changes on them as individuals, and there are severe financial changes that will affect individuals that are about to get axed by this government.

So we know that this Pallister government wants to cut the civil service—well, they already have, haven't they. How many thousands of workers have already seen their jobs disappear while this government claims no change in how it affects the front-line service.

And we know that that's also not accurate because it's had huge impacts and we've talked about them any number of times in this Chamber. We've talked about them in the House any number of times, that simple little things that this government has claimed have had no impact have. Things like, well, let's all agree that fishing licences should be just bought online, which now has impacted some local small businesses because they don't do online, because I don't know, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, whether you've ever heard me talk about the absence of reliable Internet service in the North, but businesses don't have that ability. I have an individual who runs a bear hunting

business who doesn't have Internet and is trying to figure out how he can get licences, and so far, nobody in this government has been able to give me an answer, so it looks like they've just put that individual out of work.

So that's just one case of somebody, but we know that there's a lot more front-line workers. We know there's a lot more public service workers that are about to lose their jobs. And it seems that some of their financial advisers may have been given the heads up that that bill is going to pass today because they were already advising their clients you need to make a decision before the end of the week because the bills are changing.

So I'm not sure who the government has been talking to. Certainly, it wasn't until today that we even found out that this is the bill. The most earth-shattering thing that we could talk about during a pandemic is how to change a worker's pension plan, how to change things at the last minute before a worker takes a pension; a pension that they've earned, a pension that they fully understood how it was set up and structured their life according to those rules that now changed. If this government was to get its way, would change with the snap of a finger without any public participation, without it going to committee, without us being able to ask questions.

We've seen the response to asking questions, haven't we, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The minister has no idea what's in his bill—unable to answer one question until somebody sent him in some explanatory notes.

And there's nothing wrong with using explanatory notes to understand technical issues or to remind yourself of something. I'm certainly not opposed to that. I do it myself. But to sit there time after time after time and refuse to answer a question because, well, it was a bill briefing, that's all we need—the public—the people that elect us don't sit in on bill briefings.

But the minister might be shocked to know that the people that elect us are more and more and more paying attention to what goes on in this Chamber because they've come to realize that if they don't pay attention, this government, in particular, slips things in under the wire, and all of a sudden, things have changed and they had no idea. So that's why we're going to spend time debating this bill.

We've tried to find out from the minister what some of the impacts on individuals would be, and certainly, I've heard from any number of individuals that are seeking answers, are trying to make decisions

on their future based on information that this government won't supply them, based on information that isn't really there yet because we haven't explored everything in a debate around this bill.

People are under the impression—it's funny, because the minister says, well, they should talk to their financial adviser—which most people do because, like the minister, most people are not financial wizards and don't understand how all the intricacies of these changes would affect them. But that's where the red flags started coming up, wasn't it. When they went to their financial adviser and got told, well, if you retire today and take your pension today and decide to take the commuted value, here's how much money you would have to invest so that you could guarantee your pension.

But if you decide to wait until tomorrow, if this government would have gotten its way and passed this legislation through to royal assent today—which, thank heavens they didn't—if their financial adviser is telling them that if you wait until this bill passes, here's how much money you would get—your accrued value. Here's how much less you would have to plan for your future. Here's how this change will affect you as an individual without anybody having the oversight in this Chamber to talk about that.

So people are quite rightfully concerned. This government needs to listen to those concerns. And for the overall plan, these changes may very well lead to a stronger plan eventually. But, if they're concerned about a run on the pension plan, maybe this government should reconsider its plan to lay off so many civil servants—people that go to work every day, people that support the Manitoba economy that now—nobody knows if they're going to have a job tomorrow because this government's whole mandate, whole mantra, is to cut workers at any cost.

* (16:00)

Now they've noted, that, well, if we lay off all these workers and a bunch of them decide to take their pension, well, that'd be bad news for the pension fund, which, you know, if this was a private pension fund, I could see a corporation perhaps being concerned because they also haven't lived up to their financial obligations to properly fund pension plans. But being a public pension plan, the plan will not go bankrupt. As much as the minister likes to tell us and the government likes to tell us this is just like your house finances, it most assuredly is not.

And, while this government, this Premier (Mr. Pallister), likes to stand up and say how they're going to leave more money on your kitchen table—which is a goofy statement to begin with—here is a clear example of a government that's going to take money away from working people, is going to take money off their kitchen table, if that's where they choose to leave their money. And it's not just a small amount of money that's going to impact workers.

Now, I can see, at the end of the day, where some of these changes may be beneficial for the plan's longevity. The other thing that would be beneficial for the plan's longevity would be for the government to properly fund it all the time. You know, it was back in the 1980s when pension rules changed so that employers were allowed to take contribution holidays and that governments have done that, private corporations have done that, and then all of a sudden workers find out that the pension that I negotiated in good faith with a government is now not the pension that I negotiated.

And, while I may understand the concept that there needs to be changes made to a plan, perhaps through proper consultation and perhaps through the committee hearing process, they would find ways to implement these changes that are more humane at a time when they're forcing working Manitobans to access that pension, which, in a lot of cases, those working people didn't have a plan to go on pension today, tomorrow or next week. I've talked to some that were hoping to work for a couple of more years, but with their understanding from talking to their financial advisers of what the impact will be on them immediately, may very well decide to take their pension now.

