

Third 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, Hon.	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, Hon.	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, Hon.	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
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
MOSES, Jamie	St. Vital	NDP
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

Tuesday, March 23, 2021

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills?

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Justice Second Report

Mr. Alan Lagimodiere (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the second report of the Standing Committee on Justice.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Justice presents—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Justice presents the following as its Second Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on March 22, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 24)** – *The Legal Profession Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la profession d'avocat*
- **Bill (No. 31)** – *The Horse Racing Regulatory Modernization Act (Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Act and Pari-Mutuel Levy Act Amended) / Loi sur la modernisation de la réglementation des courses de chevaux (modification de la Loi sur la réglementation des alcools, des jeux et du cannabis et de la Loi concernant les prélèvements sur les mises de pari mutuel)*
- **Bill (No. 50)** – *The Legal Aid Manitoba Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société d'aide juridique du Manitoba*

Committee Membership

- Ms. FONTAINE
- Hon. Mr. FRIESEN
- Hon. Ms. GORDON
- Mr. ISLEIFSON
- Mr. LAGIMODIERE
- Ms. NAYLOR

Your Committee elected Mr. LAGIMODIERE as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected Mr. ISLEIFSON as the Vice-Chairperson.

As per the Sessional Order passed by the House on October 7, 2020 and further amended on December 3, 2020, Rule 83(2) was waived for the March 22, 2021 meeting, reducing the membership to six Members (4 Government and 2 Official Opposition).

Public Presentations

*Your Committee heard the following three presentations on **Bill (No. 24)** – The Legal Profession Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la profession d'avocat*

*Jurgen Feldschmid, Private Citizen
James Beddome, Leader, Green Party of Manitoba
Darcia Senft, Law Society of Manitoba*

*Your Committee heard the following six presentations on **Bill (No. 50)** – The Legal Aid Manitoba Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société d'aide juridique du Manitoba*

*James Beddome, Leader, Green Party of Manitoba
Patrick Falconer, Private Citizen
Gerri Wiebe, Criminal Defence Lawyers Association of Manitoba
Shawn Kettner, Private Citizen
Michelle Dallmann, Private Citizen
Carlos Sosa, Private Citizen*

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 24)** – *The Legal Profession Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la profession d'avocat*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 31) – The Horse Racing Regulatory Modernization Act (Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Act and Pari-Mutuel Levy Act Amended) / Loi sur la modernisation de la réglementation des courses de chevaux (modification de la Loi sur la réglementation des alcools, des jeux et du cannabis et de la Loi concernant les prélèvements sur les mises de pari mutuel)**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 50) – The Legal Aid Manitoba Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société d'aide juridique du Manitoba**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

Mr. Lagimodiere: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for La Vérendrye (Mr. Smook), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to table the adult literacy strategy and adult learning centres 2019 and 2020 annual report.

Madam Speaker: Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

World Down Syndrome Day

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): Madam Speaker, World Down Syndrome Day, which was this last Sunday, is a day to recognize and celebrate people with Down syndrome.

Children born with an extra 26th chromosome, causing Down syndrome, face physical and mental challenges and often require surgery for heart defects or hearing obstructions.

One story of Down syndrome which has touched my life is that of my dear friends Rob and Jacki, who wanted to adopt a child with Down syndrome. They literally searched the world over. Eventually they found a little boy in Bulgaria. Timmy was 30 months old and weighed 20 pounds. Rob and Jacki knew he was the missing son they had searched for. Madam

Speaker, \$35,000 and eight months later, Timmy started a new life in Canada.

There are great challenges, but even greater joys. Timmy's four older siblings describe him as the best present their parents ever got them. His sensitive nature and love of play makes him the best playmate. He could giggle from being tickled all day long. Timmy is described as the joy centre of his new home.

Timmy's preschool teacher describes him as an attentive student who is zealous for his classmates to learn their letters. He is very well behaved, except for sometimes stealing the teacher's chair when she gets up after circle time. Timmy is so gentle and sensitive that others feel safe and free to be themselves around him. Whenever anyone looks sad or hurt, Timmy notices and comforts them.

People with physical or cognitive challenges are no less valuable than those who are naturally able in other ways. They have much to teach us. They bring simple joy and needed perspective. They show us things we often miss about ourselves and about the world. May we treasure these people and the opportunity to know them.

Timmy is becoming uniquely joyful part of more and more peoples' lives, something available for anyone taking time to recognize and celebrate people with Down syndrome and other disabilities. May we do so in big and small ways, not just on one day, but whenever we have the opportunity. I know we will come away richer.

Joe Malcolm

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): It's my pleasure to rise and show recognition to Mr. Joe Malcolm.

Joe devoted much of his life to serve the people of the Southeast Tribal Council communities.

Joe was a proud Anishinabe from the Ebb and Flow First Nation. Joe devoted his life to serving and working with Indigenous people. In his younger years, Joe worked with residential schools in Sandy Bay, Dauphin and Portage. Then, in 1979, Joe found his career taking him to the Southeast Tribal Council. He took on numerous roles within the tribal council in his first few years. Then, in 1985, Joe was made tribal director.

Over his career as tribal director, Joe's passion for improving the lives of Indigenous peoples was evident

every day. Joe was always on the go. His network of friends and contacts within Indigenous communities was second to none and Joe was an expert in advocating for his people and his communities.

While he had many, Joe's strongest passion had to be for hockey. Joe was the driving force behind Southeast Tribal Days, in which the highlight of tribal days was the hockey tournament, which brought together Indigenous people from all ages from five to 85 years old.

Joe loved to play hockey, he loved to watch hockey, but more importantly, he loved how the hockey tournament brought people together.

In his time as tribal director, Joe was responsible for so many milestone achievements for the tribal council and its communities. While I am conscious of my time, I do want to point out a couple highlights in which Joe was instrumental.

Joe was a driving force in the establishment of the South Beach Casino & Resort. Joe was extremely proud of the economic benefits this venture provided not only for the people of southeast communities but for Manitoba as a whole.

Joe was extremely proud of the development and construction of the Southeast Collegiate located on Lee Boulevard right here in Winnipeg. With most southeast communities not having a K-to-12 school, Joe recognized the importance for Indigenous youth to receive a high school education in a culturally appropriate environment, and thus, in 1995, the dream of the Southeast Collegiate became a reality.

Sadly, Joe passed away in 2017 and he was unable to see the grand opening of the new school. However, Joe's contribution will always be remembered, as the new school gymnasium bears his name, Joe Malcolm Gymnasium.

In closing, while I can go on and on about Joe's contributions to his people and the communities of southeast, I want to end by saying on behalf of myself and my family, who are all proud members of a southeast tribal council community, I want to thank Joe's children, Renee, Joe Jr., Harvey and Wendy and their late mother Lydia for sharing their dad and husband with our communities.

Miigwech.

Manitoba Honour 150 Award Recipients

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate): Today I rise to recognize two individuals who have been recognized for their contributions to the Fort Richmond community as a part of the Honour 150 celebration.

Volunteers are the driving force of progress in every community in Manitoba, and I am forever grateful for the time, energy and service my friends and neighbours have gifted to Fort Richmond over the years.

Helen Wang is a Fort Richmond resident and has served as the chief editor of the Manitoba Chinese Tribune for over 17 years, in addition to working as a social worker and student adviser at the University of Manitoba: both professions that reveal the calling of a giving heart.

Helen volunteered as a board member to help create the Manitoba Chinese Family Centre. This effort culminated in a space that was not only welcoming to newcomers, but also an entire connected community.

Helen's commitment to helping newcomers build foundations through relationships and networking is highly evident in everything she does, and our community is better as a result of her passion.

Charles Thomsen taught landscape architecture at the U of M for 31 years, and over that time has inspired countless students.

In his personal life, Charles served on the board of the Winnipeg Children's Museum and was a founding board member of the Friends of the Assiniboine Park Conservatory. His involvement with the board of directors of the International Peace Garden includes such undertakings as the design competition for the September 11th memorial, the first such international moniker.

His passion about giving back to the communities that have been a part of his and his family's lives is evident.

Helen and Charles have gone above and beyond to improve Fort Richmond and Manitoba as a whole, and I am very excited to see their years of dedicated service recognized.

I invite my colleagues in the Chamber to join me in congratulating these accomplished Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Thompson YWCA

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): Today, I would like to extend my gratitude and sincere thanks to the Thompson YWCA, lead by Executive Director Kim Hickey.

Over nearly 45 years, they've continued to serve the people of our region and making a positive difference in their lives. In particular, they advance gender equality through their programming and focus on helping women and girls achieve their true potential.

During their time, the Thompson YWCA has had a strong presence in the community. The non-profit began in 1970 as a medical receiving home for northern women and children. In the 1980s, they began offering education and life-skills training to adults who wanted to return to work with Steps To Success.

They have a long history of adapting and innovating, which continues during the COVID-19 pandemic as they quickly ensured that their facility followed COVID restrictions and was a safe place for people who depended on them.

They offer fantastic programming such as the SHIPP, Sheltering the Homeless in Place Project, which helps house 25 Thompson vulnerable individuals. This program was organized and funded through partnerships with MKO, the City of Thompson, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Thompson Homeless Shelter, and was created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

* (13:40)

The YWCA also organized the She Inspires Me campaign on International Women's Day for the third year in a row. The campaign involves sharing messages of support and gratitude to women and girls in their lives, which they shared on their website and Facebook.

They organized Walk A Mile In Her Shoes, a campaign in Thompson, as well, which involves men walking a mile in red high heels to raise money and awareness about rape, sexual assault, gender-based violence. This year, the event went virtual, involving men taking photos of themselves wearing the heels playing hockey, chopping wood and more.

I'd like to table a document that contains the names of the amazing women who sit on the board of the YWCA and recognize the hard work that they do.

Please join me in congratulating the Thompson YWCA for their amazing work they do in our community and for lifting up women and girls in the North.

Madam Speaker: Is there agreement to allow those names to go into Hansard? *[Agreed]*

YWCA Thompson Board of Directors: Charlene Lafreniere, president; Danielle LeMoal, director; Hailey Lychuk, secretary/treasurer; Naomi Nickerson, vice-president; Lori Rasmussen, past-president; Carrie Stockburn, director; Nancy Vystrcil, director; Nicole Werstroh, director; Heather Wittick, director.

Pharmacare Coverage for Insulin Pumps

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): The Manitoba families for type 1 continue to do such phenomenal work in spreading awareness and taking the time to really educate us MLAs about type 1 diabetes.

Since last week, I've had the opportunity to wear a CGM on my arm, and I actually table a photo of it now. It is important to clearly define the difference between the CGM and pumps that deliver insulin. The CGM is a tool that monitors blood sugar. It is also super easy to put on and can stay on for up to 10 days.

Insulin pumps are covered up until age 18, but we need to have coverage for all Manitobans who are dependent on it. Currently, all of Canada except Quebec and Manitoba cover insulin pumps past age 18.

Madam Speaker, I know that members of this government agree and want to see coverage for those living with type 1 diabetes, and I know this, and I table it, because on November 29th, 2005, our current Minister of Education (Mr. Cullen) said, and I quote: One thing that our side of the House has been putting forward is the suggestion of insulin pumps and covering the costs. I also table that on November 23rd, 2005, our current Minister of Legislative and Public Affairs (Mr. Goertzen) presented a petition calling on the government—NDP at this time—to cover insulin pumps.

There are currently estimated 6,800 Manitobans living with type 1 diabetes, and 10 per cent of already diagnosed children with type 1 have emergencies annually, causing hospitalizations averaging \$7,000 a stay.

With these costs—and this doesn't even consider first responder costs or long-term complications such as amputation, vision loss, kidney disease, heart disease and stroke—we could significantly save money in our health-care system and, more importantly, we can be providing Manitobans and their families living with type 1 diabetes much better resources.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hydro Labour Dispute Political Interference Inquiry

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, Madam Speaker, just a few short minutes ago, 2,300 Manitoba Hydro workers went out on strike as a result of the interference of the member for Fort Whyte. These are 2,300 workers who could've been back on the job today, but the Premier and his Cabinet's interference put a stop to that.

Now, his actions are causing potentially a lengthy strike that some people are saying is, quote, dangerous for everybody. End quote. Now, he's already forced these 2,300 workers to take unpaid days off after threatening the same workers with layoffs. Now his demands for a wage freeze are threatening to make things even worse.

These folks want to get back to work.

Will the Premier let them? Will the Premier finally get out of the way and let Manitoba Hydro negotiate a fair deal?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I appreciate the member referencing interference in his preamble. He's familiar with it, because that's exactly what he's done in this labour discussion between the management of Manitoba Hydro, representing the ratepayers and owners of Manitoba Hydro, who are Manitobans—including the member opposite, Madam Speaker—and the IBEW representatives, who have represented their membership well in the past and can continue to do so, but they can continue to do so without the active involvement of the Leader of the Opposition. Unprecedented meddling in a labour dispute by the member opposite may well be contributing to the labour disruption that is being threatened and is being caused today.

So, Madam Speaker, again, the member needs to take personal responsibility. He needs to talk to Gary Doer. He claims he knows him. Call him. I know him better than he does, and he'll tell him, stay away from the negotiating table. Stop trying to interfere in a

negotiation that doesn't involve you. That's what Gary Doer'll tell him if he picks up the phone. Give him a call.

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

Mr. Kinew: You know, Madam Speaker, I kind of thought, you know, predictable as the member for Fort Whyte is, that he might say something like that. So I brought a copy of an article to table in the House from 2014, when the then-leader of the opposition—this member—stood with members for IBEW, taking sides in a labour dispute with Manitoba Hydro.

It seems, though, that that wasn't real solidarity. That was simply a marriage of convenience, Madam Speaker, because now he stands against the hard-working workers of IBEW at Manitoba Hydro. He stands against them and orders them to take a wage freeze after threatening them with layoffs and cuts to their hard-earned pay.

Madam Speaker, the Premier's actions are a power grab.

Did the Premier's staff have the last word over the final offer to IBEW? Will he stop his interference?

Mr. Pallister: I have tremendous respect for the workers at IBEW and their union leadership, Madam Speaker, so much, in fact, that I won't interfere in a labour negotiation that they should be involved in without the help of the NDP party or its leader.

I understand his desire to pretend he's Santa Claus for a union group, but the fact of the matter is, IBEW union reps have been doing a heck of a good job representing their members without the member for Fort Rouge—that's right—Wab—I'm not saying that, Madam Speaker, you-know-who, who interferes for the first time I'm familiar with, in Manitoba history, who interferes directly in a negotiation by ordering his people to stand on a picket line and to organize, against all health orders, a protest on behalf of Hydro workers.

Hydro workers don't need his help; they got IBEW leadership to stand up for them.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, Madam Speaker, it's clear who is not standing up for IBEW workers. It's the member right there, and that's a real shame. It seems that the member for Fort Whyte was just using these hard-working Manitoba Hydro workers and is now

acknowledged by his Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Schuler) to have only been using these workers for political advantage. He can say many things about me, Madam Speaker, but one thing, I am consistent. I am on the side of the workers at Manitoba Hydro.

I note that the Premier refused to answer the question as to whether his staff had the last word over the final offer to IBEW. This is an important question because there's been no directives published when it comes to the final offer given. So I would like to have that specific question answered.

While we're talking about this issue of fair wages, fair deals and negotiations at Manitoba Hydro, while we're talking about interference, can the Premier tell us today: Did his staff have the last word over the final offer to IBEW, and will he stop his interference?

Mr. Pallister: What has been consistent throughout Manitoba labour history is the wisdom and knowledge of elected people to understand they have no place at the bargaining table, Madam Speaker, until now. And now we have the recklessness on display over there of an NDP leader who, with attention-seeking behaviour as his goal, tries to highlight his involvement standing up for one side of a bargaining table against the other.

Madam Speaker, this is exactly the same behaviour that caused \$10 billion to get flushed by the previous NDP government—\$10 billion. If that was there now, how would the negotiations be going? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: It isn't, Madam Speaker, because of the total disrespect of the NDP to the management at Hydro, to their own representatives on the PUB, to their own appointed representatives at Clean Environment Commission, to their own board appointees.

They always think they own Manitoba Hydro, but they don't, Madam Speaker. The people of Manitoba do. And we'll stand with the people of Manitoba and defend Manitoba Hydro against the NDP every single day.

* (13:50)

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

Skilled Trades and Apprenticeships Provincial Economic Outlook

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, it is very clear that

the member for Fort Whyte has no respect for hard-working Manitobans. His continued interference with the 2,300 hard-working IBEW members at Manitoba Hydro demonstrates that.

But it's even beyond that, Madam Speaker. His disregard for skilled workers become even more apparent when we look at the numbers.

I'll table a document, Madam Speaker, that shows how many fewer tradespeople are at work in Manitoba today. There are 83 less electricians, 16 less machinists, 121 fewer welders and 197 less plumbers, and that's because there are less opportunities for these people to find work because of his cuts and his interference.

Why does the Premier have no interest in providing good jobs and training opportunities for these hard-working tradespeople?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): While the member's participating actively in a honkathon or going and organizing a protest rally at Hydro, Madam Speaker, he's saying, look at me. That's what he's saying. But he sure isn't saying, look at the interests of the workers of this province. That's not what he's saying.

So while the NDP stand up for raising taxes on people's benefits at work, or taxing them more for their haircuts, or taking money out of their hard-earned kitchen-table pockets and using it some other way they want to do, that the people of the homes in Manitoba would like to use for themselves.

He's—the last thing that member's interested in doing is standing up for the working families in Manitoba, the way this government has dedicated itself to doing and the way this government will continue to dedicate itself to.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, I'm happy to keep standing up for the hard-working Manitobans out there.

I'd invite the First Minister to—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Kinew: —and I'd welcome all the members opposite to join the team, if they want to stand with hard-working Manitobans as well.

Again, I would invite the First Minister to look at the FIPPA document that I tabled, rather than throwing it on the ground yet again, because what it shows—

that there are 1,400 fewer skilled tradespeople working in Manitoba today than when this government took office.

Again, there's 1,400 fewer skilled tradespeople and apprentices working in our province because of their cuts and because of their mismanagement of the economy.

We know that by cancelling opportunities for apprentices to get training, by increasing the apprenticeship ratio, that they're making it even less attractive for these skilled tradespeople to create those jobs for the future, Madam Speaker. There's not going to be opportunities in Manitoba with this group in charge.

Will the Premier simply stop his anti-labour campaign today?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I understand the member is trying to celebrate himself and his involvement in creating a labour disruption, Madam Speaker, and so do Manitobans. I understand that the member is saying, look at me, and pointing to himself because his attention-seeking behaviour knows no bounds.

But I also understand, Madam Speaker, that we're No. 1 as a province in supporting health and education and social services of all the Canadian provinces. And I also understand that we have made an additional investment this year, \$1.3 billion over the record NDP investment that they ever made in their entire time in government. I understand that, too.

And, Madam Speaker, I understand another thing. I understand how to create jobs. I've done it, and I understand that Manitobans want to do it, and that's why we lead the country in supports for small businesses—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —during COVID. And that's why today, in this beautiful province, there are more people working than there were before COVID hit us.

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

Mr. Kinew: No, Madam Speaker. That's why I tabled the document: to prove to the First Minister, if he was interested—engaging in a factual debate, that there are 1,400 fewer tradespeople working in Manitoba today than when he took office.