So, while the minister certainly goes on about he doesn't have the answers to any of the questions, which is shameful in itself, he does know the answer to the questions, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He just doesn't want to publicly go on record and talk about the negative impact these changes will have on people immediately. But we will. If I could say, I've had any number of calls about the changes to the pension plan, and other members of our caucus have as well. I've reached out and talked to knowledgeable people who can fully and did fully explain what some of those changes would be to an individual that was thinking of retiring and thinking of taking the commuted value of their pension.

And it's funny because some of the answers that I got to some of the questions that I asked, there was

huge, huge implications to individuals that, perhaps, instead of working for two more years, they'd better go now because they wouldn't make up the difference, that the money that they thought they were going to get—and it may surprise the minister that some people do pay attention to these things and actually plan their futures, understand the pension language that was in place, budgeted accordingly, perhaps saved some of their hard-earned wages and looked at what that retirement package would look like, talked to financial advisers—and, of course, that's a game in itself, is when you're depending on the financial adviser who may not have your best interest at heart; particularly in these trying times, he may be looking for investments himself.

So people are important and they should be important for every member of this Chamber. And I get, I understand that we need to be concerned with financial implications of changes as well. We need to be aware of some of these financial implications and perhaps look at making changes, but when we look at making those changes as legislators, we need to make sure that we're talking to the people that these changes will affect immediately.

So the government is very concerned, as are fund—pension fund managers, that the suspected run on the pension fund with this government's austerity agenda of cut civil servants at any cost, get rid of as many workers as you can and pretend it's all because of the pandemic, when really, as we heard earlier today during question period, this has been the government's plan right from the get-go. They're using this now as an excuse—the pandemic as an excuse to make legislative changes that have nothing to do with the pandemic, but as a result of this government's misguided desire to cut the civil service, to decimate the ranks of those working people, will have an effect on the financial viability of a pension plan. So they try and rush through a piece of legislation to cover their backsides on a decision that they've made to get rid of workers.

It's really of questionable merit, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that these changes need to happen right now. And while the unions have agreed that these changes are what's best for the plan—and I don't suspect any of us on this side would really dispute that. What we will dispute is the need to rush through and ignore the democratic processes that are in place so that people fully understand—and not just fully understand, because there'd be very little point them coming to the committee hearing and asking the minister questions, wouldn't it? Would seem a pointless exercise.

But perhaps maybe those individuals, afforded the proper opportunity, can come to a committee where the minister is sitting and tell the minister what impact the change that he doesn't understand will have on their lives. And maybe, just maybe, the minister would listen to some of those people.

* (16:10)

I have my doubts. I've been at many committee meetings where people poured their hearts and souls out, and the government said, 'nyah', too bad, we're doing what we're doing. But to deny people that right is wrong.

It kind of ties into this government's refusal to meet more than one day a week. And it took a long time to convince them that we should meet at least one day a week. Is—they're trying to use this pandemic as cover for every piece of horrid legislation that they had planned long before there was a pandemic, to ram it through without public scrutiny, without the ability of us in opposition to question. And that's not right, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And this is just one piece of legislation that they've proposed that needs to go to full committee hearings and listen to everyone that has concerns and allow everyone that has concerns to come forward.

And I realize that this government doesn't like to have those committee meetings because sometimes they're lengthy affairs because, when you make changes like this, it impacts people's lives. And, while this government is only concerned about the bottom line, is only concerned about the nickels and dimes that it can take off your kitchen table and out of your pocket, every one of these changes impacts somebody's life. And what we've seen from this government is it impacts somebody's life in the negative, not in the positive.

And that's why, well, at the end of the day, this bill may pass. And, certainly, when all parties involved in the superannuation pension think it should pass, I'm sure it will. But what I'm also sure of, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that it's not passing today because people—and I can't stress enough—people need to have time to understand the changes that are coming and need to have time to make decisions based on those changes.

When people are trying to decide such a major change in their life, when they're trying to decide to go from earning the wages that they've been successful in negotiating—which, really, this

government doesn't believe in that process, either—they don't believe in actual negotiations; they don't believe that those working people deserve anything. We see that, you know, they stand up and say, oh, we got to thank all the front-line workers. Well, the best way to thank those workers is to show them respect, to allow them to negotiate wages, to allow them to fully understand the implications that these changes like this Bill 43 has, to allow those people that they supposedly appreciate the opportunity to not just look at this legislation but to fully understand it and to question the government on some of the subtle and some of the not-so-subtle nuances of what appears to be a minor wording change but isn't.

It has effects on people's lives. And that's the part that this government misses out of every discussion they have, is people. They chase the almighty dollar and ignore people. They ignore people having decent jobs and their desire to cut those jobs is going to impact the overall pension, so then they want to ram through a change to the pension plan to protect the dollars again and not care about people.

And that's what's missing. Every bill—every time we talk to this government about something, it's missing people. It doesn't care about people. It doesn't take into account the changes on people. And they haven't taken that into account with this bill, but we're going to make sure they do.

Thank you.

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Deputy Chair, you know I'm so honoured to put words on the record on Bill 43, The Civil Service Superannuation Amendment Act.

I kind of resent what the member from Flin Flon says, that we're not for people. You know, I would have to say, Mr. Deputy Chair, that my clientele that—I used to be a financial planner, and that's probably why I'm up here today, is that I actually advised my clients about, you know, when it comes to closer to pension, and so what I would say here is that what this bill is all about here, it was just about to actually protect the pensioners for—into the future.

Like, we have a defined benefits package that the member doesn't aware that its staying as a bit—defined benefits package, the best five-year services. And so what this is going to do is it's going to strengthen the actual pension plan to make sure. But we got support both from the unions, both that represent 70 per cent of the unions of civil servants.

The minister has been briefed. The member from Flin Flon didn't even go and bother to ask any questions, and the thing is he says were not about the people. We are about the people here. This is superannuation. These are employees of government here. We want to make sure that this is predictable, dependable, and this pension is there for them. It's based on five years best years of service. This is not going to change. This bill is going to continue the way that it is. And right now, as advisers—as advisers here, you know, I always recommend my clients to review them.

I actually did financial plans up for each of the—my clients to make sure where they are today, because every—like the minister says, every person is unique in their own financial situations, and so the thing was, you know—*[interjection]*—if the member from Flin Flon would allow me to speak here to talk about the importance of people, let me talk about how my clients were.

They came to me for advice, and before they retired we went, like, 10 years before they retired. We reviewed it every single year to make sure that nothing has changed, but I was also privy to this information here when it comes to—I worked for Investors Group; I worked at head office for a corporation as an accountant, and actually in—pension funds accountant. And what I did was every time, like, when the member from Flin Flon would ever talk about the commuted value, we would actually—if a client wants to move on to a different job or a pension plan holder wants to move on to a different employer, they would first give it notice to us to say, look, we need to know what the commuted value would be for that individual. Then we would have that be sent to the 'actuarialan' department to make sure what the actual commuted value would be. And that's on case if that person moved to a different employer or, at 55, that he wanted to start his—their own business. They could take that commuted value and put it into a locked-in retirement pension plan, or they can, you know, this is when they need advisers to advise them exactly about the plan.

And so, Mr. Deputy Chair, this pension here, this legislation here, is also helping out people who are going to maternity leave, that they can buy in once they come back from work and back from their—because right now, when it comes to going on mat leave—or, maternity leave or paternity leave—parental leave, there's also situations where, you know, they can't really come up with that extra money, so when they go on maternity leave, they take that time off, they spend that time with the one year with their child

and making sure they have that time. Back in the past, you know, there was—it used to be three months, six months; now it's a year.

So they have that time to take that time to raise—bring that child for one year until they find daycare, move that child into daycare, and then they're able then to, after they get back into normal with their—with the day-to-day back to work, then they can start buying up on that pension plan. This is what this allows; this pension plan legislation allows that to happen, that they can purchase the years that they had to take time off.

So this is what this whole pension legislation's all about. And, like I said, the pension plan does not change. According to—the member from Flin Flon, he's like—like little Chicken Little—the sky's falling, but this is actually going to be predicted; it's going to be there for the pensioner down the road to make sure that it's available to them, and this is what we're doing.

* (16:20)

And, if the unions of all the representatives of civil servants are here to support that, I believe that the minister, with his briefing that he had with—potentially with whoever actually represented the member from Flin Flon, it was—everybody's on the same page here.

And I think—I believe that this is a really good legislation to make sure that there is going to be—that we as a government can sustain those pension plans to make sure that we can continue contributing to those pension plans and that the pensioners have a good future ahead of them.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): It is extremely important to maintain the integrity of the pension fund. This is an extremely complex bill. While I made light of it earlier, I do think there is value in honesty and even some of the humility in admitting that you don't know all the answers. I am encouraged that the minister is listening to experts and willing to move forward on their advice. In all seriousness, I wish the Premier (Mr. Pallister) would do the same.

I am not an actuary, but I did study and teach about economics. And, as it happens, my father worked in companies that managed public pension plans. And, because my family was strange, we would talk about those things on car rides and around the dinner table.

But, while I was a lecturer at the University of Winnipeg, I taught about recessions, depressions and financial crises as well as the history of austerity. I do believe this is an important and, in fact, an urgent bill. From what I understand, if I'm correct—but the—which the experts addressed at the bill briefing, the challenge is that if a relatively small number of individuals pull out a lump sum from—at retirement, it can risk hurting the fund as a whole and mean that those left behind the plan, many of whom are younger workers, will face higher costs for the same expected returns. This is clearly unfair and [*inaudible*] creates a form of moral hazard. It means the workers close to retirement or at retirement will be able to get the full benefit and, without intending to at all because they're looking after their own interests, pass costs to younger workers. And that's something that I think we can all agree that we don't want to see happen.

But the COVID pandemic has brought into sharp relief just how fragile our economy is and how connected we are and how dependent we are on one another. So we are asking people right now to make sacrifices and to act in solidarity so we don't transmit a disease to one another, so we don't hurt one another. We're asking people to think about others and not just themselves. This actually is the sort of thing that you ask people to do for pension funds in order to keep them safe so that people don't pull them out and you don't have a run on a pension fund. These funds depend on everyone dealing—willing to pool their resources and also act in a certain way so the fund doesn't collapse.