This is the impact of his cuts. These are the impacts of the changes to the apprenticeship ratio that they have made—which, by the way, is not only going

to result in fewer people working in the trades, it's also going to make that work more dangerous.

Again, you can look down the list to see it broken down by profession, but the sum total is clear: this team's mismanagement is failing Manitobans. It's failing the trades, and it's failing our economy.

Why is the Premier so dead-set—at a time of economic uncertainty—in harming the skilled trades and putting Hydro workers out on strike?

Mr. Pallister: Well, it's a history the member tried to run away from, Madam Speaker: a history of misinformation, history—misrepresentation, a history of cover-up. And he said he was a new man and things had changed, but they're exactly the same. He continues to misrepresent the facts. He continues—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: He continues, Madam Speaker, to preach as if Manitoba wasn't succeeding in the face of tremendous challenges, as if Manitobans weren't capable of standing up and facing those challenges together. And he's wrong. He's wrong.

And, Madam Speaker—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —because of his quest, his earnest quest for attention, he decided he'd take part in a labour dispute where he'd pick a winner, and he forgot about something. He forgot about the losers he picked when he did that, and the losers are Manitobans.

Manitobans own Manitoba Hydro. Manitobans deserve some respect, Madam Speaker. They'll get it from this side, but they'll never get it from him or the NDP. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Access to COVID-19 Vaccine Barriers for Vulnerable Manitobans

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, Manitoban seniors who live at home or who are cared for at home are struggling to get to and from their vaccination appointments in an efficient and affordable way. The cost of stretcher services for many of these folks can cost over \$1,000 in some cases, and we know that there are thousands of elderly folks in Manitoba who will not have coverage or the financial ability to get to and from one of the centralized vaccination sites.

Will the minister tell us today what the government's plan is to help increase vaccine accessibility for elderly Manitobans?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): I thank the member for the question. It is certainly something that our Vaccine Implementation Task Force is very much aware of, to ensure that—we want to obviously have as many Manitobans vaccinated, particularly our seniors, in our province.

So we are looking at ways. We're using our Help Next Door. We're using volunteers, Handi-Transit, other opportunities out there. We're looking for—you know, we recognize we don't have all the solutions, Madam Speaker. We're looking for ideas out there as—to ensure that we get the seniors the vaccine that they need. So we'll continue to work with those in the community to ensure that we have the access for those seniors when they need it.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, the government has had almost a full year to find those solutions and to prepare for the vaccination rollout. Caregivers are concerned right now that they can't get their loved ones to their vaccine appointments.

One senior shared with us that, despite having insurance, wheelchair and stretcher services are not covered for her husband, and she doesn't know how they're going to be able to afford to get him to and from his appointment in April.

Will the minister commit to addressing these significant barriers and ensure that the vaccine is accessible for all Manitobans?

Mrs. Stefanson: We are. We have a Vaccine Implementation Task Force that has opened up five supersites across the province of Manitoba. We also have various FIT teams going out into congregate-care settings to ensure that those vulnerable Manitobans get access to the vaccines.

We have pop-up sites in other communities that are more remote communities to ensure that those individuals and those folks in those communities have access to those—to the vaccine as well, Madam Speaker.

We will continue to work with seniors. We'll continue to work with all of those Manitobans. We want to ensure that we get our herd immunity here in Manitoba, so we want to encourage as many Manitobans to get the vaccine as possible.

* (14:00)

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, I'm asking questions on behalf of the Manitobans who are trying to get to those appointments, including folks who are not seniors but are folks who face barriers to getting access to the vaccine. Manitobans with physical disabilities are concerned about transportation issues, as well as a lack of accommodation at the centralized vaccination supersites.

The provincial website reminds Manitobans that they should anticipate being at the super site for 45 minutes.

Will the minister commit today to include accommodation and transportation options for Manitobans with physical disabilities so that they can easily access the vaccine supersites?

Mrs. Stefanson: I want to congratulate our Vaccine Implementation Task Force for the incredible work that they have done in working together with those across our communities. And we have been recognized across the country, not just by Maclean's magazine, but others, Madam Speaker, as given an A grade, A-minus grade in terms of how we're doing on that.

So—but as I mentioned in my last response to the member's question, Madam Speaker, we have set up pop-up sites, we have FIT teams that are going out to communities to vaccinate as many Manitobans as we can. We are working with seniors and seniors organizations to ensure that they have access to the vaccine. And we'll continue to work with our partners across this province to ensure we get as many Manitobans vaccinated as we can.

UN Declaration on Indigenous Rights Request for Provincial Legislation

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): The Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued its final report six years ago, Madam Speaker.

It issued 94 calls to action. Amongst them was the TRC call to action No. 43, which calls on all levels of government to fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a framework.

We have unfortunately learned that the Pallister government is amongst those standing in the way of progress on this important issue.

Will this government stop its obstruction and allow us to get on with the important work of reconciliation?

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations): I thank the member opposite for the question, and I would like to share with him, as well as all members of the opposition, that our government is working unilaterally across our government with many departments, working towards goals that will achieve reconciliation.

But we're not just talking about it, we are out there. We are more than our words. We are working with First Nations, we're working with the Métis people, as well as the Inuit, to show them that our government is committed in every way to show that reconciliation is extremely important to all of us.

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

Mr. Bushie: I thank the minister for that rather lacklustre answer and the definition of unilateral.

It's been six years, Madam Speaker, since the TRC call to implement UNDRIP. That's the entirety of this government's time in office. Unfortunately, they wasted that time, as late last year, they wrote the federal government asking them to delay action. The Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce strongly objected, with the letter I table here today, to proposed delays and urge the Premier to reconsider his opposition.

The time for reconciliation is at hand.

Will the Premier remove his objections and support the implementation of UNDRIP?

Ms. Clarke: As indicated, our government is working directly with all aspects of reconciliation. We have done a lot of work, we have a strategy in place that we are working on directly with First Nations, Indigenous people all across our province and we'll continue doing that. We are very sincere in our path to reconciliation that the Province has adopted, and that work will be continuing.

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

Mr. Bushie: Other provinces, such as BC, have already brought forward their own legislation to enact the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. That's not the case here in Manitoba. Instead, this government is trying to block and delay federal action. That's a mistake.

The time has come. The Pallister government can make real and concrete commitments to reconciliation by removing its objections and committing to bring forward its own legislation to implement UNDRIP.

Will they ever do so, or do they intend to obstruct their entire time in office?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Whether it's environmental policy or Indigenous policy or any other number of areas, Madam Speaker, the NDP beats us in rhetoric but they don't beat us in action.

They couldn't get Freedom Road built. We built it. We worked in partnership with First Nations and transferred support for northern airports and marine operations to First Nations ownership. That's something they could never get done. We've helped to address, actually address—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —boil-water advisories, working in partnership with First Nations partners and with the federal government. We've increased funding for First Nations policing, which was stagnant under the previous NDP government. And we just got an A for our vaccine strategy, because—working closely with Chief Arlen Dumas and the other First Nations leaders in a reconciliation strategy that's working to get vaccines to our northern communities.

While the NDP did nothing, we're getting it done: 695,000 acres so far of treaty land entitlement land to Indigenous communities, and they got nothing done. Real reconciliation is action, not rhetoric.

MPI Agreement with Auto Traders Appointment of Conciliator

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): The government's interference cost all of us more. At Manitoba Public Insurance, the outcome of a conciliator is the original \$23 million in costs for Manitobans. This is a bad precedent.

Now auto traders and auto dealers want a different deal with MPI.

Will the government once again be appointing a conciliator?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Crown Services): I certainly appreciate a question on interference. We all know the gross incompetence of the NDP when it comes to the 10 billion reasons why, Madam Speaker, they cannot be trusted when it comes to Manitoba Hydro. [interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wharton: Thanks to the NDP—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wharton: Thanks to the NDP, every single Manitoba household will be paying \$50,000 in debt on Manitoba Hydro, Madam Speaker, that they created.

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

Mr. Sandhu: The conciliator cost us all \$23 million more. Maybe this is because of the donations to the PC Party. Now auto dealers see how the government went to bat for insurance companies. They want conciliators too.

I will table speaking points from the auto dealers. They say, I quote: We request a government-appointed conciliator. End quote.

Is this government going to appoint a conciliator?

Mr. Wharton: Well, Madam Speaker, unfortunately the member's information is clearly false. We certainly know that, under the NDP, hydro rates went up an average of 40 per cent. We know that 40 per cent, that could have stayed on Manitoba—Manitobans' kitchen tables.

Madam Speaker, again, our government—as the members opposite don't respect—our government values our trades—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wharton: —and we will not interfere in the process. Unlike members opposite, we will let the negotiations work out between the trades and MPI.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Madam Speaker, when this government interferes, it costs all us more. No more—no one can blame auto traders for representing their industry, but it is government's job to serve the public. When they failed to do last time, their interfering costing us \$23 million.

Now auto dealers want the same treatment.

Will this government again be appointing a conciliator? Yes or no?

* (14:10)

Mr. Wharton: Certainly, we appreciated the efforts by IBAM and MPI during that process, Madam Speaker. We appreciate that, in the end, Manitobans will recognize over \$20 million in savings, when it comes to basic coverage, in partnership with IBAM.

And, Madam Speaker, I have a question for the members opposite, particularly to the Leader of the Opposition: Will he give back \$10 billion to Manitoba ratepayers of hydro today? Yes or no?

Seneca Warm Line Funding Inquiry

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Since March of last year, the Seneca Warm Line has listened and helped over 11,000 Manitobans who have been struggling with mental health and wellness issues.