I do think this is an important bill if it achieves what it is—its intended goals to bring forward in this crisis, because it will help ensure the security of the pension fund. If the actuaries are correct, it will protect the vast majority of workers who would otherwise face increase costs if just a few people pull out everything. But we do need to understand why these changes are not enough and the context—the economic context into which this bill is being introduced.

Why would people want to retire and take a lump-sum payment right now? The answer is because they're afraid for their jobs. There are many public-sector workers who absolutely—who are living in fear that the axe is going to fall on them next. Our caucus heard from a woman in Dauphin who moved out to Dauphin to work at the Dauphin jail, not realizing that it was going to be closed down. She expected to retire there with her family. All of a sudden, she's going to be expected to move to Headingley. She's concerned—

considered she will even not be able to afford the move, that her pension itself will be disrupted if she doesn't do the work. The government knew in November 2018 the jail was going to be closed, but waited until after the election to announce that.

And this is just an example. She's somebody who very much wants to be able to pull out the lump sum because she wants to be secure. She feels that will give her the security she needs because she's not getting that security from her employer, which is this government.

We are living in scary times. People are afraid for their health; they're afraid for their loved ones; they're losing their jobs; they're losing their businesses. People are seeing their savings in investments vanish, which is affecting pensions as well. And people are more frightened and more worried about their futures, likely, than they have been for many decades.

And, in the midst of this, the government has been adding to it by saying they want more layoffs. I—the—I know the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) been trying to minimize it and say it is just 2 per cent, but the people who are being laid off aren't losing 2 per cent of their salary, they're losing 100 per cent of it. And it's hundreds of people at Hydro who are losing their entire salary. We're talking about hundreds of people and—or thousands of people across school boards, municipalities, universities, colleges, it is not going to be equally shared pain. You're talking about taking all that pain and focusing it on a small percentage of the population, and that is completely unfair. But that is why people are afraid, not just because there are a bunch of people who know that they're up next, that they are going to lose their jobs, that they don't know if they're going to be able to pay their bills or their mortgages, but because there are so many other people who are afraid that this is only going to get worse, especially because this government has shown every indication that they will not help—*[interjection]*—adequately, I will say that.

So, of course, people are going to want to pull out all their savings because they are losing their jobs, their families and friends are losing their jobs, they don't have anywhere else to go, they may already be strapped with debt and can't take on any more debt, so the only place they can go is to their pension in order to be able to get a source of funds.

And we talked—and, frankly, governments have been taking measures, but it has not by any means gone far enough. We are continually hearing from small-business people who are afraid they're going to

lose not just their business but the life savings they poured into their business. I've talked with people in tears who are afraid they're going to not just lose their business but lose their house because they're not going to be able to pay their mortgage. And, if governments don't step up to make sure that people can pay their bills, we are going to pull money—they are going to want to pull out monies out of pensions because they have nowhere else to turn.

So it isn't enough. It isn't enough to just pass this bill. We also have to be doing more to make sure that people don't feel the need, so that we're actually either preserving jobs or creating jobs, making sure people can continue working so people aren't losing their work and they're not losing their income. But that is exactly what this government is planning and proposing, though we haven't seen an actual plan, we haven't seen any numbers that justify it, and, worst of all, we don't have any projections about what this is supposed to do because there are different perspectives on this.

When I look at the kind of draconian cuts that are being demanded, I think about what happened in Europe where people, where all sorts of supposedly very smart people, came together and imposed brutal austerity on Greece.

And the projections were that within a couple of years everything would be back to normal. But, instead, it kept getting worse, and it kept 'g wetting' worse, and it kept getting worse. And at a certain point, you had 50 per cent unemployment for young people in Greece, you had 25 per cent employment—unemployment for adults in Greece, and they lost 35 per cent of their GDP. That is a worse economic impact than the Second World War delivered to Greece. These are—and the reason for that is because so many—*[interjection]*—yet very smart people, do not realize the colossal impact that debt has. And when we had cuts, when there were cuts in the EU—what was called the EU periphery, the countries that were late joining in—a single Euro could result in a \$1.70 loss in GDP.

So we're actually—we're not talking about the idea that, well, we're going cut \$860 million, and that's going to just result in \$860 million in so-called savings, because it's a fundamental principle of economics: all spending is somebody's income, and that's something this government doesn't seem to realize. All spending is somebody's income. All that spending the government does is somebody's income. And somebody—and they spend it into the economy.

When the—the government doesn't spend money on itself, it spends money back into the private sector, and when you shrink that, you—all you're doing is shrinking the overall size of your economy.

So the decision to engage in austerity right now, people have described it in absolutely brutal terms, but it's going to have the exact opposite effect that it has—that is expected, because a single dollar—just as when you stimulate and spend a dollar, you put it into the economy, it gets passed on and you can end up with more than a dollar in benefits—a single dollar in cuts, when the economy is in a massive recession like this, can result in more than a dollar in losses. I can't say this enough. It's absolutely reckless what this government is doing in proposing these cuts because we are going to—because all it does is amplify the pain. It doesn't make sense.

And I heard today that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is expecting a V-shaped recovery with the expectation we'll just be able to go back to normal, everything'll open up. But there are projections in the US that, within a month, half of all small businesses could be broke. We're still hearing that from small businesses here in Manitoba because they can't pay their rent.