The peer support staff continue to work tirelessly to support Manitobans who are struggling, and their insight show us that Manitobans need ongoing mental health supports as we all work towards recovering from this pandemic.

However, the funding—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Smith: —for Seneca Warm Line, which is approximately \$113,000 per year, ends on March 31st, and they have not heard whether their funding will be extended from this government.

Will the minister commit today to providing ongoing funding for this valuable mental health service?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery): I thank the member for the question.

Our goal is to ensure all Manitobans enjoy the best possible mental health throughout their entire lifespan, and that is why our government is working with over 40 organizations and agencies all across the province—in the North, rural and right here in the city of Winnipeg—to ensure individuals receive the services they need to address the struggles they're having with mental health and addictions.

And I want to take this opportunity to thank all of those organizations that are helping us to lift Manitobans at this critical time in all of our lives.

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

Mrs. Smith: Last year, when Manitobans expressed a need for mental health resources due to stress

from the pandemic, this government chose to sign a \$4.5-million deal with Morneau and Shepell instead of helping support local therapists to help their patients here in Manitoba.

The government website says that this program has served only 4,000 Manitobans, while Seneca Warm Line assisted well over 11,000 Manitobans at the mere cost of \$113,000 versus the \$4.5 million.

Will the minister commit to investing in local mental health resources so that Manitobans can have access to locally informed care like the Seneca Warm Line?

Ms. Gordon: I thank the member for that supplementary question.

Madam Speaker, our government has invested \$48 million in 28 initiatives since receiving the VIRGO report in 2018, and I'd like to highlight for the House some of those initiatives: expanding the distribution of Thrival Kits that will help at least 30,000 grades 4 to 6 students across our province; increasing support for NorWest Youth Hub; expanding Project 11; implementing the Métis cart pilot project, and so much more good news, not just today, but in the days, months and years to come.

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

Mrs. Smith: Somehow this minister can find \$4.5 million for an out-of-province contract but not \$100,000 to support a call line that serves nearly 1,000 people each month here in our province.

This govern—must invest on ongoing mental health resources to ensure that all Manitobans are able to recover from this pandemic. These investments must be local in order to be meaningful—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Smith: —and sustainable. We know that local investments are more cost-effective, employ people—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Smith: —locally and reach a larger group of people.

Will the minister commit today, and I'll ask, to reinvesting in the Seneca Warm Line to ensure they continue to offer their valuable services to those right here in the great province of Manitoba?

Ms. Gordon: Now, the NDP's plan was—and still is—a plan of fear, but our plan is investing in Manitobans: 28 initiatives, Madam Speaker. They are local. They're in the North. They're in the rural areas. They're right here in Winnipeg.

Madam Speaker, 4,000 individuals have benefited from a series of online and Internet-based counselling services, and we're going to continue to build a comprehensive recovery-oriented system of care that offers the greatest chance to lift Manitobans who are living with the struggles and challenges of mental health and addictions.

School Boards and Trustees Decision to Eliminate

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): In the words of the chair of the Hanover school board, Bill 64 blows up Manitoba's public education system and no one knows how it will be glued back together.

It's clear the current Education Minister had nothing to do with this bill because it was introduced by the previous minister back in November. The K-to-12 review was clear: keep school boards and trustees. It's right there in black and white on page 124, yet this PC government is getting rid of them. They're ignoring the review and thousands of Manitobans who were consulted.

Who made the decision to eliminate school boards and when?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, we're attempting to do a reform that is historic in nature. We need to do that because resources are being wasted at the top of the organizational structure that need to be at the front line with the classroom—in the classroom where teachers can benefit and students can benefit from teachers who are better resourced.

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

Mr. Lamont: Every idea in Bill 64 is worse than the last. It doesn't empower parents; it fires everyone who runs the school system and expects parents to do their work for free. It ignores poverty in First Nations. Rural schools will be closed and rural students will be stuck on buses for hours.

If not the K-to-12 review or parents, where did these ideas come from? Last April, the Deputy Premier urged a group of alt-right politicians, including a representative from the American legislative exchange commission, Patricia Rucker, to use the

pandemic as a pretext to dismantle public education. He said that less than half of education could be public when he was done with it.

Why bother with a sham K-to-12 review if the Deputy Premier gets to override it all anyway?

Mr. Pallister: The nonsense continues, Madam Speaker, from the member opposite.

Our administrative costs in this province are fully 48 per cent higher than Ontario's next door. The member's arguing for the maintenance of a system that's failing our children. That's not acceptable to us. We're going to make the improvements that needed to be made a long time ago and weren't, to put more resources on the front line with teachers; support for classrooms, for students that need that help.

He asks who made the decision: 2,300 written submissions; 62 formal briefs; 9,000 public survey responses and over 1,200 teachers took the time to give us their input. And we listened and we designed a program, Madam Speaker, that will support teachers and support families.

The member is arguing for more trustees and superintendents as a solution, Madam Speaker. If that was a solution, why are we dead last in the country. That's maybe good enough for him but it's not good enough for us.

Education Modernization Act Elimination of School Boards

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, Madam Speaker, the Premier has said that school boards have spent most of their time agonizing over local taxes and bargaining with teachers over wages, yet I have talked to school trustees and they tell me the proportion of time spent in these two activities is closer to 5 per cent, far less than the Premier's estimate.

Did the Premier feel that he had to provide inaccurate information about school boards to justify putting forward Bill 64 because the real facts wouldn't support his elimination of elected school boards?

* (14:20)

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): The member's logic, Madam Speaker, would escape any trustee in our province who is objectively looking at the situation. He could talk to colleagues in this room, if he would choose to, who would tell him the proportion of work that is spent on these issues is very large for trustees. Negotiating in each school division takes tremendous

time and effort, and we respect the work of trustees over many years in doing it.

Also, Madam Speaker, because we're changing the system to centralize the bargaining, that work is no longer needing to be done. The collection of local taxes and the establishment of the mill rate takes onerous work and the calculations and the tabulations that must be done are tremendous. He could ask any of a half a dozen people in this room who've done this work.

He belittles the work of trustees. We do not, Madam Speaker. We respect the work of trustees in the past, but the work is not the work that we're going to do, going forward, to empower our teachers in the classroom.

And so, again, the Liberals and NDP are sure that the present system is fine for them, but if it doesn't work for the children of our province, it doesn't work for this government either.

Mental Health and Addictions Services Creation of Youth Hubs

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River): The creation and expansion of youth hubs was the main recommendation of the 2018 VIRGO report and strategy on improving access and co-ordination of mental health and addiction services for children and youth in Manitoba.

Can the Minister for Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery please share with the House how our government is improving access for young Manitobans to mental health and addictions services in Manitoba?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery): I thank the member for the question.

In 2017, our government created Manitoba's first youth hub at northwest co-op health in Winnipeg. We promised at that time to deliver on three additional youth hubs, but I'm so pleased today to rise in the House and to say that we are expanding on that original promise by investing \$1.92 million to create five, Madam Speaker—not three—five additional youth hubs.

Two youth hubs will be in rural Manitoba and three will be located in Winnipeg. In combination with NorWest Co-op Community Health Centre, there'll be a total of six sites in Manitoba and, Madam Speaker, youth hubs—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

COVID-19 Vaccinations Paid Leave for Workers

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I wish to ask the following question. It's come to my attention that folks in Saskatchewan can now leave work for up to three hours to get vaccinated without fear of loss of wages. I know that folks that have worked in health care in northern Manitoba had to take days off, sometimes to drive to Winnipeg, other times just to drive to another community.

So I ask the minister today: Will they commit to a paid leave here in Manitoba for people to get the vaccine?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, I appreciate the member raising the question. That's something Premier Horgan in British Columbia and myself convinced our colleagues to support as a federal initiative, national initiative, and we are continuing to look for results there.

I think the issue, though, of vaccine—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Just a reminder to members that are participating virtually that there is to be no heckling, and that has been a rule that was established as soon as we set up the virtual component.

So I'm asking all members—I shouldn't have to do that, and we've run into this instance a few times—so I'm going to ask and remind members that heckling is not allowed via our virtual system. That just makes it difficult for everybody that is trying to manage this new technology.

Mr. Pallister: I understand the member's frustration, Madam Speaker. We're all frustrated at the lack of available vaccines from coast to coast to coast. And the fact is that we've taken initiative as a government to make sure this doesn't happen again by pursuing the support and ultimately the provision of vaccines here domestically in our country so that we're not ever again dependant on foreign suppliers and see ourselves ranking 50th among nations in getting vaccines.

Whether it is boosters or a future pandemic, Madam Speaker, we'll all benefit by having Canadian-produced vaccines available and distributed to Canadians sooner than has been the case during this pandemic.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

Speaker's Rulings

Madam Speaker: I have two rulings for the House.

Prior to routine proceedings on Thursday, March 4, 2021, the honourable Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) raised a point of order concerning the use of the words, quote, "why did he break the law," unquote, said by the honourable member for St. James (Mr. Sala) when asking a question to the honourable First Minister during oral questions the previous day. The honourable Government House Leader noted that it was not appropriate to accuse an MLA of breaking the law.

I took the point of order under advisement to review the marks—remarks in Hansard.

Page 1317 of Hansard for Wednesday, March 3, 2021, identifies the honourable member for St. James as saying: Why did he break the law by hiding his interference in Hydro from Manitoba?

The honourable Government House Leader is correct in one aspect in that the words breaking the law or break the law have been the subject of Speakers' rulings on several occasions. However, those same words have also been used hundreds of times in debate without being called out of order, so Manitoba practice is inconsistent with the use of these words.

Therefore, I would rule that there is no point of order, but I would like to remind all members the people of Manitoba expect us to conduct our business in this Chamber in a respectful manner, and civility of respectful disagreement is a good goal to strive for.

And I have another ruling for the House.

After the prayer on March 11, 2021, the honourable member for Thompson (Ms. Adams) raised a matter of privilege alleging that the contents of a bill before the House were shared publicly with media by the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) prior to the distribution of the bill in the House. The member argued that it is a long-standing tradition that bills are—which are to be introduced and debated in this Assembly, and I quote, "must be first presented to this House prior to any other person or venue." End quote.

She further stated, quote: It offends the authority of this House to have the question of legislation first proposed to individuals other than those who have

duly elected by the people of this province to consider, debate and vote on these important matters. End quote.

The member concluded her remarks by moving, and I quote, that Bill 47 not be considered to be a specified bill for this session of the Legislature, that the Minister of Families apologize for breaching the privileges of all members. End quote.

The honourable Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) and the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) both spoke to this matter before I took it under advisement to consult the procedural authorities.

As members know, there are two conditions that must be satisfied in order for a matter raised to be ruled in order as a prima facie case of privilege. One, was the issue raised at the earliest available opportunity, and two, was sufficient evidence provided to support the member's claim that their privileges or the privileges of the House were breached.

On the issue of timeliness, the honourable member for Thompson (Ms. Adams) noted at the time of her submission that she had just learned that the contents of a bill had been shared publicly with media prior to its distribution in the House. She concluded that, and I quote: This is the first time the House has met since that has taken place; I believe this is the earliest opportunity to bring this matter to your attention. End quote.

* (14:30)

Given this information, I would agree that the member met the test of timeliness.

Regarding the second condition, whether there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the privileges of the House have been breached, there are several factors to consider.

Joseph Maingot, on page 224 of the second edition of Parliamentary Privilege in Canada, advises that, and I quote, a complaint that a minister of the Crown has made a statement outside the House rather than in the House may amount to a grievance against the government, but in the absence of an order in the House forbidding such activity, there is no personal or corporate privilege that has been breached in the doing, and neither does it constitute contempt of the House in the privilege sense.

On June 2, 1983, Speaker Walding ruled that such a complaint, and I quote, "may be a matter of discourtesy, but it is not a matter of privilege." End

quote. Manitoba Speakers Phillips, Rocan, Hickey and Reid have all supported this sentiment in subsequent rulings, as I have in rulings in 2018 and 2019.

I will note that the underlying principle here is the primacy and authority of the Assembly. As elected representatives, it is our duty to carefully consider the business before us so that we may make informed decisions. Any matter destined for consideration by this body, including legislation, should be introduced and explained here first before it is shared with the public or the media. This has been the practice of this place for many years.

In recent years, though, we have seen this practice evolve. It has become common for members on all sides of the House to discuss, in general or conceptual terms, potential legislation outside of the House in advance of introduction. These discussions have occurred in the form of consultations with stakeholders and also through interactions with the media. As long as such discussions do not reveal or relate any detailed provisions of upcoming legislation, the primacy and authority of the Assembly is not infringed upon.

In the current circumstance, I must note that no specific evidence of any media coverage regarding the contents this bill was provided to the Chair to demonstrate which details of the bill in question were shared with the media or anyone else prior to introduction in the House. This is a crucial point. In the absence of such proof, as your Speaker, I have no basis to rule that any privileges were breached. Accordingly, after careful consideration of this matter, I am ruling that a prima facie case of privilege has not been established.

However, I would echo Speaker Walding's sentiments and note that while this circumstance does not constitute a breach of privilege, it could be considered discourteous to the Assembly. Should a similar situation occur in the future, as your Speaker I would remain obligated to carefully consider all of the evidence presented and deliver a ruling.

I will leave you with an observation I have shared previously. We live in an era when human communications have experienced unprecedented growth and evolution. The modes of communication available to us and the pace and manner of our interactions move at a speed unimaginable to our predecessors.

With that in mind, I would offer a suggestion that the Standing Committee on the Rules of the House may want to consider whether or not disclosure of bill contents prior to the introduction and distribution

of the bill should be allowed. I am not stating a preference on this question; I am simply suggesting that the committee could either confirm the traditional practice or re-evaluate it in light of modern communication methods. This discussion could also be extended to consider other potential modernizations of our processes and practices.

I thank members for their attention to this ruling.

PETITIONS

Portable Housing Benefit

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The Portable Housing Benefit program, introduced in 2009, provided a most modest amount of \$200 per month for those with mental health issues to increase their ability to obtain safe, secure housing, and overall decrease the level of homelessness.

(2) After the introduction of other housing programs such as house-census-Rent Assist in December 2015, those who received the PHB were grandfathered in, so they continued to receive the full \$200 H-P-B per month.

(3) In early 2019, the Department of Families made a-requested a decision to remove these previous grandfathered-in recipients from the PHB program.

(4) In June 2019, those previously grandfathered-in recipients received letters stating they would receive the full amount of PHB as late as October 7, 2019. The Families Minister advised the Legislature there were no changes to the PHB.

(5) After the provincial election, housing coordinators met with recipients and provided them with a letter dated November 1st, 2019, indicating that they would no longer receive the benefit under the PHB program.

(6) The recipients of many of the serious mental health concerns, including suicidal ideation, were devastated by the information they would personally-during these meetings.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as is follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Families and the provincial government to reverse this cut to recipients of the Portable Housing Benefit;

(2) To urge the Minister of Families and the minister of health, seniors and active living to understand and take away these benefits from the most vulnerable in our society will cause great hardship financially, but more importantly, it will have devastating, long-lasting effects on their well-being.

This petition is signed by many Manitobans.

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

Public Child-Care Grants

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background for this petition is as follows:

(1) The pandemic has further emphasized the need for quality, affordable and accessible child care and demonstrated that the government has failed to ensure child care is accessible to all Manitoba families.

(2) Over 90 per cent of Manitoba children receive child care through non-profit, licensed centres, and yet funding has been frozen since 2016. These cuts have resulted in many early childhood educators leaving the sector.

(3) While child-care centres have faced increased costs associated with lost parent fees due to COVID-19 closures and spent thousands on PPE, when open, to keep kids safe, the provincial government has provided no additional financial support.

(4) The government spent less than 1 per cent of the \$18-million temporary child-care grant, and instead gave KPMG double their contract, nearly \$600,000, to conduct a review that will raise parent fees and lay the groundwork for privatization.

(5) The provincial government's cuts to nursery school grants is doubling parent fees for hundreds of families, making child care less affordable and accessible.

(6) The provincial government passed bill 34, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, which removed the cap on child-care fees for private sector businesses.

Therefore we petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse changes to the nursery school grants and to end the

freeze on child-care operating grants while committing to keep public child care affordable and accessible for all Manitoba families.

This petition is signed by Kailyn Phillips, Shaun Nabe, Brad Elder and many more Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara)? No?

Cochlear Implant Surgery

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) People who suffer hearing loss due to aging, illness, employment or accident not only lose the ability to communicate effectively with friends, relatives or colleagues; they also can experience unemployment, social isolation and struggles with mental health.

A cochlear implant is a life-changing electronic device that allows deaf people to receive and process sounds and speech, and also can partially restore hearing in people who have severe hearing loss and who do not benefit from conventional hearing aids. A processor behind the ear captures and processes sound signals, which are transmitted to a receiver implanted into the skull that relays the information to the inner ear, the cochlea.

The technology has been available since 1989 through the Central Speech and Hearing Clinic, founded in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The Surgical Hearing Implant program began implementing—implanting patients in the fall of 2011 and marked the completion of 250 cochlear implant surgeries in Manitoba in the summer of 2018. The program has implanted about 60 devices since the summer of 2018, as it is only able to implant about 40 to 50 devices per year.

* (14:40)

There are no upfront costs to Manitoba residents who proceed with cochlear implant surgery, as Manitoba Health covers the surgical procedure, internal implant and the first external sound processor. Newfoundland and Manitoba have the highest estimated implantation costs of all provinces.

Alberta has one of the best programs with Alberta aids for daily living, and their cost share means the patient pays only approximately \$500 out of pocket. Assisted devices program in Ontario covers 75 per cent of the cost, up to a maximum amount of

\$5,444, for a cochlear implant replacement speech processor. The BC Adult Cochlear Implant Program offers subsidized replacements to aging sound processors through the Sound Processor Replacement program. This provincially funded program is available to those cochlear implant recipients whose sound processors have reached six to seven years old.

The cochlear implant is a lifelong commitment. However, as the technology changes over time, parts and software become no longer functional or available. The cost of upgrading a cochlear implant in Manitoba of approximately \$11,000 is much more expensive than in other provinces, as adult patients are responsible for the upgrade costs of their sound processor.

In Manitoba, pediatric patients under 18 years of age are eligible for funding assistance through the Cochlear Implant Speech Processor Replacement Program, which provides up to 80 per cent of the replacement costs associated with a device upgrade.

It is unreasonable that this technology is inaccessible to many citizens of Manitoba who must choose between hearing and deafness due to financial constraints because the costs of maintaining the equipment are prohibitive for low-income earners or those on a fixed income, such as old age pension or Employment and Income Assistance.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide financing for upgrades to the cochlear implant covered under medicare, or provide funding assistance through the Cochlear Implant Speech Processor Replacement Program to assist with the replacement costs associated with a device upgrade.

Signed by Elaine Stark, Myrna Downie, Irene Puloski and many, many other Manitobans.

Thank you.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

People who suffer hearing loss due to aging, illness, employment or accident not only lose the ability to communicate effectively with friends, relatives or colleagues; they also can experience unemployment, social isolation and struggles with mental health.

A cochlear implant is a life-changing electronic device that allows deaf people to receive and process sounds and speech, and can also partially restore hearing in people who have severe hearing loss and who do not benefit from conventional hearing aids. A processor behind the ear captures and processes sound signals which are transmitted to a receiver implanted into the skull that relays the information to the inner ear.