There are places that are going broke right now and landlords aren't signing on to the CECRA the way they should be. And we've been reach—there have been a number of businesses have reached out to us because they say they're desperate because landlords aren't signing on to the commercial rental assistance, and my colleague, the MLA from River Heights, mentioned this today as well.

It's absolutely critical that this government steps forward and puts a moratorium on commercial evictions if we're actually going to preserve businesses and that we require landlords to participate in the CECRA, because otherwise we are going to see huge amounts of insolvencies. And those businesses are not going to come back. And this is what's so important, and that the difference between what we're trying to achieve, which is to say we need to preserve as much of value—as many people working, as many institutions, whether it's a small business, whether it's a college, a university, whether it's a not-for-profit, whether it's a cultural organization, a charity—these are all organizations that do important work.

* (16:30)

And one of the basic principles which, again, which this government doesn't seem to realize is that workers help generate revenue. That's what people

who work at Hydro do. Or, and that people in government help people make money. That's part of what government does. That's part of why these investments matter.

And I have to say, I'm watching this government's decision to make cuts with real horror because I've—partly because I've heard stories with—my father grew up in the Depression, though he had a—it was fine for him because they were living on a small patch of land out in Headingley. But there was no money to be had. They were very lucky because they actually had a small building to live in and they could actually farm enough to be subsistence farmers and survive. And many people didn't. And there were times when unemployment in the Prairies in the 1930s was 75 per cent in some communities. It was absolutely brutal.

And I'm watching this government's decision, like I said, to make cuts with real horror because I've studied these—probably because I've studied and I've taught these things, and that all the evidence for the last 12 years is that austerity doesn't work. Since 2008, every single jurisdiction—every single jurisdiction that cut ended up with a worse economic performance and higher debt. GDP was lower; debt was higher. Every single jurisdiction that decided to stimulate the economy, its debt went up, but so did growth. So you ended up being stronger and more resilient and more able to pay off that debt.

And so we're doing the exact opposite, saying, well, we're going to borrow billions of dollars this year, but we're actually not going to billion—we're not going to borrow enough to put people to work. And, I mean, today when the Premier said, look, you know, how can you say this is austerity when we're borrowing money. Well, because we're laying people off, because we're putting a gun to organizations' heads and saying if you don't find the cuts, we'll find the cuts for you. If you don't find the layoffs or if you don't find the savings—or if, even if you have found the savings, we're going to tell you, you know what, we know you found the savings, but that's not good enough, we want people to be laid off. Because that's what we're hearing from the U of M, that's what we're hearing from Hydro.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

And I cannot—again, I can't emphasize this enough, because I'm also tired these—hearing that these times are unprecedented. These are preceded times. We've had pandemics before. We had a pandemic here a hundred years ago. And my great-grandfather died in the Spanish flu epidemic in 1918.

He left behind a pregnant wife with five children. And they grew up in grinding poverty because there was nothing to help them. He died, and he was the breadwinner. My father was born in March 1933, which is the very depths of the Depression in Manitoba. He grew up in a shack in Headingley. And this year looks more like 1929 than many people are willing to recognize and admit.

We have had a decade of where the economy has been driven mostly by low-interest debt. It hasn't been driven by industrial investments. It hasn't been driven by people building new plants and factories. It's been overwhelmingly driven by debt, so it hasn't created good jobs.

The huge—over 50 per cent of people between the ages of 25 and 54 are working part time, so they—and so that's part of the reason. When you look at the people who've been most affected by the layoffs in the last two months, it's people who are precarious workers, people who are vulnerable, people who are—had salary jobs are generally fairly well protected, but it's all those people who were working part time, all those people who depended on tips, people in the restaurant industry. A month ago, it was—the stats came out that one in 10 restaurants in Canada has closed for good. And it's not going to stop and—but we—unless we do something to intervene.

And the—my other concern is that while the impact of the COVID-19 crisis is huge, there's—it's actually setting off something much deeper, something much larger, which is a debt crisis which has been brewing for years, not just under this—not just under the current federal government or the current provincial government, but with—but since 2008 before. The real danger is that COVID-19 is just like a pin on a grenade. It's only the pin, and we're going to be setting off a much larger debt crisis—an insolvency crisis because—and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and I have both talked about this, that 50 per cent of Manitobans and 50 per cent of Canadians are a paycheque away from insolvency, and the reason for that is because they have so much debt.

And the reason they have so much debt is because they've been told to take it on, and they have had no other opportunity—they haven't had a raise. It's hard to get a job. It's hard to get a full-time job. It's hard to get a full-time job with benefits. And, as a result, it's been very, very easy to get debt.

I get email after email from banks offering me new credit cards. They're offering me lines of credit

that I don't need and that they shouldn't even be offering me. I'll pay it back, but this is the thing, is that we've been pushing debt on people, telling them that that's what they're expected to do and we haven't actually—denied them the opportunity to do anything but take out debt because the only way you can buy a new house is to take out a mortgage. The only way you can afford to buy things is to take out a credit card. The only way you can afford to go to university or college is if you take out a student loan.

And the 2008 financial crisis was caused by—and people talked about—it was mortgages. And there was a massive bailout of banks, including in Canada. And we're doing another bailout right now because what—and what are we bailing people out for? It's mortgages, because we've had policies at the national level and the international level which have been absolutely reckless in persuading people to take on debt that they can't possibly afford.