The technology has been available since 1989 through the Central Speech and Hearing Clinic, founded in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The Surgical Hearing Implant program began implanting patients in the fall of 2011 and marked the completion of 250 cochlear implant surgeries in Manitoba in the summer of 2018. The program has implemented about 60 devices since the summer of 2018, and it is only able to implant about 40 to 45 devices per year.

There are no upfront costs to Manitoba residents who proceed with cochlear implant surgery, as Manitoba Health covers the surgical procedure, internal implant and the first external sound processor. Newfoundland and Manitoba have the highest estimated implantation costs of all provinces.

Alberta has one of the best programs with Alberta aids for daily living, and their cost share means the patient pays only approximately \$500 out of pocket. Assistive Devices Program in Ontario covers 75 per cent of the cost, up to a maximum amount of \$5,444, for a cochlear implant replacement speech processor. The BC Adult Cochlear Implant Program offers subsidies replacements to aging sound processors through the Sound Processor Replacement program. This provincially funded program is available to those cochlear implant recipients whose sound processors have reached six to seven years old.

The cochlear implant is a lifelong commitment. However, as technology changes over time, parts and software become no longer functional or available. The cost of upgrading a cochlear implant in Manitoba of approximately \$11,000 is much more expensive than in any other provinces, as adult patients are responsible for the upgrade costs of their sound processor.

In Manitoba, pediatric patients are eligible for funding assistance through the Cochlear Implant Speech Processor Replacement Program, which provides up to 80 per cent of the replacement costs associated with a device upgrade.

It is unreasonable that this technology is inaccessible to many citizens of Manitoba who must choose between hearing and deafness due to financial constraints because the costs of maintaining the equipment are prohibitive for low-income earners or those on fixed income, such as old age pension or Employment and Income Assistance.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide financing for upgrades to the cochlear implant covered under medicare, or provide funding assistance through the Cochlear Implant Speech Processor Replacement Program to assist with the replacement costs associated with a device upgrade.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for The Pas-Kameesak, on a petition?

The honourable member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway)—oh.

An Honourable Member: She's there.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for The Pas-Kameesak, on a petition. Go ahead.

Public Child-Care Grants

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): —to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background for this petition is as follows:

(1) The pandemic has further emphasized the need for quality, affordable and accessible child care and has demonstrated that the government has failed to ensure child care is accessible to all Manitoba families.

(2) Over 90 per cent of Manitoba children receive child care through non-profit, licensed centres, yet funding has been frozen since 2016. These cuts have resulted in many early childhood educators leaving the sector.

(3) While child-care centres have faced increased costs associated with lost parent fees due to COVID-19 closures and spent thousands on PPE, when open, to keep kids safe, the provincial government has provided no additional financial support.

(4) The government has spent less than 1 per cent of the \$18-million temporary child-care grant, and instead gave KPMG double their contract, nearly

\$600,000, to conduct a review that will raise parent fees and lay the groundwork for privatization.

(5) The provincial government cuts to nursery school grants is doubling parent fees for hundreds of families, making child care less affordable and accessible.

(6) The provincial government passed Bill 34, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, which removed the cap on child-care fees for private sector businesses.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse changes to the nursery school grants and to end the freeze on child-care operating grants while committing to keeping public child care affordable and accessible for all Manitoban families.

This petition has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

Thank you.

Diagnostic Testing Accessibility

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Until recently, diagnostic medical tests, including for blood and fluid samples, were available and accessible in most medical clinics.

(2) Dynacare blood test labs have consolidated their blood and fluid testing services by closing 25 of its labs.

(3) The provincial government has cut diagnostic testing at many clinic sites, and residents now have to travel to different locations to get their testing done, even for a simple blood test or urine sample.

* (14:50)

(4) Further travel challenges for vulnerable and elderly residents of northeast Winnipeg may result in fewer tests being done or delays in testing, with the attendant effects of increased health-care costs and poorer individual patient outcomes.

(5) COVID-19 emergency rules have resulted in long outdoor lineups, putting vulnerable residents at further risk in extreme weather, be it hot or cold. Moreover, these long lineups have resulted in longer wait times for services and poorer service in general.

(6) Manitoba residents value the convenience and efficiency of the health-care system when they are able to give their samples at the time of the doctor visit.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately demand Dynacare maintain all the phlebotomy, blood sample sites existing prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency, and allow all Manitobans to get their blood and urine tests done when visiting their doctor, thereby facilitating local access to blood testing services.

This petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses)? No?

The honourable member for St. James (Mr. Sala)?
The honourable member for St. James on a petition? No?

The honourable member for The Maples (Mr. Sandhu)?

The honourable member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw)?

The honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe)?

We will then move on to grievances.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): First, on a matter of business, pursuant to rule 33(7), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday at private member's business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Seine River (Ms. Morley-Lecomte). The title of the resolution is Celebrating Backyard and Community Gardens.

Madam Speaker: Pursuant to rule 33(7), it has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday at private member's business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Seine River. The title of the resolution is Celebrating Backyard and Community Gardeners.

Mr. Goertzen: I have a leave request in co-ordination with opposition House leaders. I am seeking leave to

amend the Sessional Order passed by this House on March 15th, 2021 by deleting item 6 and replacing it with the following:

6. On March 24th, 2021, starting at the beginning of orders of the day, government business, the House, the provisions outlined for a limited debate on specified bills in rule 2(10) will apply, with the exception that the Government House Leader will have the ability to call the order of bills for debate, and after each debate concludes, the Speaker shall put the question.

And by deleting item 8 and replacing it with the following:

8. On March 25th, 2021, starting at the beginning of orders of the day, government business, the provisions outlined for limited debate on specified bills in rule 2(10) will apply, with the exception that government—that the Government House Leader will have the ability to call the order of bills for debate, and after each debate concludes, the Speaker shall put the question.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to amend the Sessional Order passed by this House on March 15th, 2021, by deleting item 6 and replacing it with the following:

6. On March 24th, 2021, starting at the beginning of orders of the day, government business, the provisions outlined for limited debate on specified bills in rule 2(10) will apply, with the exception that the Government House Leader will have the ability to call the order of bills for debate, and after each debate concludes, the Speaker shall put the question.

And by deleting item No. 8 and replacing it with the following:

8. On March 25th, 2021, starting at the beginning of orders of the day, government business, the provisions outlined for limited debate on specified bills in rule 2(10) will apply, with the exception that the Government House Leader will have the ability to call the order of bills for debate, and after each debate concludes, the Speaker shall put the question.

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: Can you please call for debate this afternoon, Bill 62 and Bill 32?

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider the following bills this afternoon: Bill 62, followed by Bill 32.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 62—The Animal Diseases Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: I will therefore call second reading of Bill 62, The Animal Diseases Amendment Act.

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development): I move, seconded by the Minister of Legislative and Public Affairs (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 62, The Animal Diseases Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Pedersen: Farm trespassing and biosecurity risks are increasing across Canada, and Manitoba livestock farmers are concerned about safety for their families, their livestock and the public's food supply. The government of Manitoba supports the rights of all Manitobans to hold and express their view and beliefs, but that does not extend to trespassing onto private property where farm families live.

Further, while people may express their views in a lawful manner, they should not do so in ways that put the health of animals and the food supply at risk or create potential biosecurity risks that could potentially spread animal diseases.

Farmers in Manitoba operate under some of the most stringent animal health and safety standards in the world. There are many legal avenues available if people feel that animals are in distress, but interfering with biosecurity areas is not one of them.

The government of Manitoba will not tolerate illegal activities that risk the safety of farm families or their livestock, nor will this government tolerate animal cruelty. Nothing in these changes negatively affects citizens' ability to report on animal-welfare concerns. There is the Animal Care Line, and our animal protection officers will investigate if any allegations of animal abuse come forward.

Farms are not only places of business; they are homes where children and families also reside. Trespassing on these homes and places of work is a very serious matter. Trespassing can expose farms and food facility—food production facilities to biosecurity risks that could spread disease and may cause injury or stress to farm animals. If a person interferes with an

animal in transport, it can cause distress to the animals and impair the biosecurity of the entire load.

We have seen the effects of trespassing in other jurisdictions across Canada and around the world, and we'll work to ensure our response allows our farms and food processors to continue to produce food world—to produce world-class, safe and healthy foods in a humane way.

Our objective is to have the legislation that protects our farmers in a way that will lead to a more safe, just and peaceful Manitoba and recognizes that there are areas where biosecurity needs to be protected.

We have consulted with the industry and farm organizations in a public survey on EngageMB, and we look forward to passage of this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Questions

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A question period up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the minister by any member of the following sequence: first question by 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.

The honourable member for Notre Dame (Ms. Marcelino). *[interjection]*

Oh, sorry, right—the honourable member for Burrows—wrong bill.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): I thank the minister for the introduction for the second reading of the bill.

Just curious to know about the detailed consultation process. Who was consulted with the creation of this bill? Can the minister offer deeper details on it, please?

* (15:00)

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development): Yes, we, along with the public and EngageMB, so that all Manitobans had the opportunity to comment on the content—the need for this bill or what their feelings were towards it, we also consulted with organizations such as Keystone Agriculture Producers, The Association of Manitoba

Municipalities, the poultry organizations; whether it's the eggs, the chickens, the turkeys, and Dairy Farmers of Manitoba, and other groups like that—Manitoba Beef Producers. That's just off the top of my head that—the organization—the farm organizations, plus the public, had input—

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

Mr. Brar: Just wondering, what triggered the minister and this government to bring this bill forward? Just trying to understand the motivation and reasons behind this legislation. Why?