And now, all of a sudden, we're going to have to pay the piper, and I don't know that we're going to be able to do so, that the amount of debt in the world is so great—whether it's corporate debt, government debt, personal debt—that this is something that is not recognized. I don't think it's recognized by this government, but I also don't think it's recognized by the economists and the advisers that they listen to.

And that's—again, that's why I'm so horrified by what's happening, because I can see what's happening. And the assumption that we're just going to have a V-shaped recovery, we're going to bounce real—bounce right back ignores the fact that people are in so much debt and that that depth of that debt is so great that it is basically—the other comparison is when you're trying to blow up—there's World War II movies about blowing up dams.

And, when you blow up a dam, you don't actually have to blow up, you just drop a single charge. It sinks down to the bottom, goes off and then the pressure of the water itself is what destroys the dam, not the bomb. And that's what we're looking at in terms of our economy and in terms of debt.

And I'll add that the—like I said, it looks more like 1929 than anyone recognizes and that this is an insolvency crisis. I hope it doesn't happen, but there are many, many indications that it will, and with one of—the exception of this bill, the government's actions to lay people off, liquidate public assets, increase unemployment and reduce incomes will make a recession worse.

Because there are two things that happen in the—and like I said, this is—looks like 1929 with a pandemic added to it, is that you've had a euphoric, too much debt, people—what's called easy money. Too many people lending, too many people borrowing, using that money to bid up stock prices and real estate so that people—it makes a lot of money for people in the short-term, but it means you have massive inequality and people can't afford a place to live.

But the other is that when this crisis happens and all of a sudden you get—everyone gets concerned about inflation, all of a sudden you get deflation. And people think, well, deflation, that's great. Prices are going down. But there's a huge problem there, is that it's not just prices going down. It's wages going down. It's the number of people working going down.

And you have all sorts of—thus dropping in price, and when you have debt against all that, that debt doesn't disappear. And, when you have a mortgage that's 200 or 400 or 600 thousand dollars and all of a sudden, you're asked to do job-sharing, you might not be able to handle it. You might go broke. You might go bankrupt.

And we're talking about thousands of people, tens of thousands of people. The number of people who've applied for—over 700,000 Canadians have applied for relief on their mortgages to banks in the last two months. They're putting off a billion dollars' worth of interest a month. Over 400,000 people are putting off paying their credit cards.

There's going to be a point when, all of a sudden, this relief is going to end, and if people can't pay their rent now and can't pay their mortgage now, or can't pay their credit card now, there's no way they're going to be able to pay it off in three months' time.

And this is why it's so important: every indication is that, like I said, every indication, to me, is that these are things that are going to happen. People are talking about a V-shaped recovery. Other people are talking about a U-shaped recovery, which is optimistic, and other people are talking what's called an L-shaped recovery, which means we go straight down, we stop there, and then we just—and that's it. We don't have a recovery.

* (16:40)

And, in situations like this, the fact is that the—when the private sector goes up in flames, the solution is not to set fire to the public sector as well. It's to make sure that you're holding on to as much as you can because the public sector can be a bulwark. It's not

about expanding the public sector; it's about not cutting it. But it also means that there are times, like in the Great Depression, when governments act to recapitalize and rebuild the private sectors so we can go back to having a mixed economy that works, and that's not what we have now.

And we can't—I think the idea that we're going to go back to the status quo is something that is not just something we should reject—or hope for. The status quo really was not working for an incredible number of Canadians, an incredible number of Manitobans, whether they're First Nations, whether they're precarious workers, whether they're young people, whether it's people struggling with debt. There are too many people who haven't had a raise and we have an opportunity and, I think, an obligation not just to make sure that we're looking after everybody—everybody—not picking and choosing who winners and losers are, but to look after everybody to make sure that they're safe and secure through this crisis.

And that goes beyond health, because the fact is if people can't pay their bills they can't eat, and we already have a situation like that. We already have hunger in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

I would just ask the member to draw himself back to the relevance of this debate, which is on The Civil Service Superannuation Amendment Act, so, with the member's support, I would ask him to make his comments relevant to this bill that's being debated on the floor right now.

Mr. Lamont: I am almost done. And I'll just say, like, to put my comments in context, that it's important to understand this bill in terms of the economic context, the current economic context and why people would be—why people would feel the need or the obligation to pull out all their pension funds because they're worried about losing their jobs and because of the level of economic insecurity that's happening right now.

And I will say it was—before the government keeps saying this crisis is unprecedented, but their response is highly precedent. It's not an unprecedented response. It's been more of the same. It's we usually—it's more of the same but on steroids.

So we're seeing, where before we saw some cuts, we're just seeing, well, let's just do more cuts, more austerity, more freezes, and that will somehow solve the problem when that is actually part of what the entire problem, because we have not had an adequate—

we actually have not had strong enough public sector contributions to the economy in order to make sure people safe, and that's so clear because why are we having to announce all these supports and countless new programs if everything was fine beforehand.