Mr. Pedersen: There's really two reasons, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And speaking to the member's question, food safety and farm safety. There's—food safety is ultimate—there are—food producers and food processors have national standards for biosecurity, for food protocols, for food handling, and that is—ultimately everyone wants safe food.

And we've also seen in other jurisdictions where there has been some challenges on—at the farm—on the farms. And this is putting the safety of farm families at risk. And we have not, to date, had this, but we want to make sure we can avoid these situations.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, to the minister, I'm asking about the size of the biosecurity zone. Will there be specifications in terms of what the size of that biosecurity zone can be? How large or how small?

Mr. Pedersen: Even right now, there is signage out there, there is—most times there's signage right at the end of the yard or before a public road warning that this is a biosecure zone. So there will be—adequate signage needs to be up there to make sure that people are aware that there is a biosecurity zone in that area—in that—in the livestock operation there. So it is with signage that is readily available to the public, that's how it will be noted.

Mr. Brar: Just wondering how many breaches have the minister noticed in Manitoba per year? Or can the minister share the data for the breaches for last—say, past five years? Do you have any data about it so that we know?

Mr. Pedersen: In our consultations, we noted that—it was noted from various farm organizations that they—their members have been reporting people on their property. There's been no—and, you know, these people haven't kept official records of when the date

was or anything like that. But it's been noted that it's been happening more frequently.

And as the Minister of Justice (Mr. Friesen) introduced his amendments to the trespass act, this is a challenge for farm families when no one else is nearby to help them that if people are coming onto their property and—unknown people. And that's a challenge for everyone.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member for River Heights, if you can take your mic—turn your mic on.

Mr. Gerrard: The minister completely failed to answer my question, which is what is the size of the biosecurity zone? If you have, for example, a hog operation, how big will that biosecurity zone extend? What are the limits of the zone? How far will it go? How narrow will it be?

Thank you.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, I can gladly take the member on a tour of rural Manitoba and, as he'll understand, every operate—livestock operation varies in size. So I can't give you a specific metre—square metre size or an acreage size. It depends on the size of the operation and they'll have proper signage to outline their biosecurity zone.

Mr. Brar: Just trying to understand this. Is it supply driven or a demand-driven proposal?

Mr. Pedersen: I didn't catch the last part of his question. Could the member repeat his question, please?

Mr. Brar: Just trying to understand, was there a demand from the farming community that they wanted the government to bring in such a legislation or it's supply driven, that the minister all of a sudden thought that our farmers might need this legislation and let's do the consultation. That's my question.

Mr. Pedersen: I'm sorry for not catching that question. I wasn't trying to avoid it. This was a request from the farm organizations. They run very strict biosecurity zones within their—and very strict biosecurity protocols within them, so it was a request from the industry and then we did the public consultation of it.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. To the minister: I've been all over Manitoba and very rarely are the biosecurity zones clear on how far they extend. Whether it is five metres, 100 metres, one kilometre, I think there needs to be more clarity on this.

As to the inspections, how frequently will operations—livestock operations be inspected under the government's plans?

Mr. Pedersen: The member needs to understand that these operations run under a national biosecurity code and a load of livestock coming out of—I'll use the example of a load of hogs coming out of a barn—goes to a livestock processing. There is biosecurity standards and protocols that are in there. That product is traced throughout the plant, so that if there are any obvious signs of either abuse or biosecurity breaches, that would be—go right back to the operation.

In the case of a dairy farm, that milk is—there is an individual sample before every—before a truck is even loaded with the milk out of a milk tank and therefore, that—

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

Mr. Brar: Just wanted to discuss that it's already illegal to trespass; we all know that. And there are rules around biosecurity already in place.

Why has the minister brought this bill forward in this situation?

Mr. Pedersen: The challenge with the old Petty Trespass Act, that it was—the onus was on the landowner to bring forward and press charges against it, and that made for some very uncomfortable situations.

And so this way, now, in conjunction with changes that the Minister of Justice is bringing in the trespass act, is taking the onus off of the landowner to bring forward charges. They can call the RCMP or the local law enforcement to be able to handle these and diffuse these potentially dangerous situations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights. The honourable member for River Heights, can you unmute?

Mr. Gerrard: Deputy Speaker, markets for livestock increasingly depend on us being able to demonstrate that we have really high standards for the care of the animal husbandry that—related to things like use of antibiotics to the use of stalls and so on.

What is the minister's plan overall to make sure that Manitoba keeps up with standards, so that our markets will—mains—remain strong globally?

* (15:10)

Mr. Pedersen: I'm glad to see the member is going to support this bill because this is what this is all about.

There's national biosecurity standards and protocols for how animals and poultry are looked after and how they're fed and to make sure that the food is safe, and this bill will help make sure that these protocols and standards are maintained.

Mr. Brar: The minister indicated that food safety and farm safety is important and they're trying to save food and farm families—or, I would say, protect livestock and farm families. From whom?

Mr. Pedersen: Well, unlike the member opposite—from his question—who doesn't seem to care about food safety, you could have—and this is the challenge that we face—if people enter a biosecure zone without proper hygiene, without proper disinfectants, they could introduce foreign animal diseases. They could be feeding a restricted ingredient into those animals in that barn without obvious permission of the land owner. That's what this is about. It's about keeping our food safe so that consumers can trust Manitoba-produced food.

Mr. Brar: Asked about animal rights advocates giving water to thirsty animals, this minister said, who knows what is in that water; are they contaminating that water, which would contaminate, he goes on, the food system?

Is the guiding principle behind this bill truly that level of paranoia?

Mr. Pedersen: I know the member from Burrows has a little bit of farm experience, but in my experience of loading possum belly trailers, double-deck trailers, never a good idea to be involved walking around a trailer on a highway. That's—it's personal safety to those—and I'll stick by this, who knows what's in that? That's what our challenge is. What are they giving to that animal on there that could be a restricted food ingredient that they're giving to those? And you know, I know the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) is talking, thinking—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Pedersen: Practical experience is telling us that this is something that shouldn't happen out on the highways and in our—in terms of personal safety and terms of animal safety.

Mr. Brar: I think the minister is trying to solve a problem that does not exist.

He failed to share any past experiences, complaints or biosecurity protocol breaches that happened. He's just thinking that it might happen, somebody might poison animals. I don't agree to that.

Could the minister not have taken a policy or regulatory approach if he feels there really is a problem here? Why use the hammer of legislation?

Mr. Pedersen: Farmers are very progressive people and the last thing they want to do is be put into a danger zone—dangerous situation, having their animals at risk. And the NDP's position now is, don't worry, nothing will ever happen. And yet, when there is a food safety issue, they will come back. They will blame the farmers. They will blame this government. They'll blame everybody but themselves because they were not proactive in looking at a potential problem that could exist.

We're with Manitoba farmers each and every day.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Do you have any more questions, the honourable member for Burrows?

Mr. Brar: Yes, I have one.

What steps is the minister taking to address concerns for animal welfare?

Mr. Pedersen: Well, in case you didn't catch it, there are national standards for biosecurity and for nutrition needs of animals. These are national protocols that they're—our producers are very much involved in addressing and keeping those national standards, because their income, their livelihood and their animals' welfare is at stake with this. And we'll stand behind Manitoba farmers each and every day.

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

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The debate. Any speakers?

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): It's my pleasure to put a few words on record on Bill 62.

As far as I have seen for my short experience as a legislator, this minister almost always failed to stand with Manitoban farmers—exact opposite to what he just claimed.

This bill amends The Animal Diseases Act to require a person to obtain consent before entering a biosecurity zone or interacting with animals in such a zone.

A biosecurity zone is an area within a livestock operation to which access is tightly controlled to limit the spread of pathogens.

Consent is now also required before interacting with animals in transport. This bill makes it an offence to block or interfere with a vehicle transporting commercial animals. The requirements for giving notice of orders are to be established by regulation.

Let's try to understand the real situation. Whenever this minister mentions Manitoba farmers, protecting farming families, I hear it as protecting big corporations, standing with the large, rich, corporate houses, the big industrial farm operations. That's what he actually means. We need to understand this.

Bill 62—its title is beautiful—The Animal Diseases Amendment Act. But what we need to understand is the intentions behind bringing this legislation forward. As we have seen during this question period, the minister failed to establish the fact that there have been biosecurity breaches in Manitoba. There have been hundreds and thousands of complaints in Manitoba. Basically, this bill talks about biosecurity—and we all know that biosecurity is important, and most of us try our best to follow the protocols, but due to lack of education or awareness, breaches happen.

But when the government or the people in charge, they try to use this platform, this Chamber, to address their own political plans, their own ideology, then the things go wrong. Biosecurity is important. How to make sure we follow protocols.

* (15:20)

As informed citizens, all of us know that there are mostly two ways to go. The first is education. Another is enforcement. This goes everywhere. This goes in the justice system and the police system and the traffic system and health sciences and education. We follow the rules, and the department and the government and the parents and the teachers and the journalists, they educate us. The knowledge generators, professors, they educate us: what's right, what's wrong, what are the rules around a particular area, a discipline, an organization, a job responsibility.

We enforce things where education fails. If there is a lack of information, we need to provide that information to the concerned people.

I was going through some studies, here. There have been some researchers here on some poultry farms, and those researchers, they have done some observations through hidden cameras or other

research tools. And they have established, they have published, that a good percentage of the workers at these poultry farms, they even failed to wash their hands when it was desired to do so. They even failed to change their coveralls, to change their booties wherever it was required.

So, as I was asking this minister in the question period, who the minister is trying to protect our livestock from, who the minister is trying to protect our food contamination from.

Keeping the whistle-blowers out does not solve all problems. We need to understand this. The owners, they get into barns, they go near to the animals. The employees, the inspectors, all of them, it's part of their job to be in contact with those animals.