We—this crisis has shown just how rotten and tattered our safety net has become, and an unprecedented reaction from this government would be to turn away from austerity and cuts and an appropriate reaction in order to be actual to invest because tens of thousands of Manitobans are going to be begging to crack open their pensions when they shouldn't, and it'll further destabilize the economy because they don't have the support they need.

So, I will—I thank the government for bringing forth this bill. We do believe that this is a bill that needs to happen. I refer to—to protect workers and to protect pensions, but much, much more needs to be done.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): An honour to rise here today to put some words on the record with regards to Bill 43.

I wanted to begin my comments this afternoon by commending and thanking the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey) for his important words that he put on the record with regards to this bill and how he, time and time again, stands up for the working people of this province, and, once again, here today, has stood up to defend the rights of those workers and to defend pensions here in this province. And I think he should be commended for that work, and it was certainly important that he led the discussion here this afternoon.

I am surprised that, once again, we have no one from the government side who wishes to put any further words on the record here yet this afternoon. Now, I do understand that there will be—there certainly will be, I'm sure, days and days and days of debate that will happen with regards to Bill 43. I'm sure every member of the government side will want to get up and actually put some words on the record.

I know certainly members of the opposition will continue to ensure that workers and their rights are being spoken about and defended here in this Legislature. I think that is what we are here for. I think that is what we as an opposition caucus have made crystal clear. I think, you know, the Leader of the Opposition asked the question in question period, led off starting with jobs, ending with jobs. And that is

firmly where we want to be in terms of the work that we're doing here during this time in the Legislature.

It's been often—it's been called now quite often an unprecedented situation that we are in here in Manitoba, certainly around the world, with regards to COVID-19. But, you know, I think it is important that just because we don't have a precedence for this, for this kind of particular situation that we're in, that we still look to and strengthen the democratic institutions that we have to ensure that the people of Manitoba have their say.

That is one of my main concerns with the bill as it's been brought forward, and certainly how it's been brought forward in the way that the government was looking to move through the first, second and third reading of this bill here this afternoon and looking for royal assent this afternoon here in the Legislature.

I do believe there is work that can be done with regards to this particular legislation. However, to expect legislators here in the Chamber to get the bill, to understand that we're debating it here this afternoon and then be expected to move it through the process so quickly, I do believe is—does disregard our democratic process that we have in this province.

And I'm very, very concerned that the government is trying to make this type of governing the new normal. And we cannot allow that to happen. We cannot allow this to be how we operate here in the Chamber.

I do believe there's an opportunity not only for us to debate and to put words on the record with regards to important bills like Bill 43. I do believe that there's also the role that the public has, and we know that in Manitoba we have a very unique situation where we actually invite the public to the building under normal circumstances to lend their voice and their expertise in developing policy.

I heard the minister, when asked, that he has consulted with, you know, various folks, but he did not say that he has actually reached out to those pension holders who will be affected.

And that is a concern. I think any time we're bringing forward legislation that affects Manitoba workers, of course, you—we know that we stand with labour here on this side of the House and will continue to do so. We know that we will listen to business leaders to ensure that we're getting the best advice from the private sector, as well.

The member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Piwniuk), in fact, said that he was a financial adviser and that, in fact, he had a certain expertise with regards to this legislation. Now, I don't know if he is currently a financial adviser. I'm not sure how the conflict of interest rules around this place work. He apparently knew that this bill was coming forward here this afternoon for debate and he said he spoke to some of his clients about that.

I would be somewhat concerned about knowing when a bill was coming forward that might affect some of his policyholders and whether, in fact, he was telling the House that he had, in fact, informed them of these changes that were going to be coming. I'm not sure I heard that correctly, but it is something that I think we should be somewhat concerned about.

But we are going to listen to financial experts and we're going to listen to those folks, as the minister said, the actuaries. He kept referencing the actuaries and how only they held the information that was being asked by the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey). *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: Only the actuaries could answer the questions that were being asked here.

We would seek out their advice, but what I think is missing in this process here, Madam Speaker, is advice from the workers, it's seeking advice from the general public. And when we're making big fundamental changes like this, I think it's important for us to focus on hearing from them, as well, which we know during this pandemic we cannot in fact do under the current rules.

* (16:50)

It's also very concerning, Madam Speaker, and the member from Flin Flon certainly touched on this aspect, that this is being brought forward by a government who at every single turn has sought to weaken the public service, has sought to reduce the number of workers in the public service here in this province. And that's a major concern.

Again, I'm not saying, I'm not making the direct link between Bill 43 and their actions with regards to those layoffs, but it is certainly suspect when a government brings forward legislation that alters the pensions and the superannuation fund for so many workers at the very same time that they are laying workers off. And this is not just, of course, the official

opposition saying this, although we certainly have and we will continue to do so.

In fact, today, just today in question period, the Leader of the Opposition was able to bring forward important documentation that shows a direct link between the goals of this government in reducing public service jobs and firing people in the public service, and the actions that they've undertaken under the cover of COVID and the global pandemic.

We know that they have cut these jobs because it's been reported in the media, Madam Speaker, and this is certainly not something that, as I said, is only coming from the official opposition.

We know that in October it was reported in the Canadian press Manitoba government cuts 2,000 civil service jobs, which the numbers show Province chucked more positions than planned, so they were already ahead of schedule with regards to those layoffs.

We see that 2,000 fewer jobs were, at this time, were in Manitoba in the public service, and this was before the government had what they felt was the cover they needed of a global pandemic to really begin the cuts that we're seeing now, and we're seeing those coming even more intensely than they have before.

So why should we be concerned? Because we know that when the government is cutting jobs left and right like this—we know that it's been, as I said, 2,000 jobs reported at that time, but we know in total there's been almost 10,000 combined layoffs and job cuts.

And it's civil servants who are asking us, as the official opposition, to stand up and say, why is nobody on the government side concerned about this? Why are they not standing up to the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and saying that this needs to be done differently?

When civil servants who, you know, are providing those essential services that Manitobans are counting on right now are being—are having their positions cut, it's a major concern, and they're not being given the full information that they should be given about their futures and about the jobs that they're performing, and that's just not right, Madam Speaker.

We also know that, by cutting positions at this time, it significantly hurts—potentially hurts the pension fund. It threatens the fund itself when, at this time, there'll be less people paying into the fund. When we're making major changes that we're talking

about today that the government has proposed, and yet the jobs that are being proposed are being lost, that is a major concern.

The member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) recently mentioned Michelle Gawronsky, said we should listen to Michelle Gawronsky. I agree with him absolutely. I think—[interjection]—he's saying it right now, we should listen to Michelle Gawronsky. So what does Michelle Gawronsky say?

She says: During these unprecedented times, the critical importance of our public services is more clear than ever, and we were told that the only way to avoid significant layoffs would be to voluntarily enter into work-sharing agreements where non-essential staff would have their work week reduced to as little as two days a week.

Madam Speaker, it's clear that this government has no intention in working with the public service to ensure that people's jobs are protected. Instead, what they're doing is they are cutting first and asking questions later.

And then, on top of that, making fundamental changes to the pension fund, which, as I said, could be in jeopardy if we see continued layoffs, which, as we know, is the intent of the government.

Manitobans, as I said, are relying more than ever now on public services to be there. We know that people are calling on Employment and Income Assistance more than ever. We know that Rent Assist is one of the key programs that people are counting on. Residential Tenancies, you know, is fielding calls from people who are concerned about their housing and how they can ensure that they'll be secure in the place that they're living.

We know that Child and Family Services is—has seen increased volume in terms of the impacts that they're seeing, and they're trying to provide those services—people doing great work in that.

And that's just a snapshot of some of the work that's being done by our incredible public servants right now. And yet, at the same time they're being asked to do more, they're being disrespected; they're not being given the information; and then they're being asked, don't worry, we're going to deal with your pension issue. We won't tell you all the details and, in fact, we're going to try and get that done quickly in an afternoon.

Well, Madam Speaker, I don't believe that's how we should operate here in this Chamber. I do believe

that we need to ensure that the public has their say and that the public has input with regard to this kind of important information.

Workers, we know, are left very concerned that the government will designate many public services as nonessential. We don't know. We haven't seen the list. We don't know who's being deemed essential and who's being deemed nonessential, and thereby we know that the government plans to undermine the services that keep our communities safe and healthy.

We need to ensure—and this is the work that we—we are happy to be doing as the official opposition—that our public services remain strong and that they are there for Manitobans and for families who need them at every single turn.

You know, Madam Speaker, we hear an increased amount from our constituents during these uncertain times, and we often get heartfelt emails and phone calls and social media posts that talk about some of the struggles that people are having, and there are a number.

But one of the groups of people that I've heard from the most in the last number of weeks has been public servants, public servants who are fundamentally, in their nature, looking to work together to make our province a better place—I believe that wholeheartedly—and yet they are being disrespected at every turn by this government.

And, when we are talking about a bill as fundamental as this, I find myself once again on the front lawn of the Legislature as we were being circled by what I can only estimate was hundreds of vehicles. I know anybody who was in the Legislature at that time heard the honking, heard the noise that was being generated by those hundreds of vehicles circling the building. I had the pleasure of being out there to talk to those people.

I know members of our opposition caucus, I think every member of the opposition caucus, was out on the lawn. I saw no members of the government side out on the Legislature to listen to those workers.

And when I had a chance to talk to a few them, at a socially distanced way, but in a way that I could hear what their concerns were, they were talking about how they want to be part of the solution, how they want to be part of getting Manitoba back on track, of bringing our economy back, of bringing our province back and bringing people back to a sense of normalcy. That is what they want to do as public servants and as workers in this province.

We will stand with them, Madam Speaker. We will stand with them at every single turn to ensure that their voices can be heard in this place, not just through the honking that happened that, as I said, I think every member that was in the building heard. It didn't matter where you were, and I'm sure it could be heard in the Premier's office.

It can't be that is the only way that people have their voice heard now. What we ask simply is that we have the opportunity to stand up as an opposition, that we are able to talk with and hear from the public and workers in this province with regard to major changes like this before they are pushed through and that we have an opportunity to stand up for working people in this province. We will do that every day in question period. We will do it in every speech that we give. We will do it in every single way that we possibly can.

But, until people have the information and have the ability to have their say, I believe legislation is not going to move forward until this government listens to the people.

I'm very concerned about how this bill was brought forward, and I think it is on all of us to ensure that everybody's voice is heard in this Legislature.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 14 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until Wednesday, May 20th, at 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 13, 2020

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