Is it just the whistle-blowers or animal rights activists who are a threat or who are a source of infection for our animals or our food in the food chain? That's not true.

I'm looking at this legislation—while respecting biosecurity, while respecting our family farms, farmers, producers—as a political move, trying to make our producers happy. I've been working with Manitoba Agriculture for so many years. I can't remember a single complaint that a family farm would have brought forward to the department where I worked that somebody trespassed, there was an infection on their farm—in their hog operation or their livestock operation or their poultry farm or their dairy farm—due to strangers stepping into their property. I never noticed that, and I think the minister did not, as well.

So what we are trying to achieve here? What's the logic? The logic is to protect big operations who do not care about the animals.

I remember—I belong to a farming family—when I was a kid, I had chickens at my farm, at my home. We had cows, we had buffaloes. Many of the people in my village, they used to have rabbits, goats.

And do you know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Those farmers, they love animals more than their family members—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I just wanted to have the member maybe unmute his sound, because we've got mute.

Mr. Brar: That happened by chance. Apologies for that.

So, I was trying to share that our family farms, the farmers, they love animals, no doubt about it. I'm a farmer's son, and I remember how much I was connected with my chickens and cows and buffaloes.

It's not about family farms; it's about corporate agriculture. It's about those profit-making brains who have no attachment to animals. To them, that's just a business. And the people, the consumers, all of us who eat, they need to know where their food comes from. They need to make sure that the food on their table doesn't come from an establishment where cruelty has happened to those animals. This bill protects those big operations to keep out the people who care about animals and animal rights.

I've been approached by so many organizations who are really concerned about this move. And they call it ag gag laws. We have experienced not one, but three in this Chamber: Bill 62, Bill 57 and Bill 63. They are all ag gag laws. And when we talk about this word gag, that means, for those who don't understand it, pushing a piece of cloth in somebody's mouth to shut them up. It silences those voices who stand with animal rights. Those are innocent creatures.

If this minister really cares about our ranchers, why are Manitoban ranchers demanding his resignation? Why they feel—I was talking to one of the ranchers this morning. You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what they feel? They feel that this minister and this Premier (Mr. Pallister) get upset when somebody stands in their way to stop them doing whatever they want to do. They get angry. They get angry with the questions.

This minister, through these legislations—trying to pretend that they really care about Manitoba producers. They do not. If they did, they must have supported the AgriStability proposal that the feds offered recently. The feds are offering 60 per cent of support, close to \$100 million, for these provinces, and they're asking the provinces all together to just contribute \$70 million so that these producers in the middle of a pandemic can survive, can sustain, can keep their businesses running.

*(15:30)

If this minister really cared about biosecurity, he should not have ordered closure of 21 rural Agriculture and MASC offices.

A few minutes back, I just mentioned about education, information awareness, where the awareness comes from. Who educates us? Who educates

producers? What are the sources of information of the producers? The ag experts. The food safety experts.

We have ag experts—my apologies, Deputy Speaker, we—sorry, we had, actually. In April, we'll start saying we had ag experts in these rural offices, which would no longer be the case after that change. If the minister really cares about biosecurity, he would let those ag experts stay in those offices and help the farmers ensure biosecurity at their farms.

It's not about small ranchers. It's not about small producers. It's not about livestock producers. Again, I want to emphasize—bigger and bold—it's about industrial agriculture, their friends, and protecting them from the people who really care about animal rights.

If we look at our neighbours down south, this ag gag thing, this is not new. It started in the late '90s, 1990s, when there were legislations brought forward to silence the voices of people who care about animals. What happened later? Similar ag gag laws. They have to be struck down in Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, Iowa and Kansas because they violated the First Amendment right to free speech.

In the same way, these ag gag laws, they violate the Charter of rights, in our case. In Canada, what's the status of ag gag laws? We need to understand this: Alberta, bill 127 passed; Ontario, bill 156 passed; Prince Edward Island, bills 120 and 124 passed. And Manitoba is considering to go the same way. Let's talk about 'brishit'—British Columbia: BC Ministry of Agriculture, they confirmed they have no plans to enact an ag gag law.

When we talk about the consultations, again, the minister failed to justify. Those farms have no issues. Nobody trespassed, nobody threatened, nobody mistreated their animals. And if the minister says, hey, I'm bringing forward a new legislation that would mean that no one can disturb you while you are at your farm, no one can enter your property, they would say, yes, it's okay, it's good for us—but there is no problem.

We need to understand this. We need to look at the by-products—I'm sorry—we need to look at the by-products of this bill.

To me and to the ranchers, especially Crown land ranchers, leaseholders, this minister feels like a man with a stick, forcing everything, forcing them to pay Crown lands rent, which is 300 per cent more than what they used to pay. And how does it feel when you genuinely try to water some animals because you feel

that they need water at that time and you are jailed or fined for that? How would that feel?

Biosecurity mistakes happen. When I was working with Manitoba Agriculture, I have been scouting soybean fields, canola fields, and I always used to follow biosecurity protocols. I used to use those plastic booties and change them in between the fields. I used to disinfect my tools. And most of the people in this industry, they do that, they follow that.

But due to lack of information, mistakes happen. We need to create a culture which is called biosecurity culture. Does anyone who is listening remember ourselves wearing masks 11 hours a day five years back? No. I don't. We learned to follow public health guidelines because someone responsible, they developed that knowledge and they communicated that to us. They convinced us, they educated us, that this is good for us, this is how we can save ourselves and each other.

The same way, the food production biosecurity protocols could be communicated to the public, to the industry, and people would follow those rules. We are not here to divide people. We are not here to tell the farmers that those are the strangers; they would come and attack you; those are the people who hate you; those are the people who can poison your animals. Everybody is innocent, responsible. That's what we should understand, expect.

Why would I, or someone, poison animals? If that was the case, why was that not reported multiple times around us?

We are in the middle of a pandemic, and we are bringing forward legislation which is not super urgent at this point of time, because we already have legislation that checks trespassing, that protects infrastructure, that protects our food, food production facilities. We already have those legislations.

* (15:40)

But when you start addressing your political ideology, by easier methods, I would expect this minister to stand up today and announce that, yes, I am offering my part of contribution to the AgriStability program. That's what would make our producers happy. I would expect him to stand up and say, unit transfers are allowed.

Again, I talked to one of the ranchers, and they said, historically, it's not just in Manitoba; in North America, this is the trend. Somebody is having 160 acres of land and they have 3,000 acres of leased

Crown land. That's a single unit, deeded land, leased land. And when they plan their retirement, after that family has invested 65 years of their life on that land to improve it, to fence it, they are connected to that land. It allows them to plan their retirements better.

But here, what's happening? Centralization of power. Just with a stroke of a pen, the minister can do whatever they want to do.

We all understand that biosecurity is important, no doubt about it. But we need to check whether the minister is sincerely trying to address biosecurity. No, I do not think so, because he is taking away the resources—the human resources, financial resources—away from the families he is trying to please through this legislation.

It's not about small ranchers. Again, it's not about livestock producers, farmers who love animals. It's about industrial agriculture. That's the goal. That's the hidden agenda.

From that conversation, that rancher was saying that the minister—let me see my notes here—that the minister does have some hidden agenda, but we do not know what it is. That's the level of trust that this minister and this government holds among the people, real people, on the land.

They understand that this minister would always, one hundred and two per cent of the time, avoid answering questions during the question period about Crown lands, about cuts in the Agriculture Department and about their plans to consolidate everything, to consolidate the powers.

Those factory farms, they are totally, totally profit-oriented. We should be finding a way to support sustaining our farms.

Recently, the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew), he wrote a letter to the Finance Minister to include livestock producers in the Bridge Grant program. Why does this government not think that those producers, they need real help? They have suffered a lot due to supply chain disruptions.

I don't think that this bill addresses what is being presented by this minister. We already have biosecurity rules.

So, due to lack of time, I would conclude here that we need to understand the real intentions of this minister: to help their friends, the corporate world and, really, ignore the real people on the land, which is ranchers.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there any other speakers?

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Well, I am not pleased to be getting up this afternoon and put a couple of words on the record in respect to Bill 62. I think, and I've said it in the last week and this week, every opportunity that I've had to get up and speak about the current sweep of legislation that's before this House, including together with Bill 57 and Bill 63.

Together, Bill 57, Bill 62 and Bill 63 has a chilling effect on the right to protest in Manitoba, the right to dissent in Manitoba, the right to actually walk anywhere in Manitoba for fear of coming onto private property and potentially coming into conflict with other Manitobans. Together, those three pieces of legislation are moving Manitoba towards an authoritarian regime under the administration of the Pallister government, and Bill 62 is implicit and a part of that as well.

So, Deputy Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the member for Burrows (Mr. Brar), who is not only an extraordinary human being, but knows agriculture as well, and I appreciate his words, his expertise on this matter.

Now, Deputy Speaker, I could share my own words and my own thoughts, but what I thought I was going to do in the limited time that we do have is I think that I want to use my privilege of being able to stand up in the House to read a letter into the official record of this Chamber, of this Legislative Assembly, that was addressed to the former—or no, to the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General (Mr. Friesen) and to the Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development (Mr. Pedersen).

I'm going to read it into the record because it needs to be heard, it is succinct in laying out the concerns, very real concerns, with Bill 62.

Dear Minister—I can't say it because it's their names: These are the comments of Animal Justice; the Winnipeg Humane Society; Canadians for Ethical Treatment of Farmed Animals; Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals; People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals; Mercy for Animals Canada and the Humane Society International/Canada, regarding the amendments to the petty trespassers act and The Animal Diseases Act.

The government has solicited public feedback on the proposed amendments through an online survey, and while we have filled out this survey individually,

we have found this tool to be unsatisfactory. The survey covers a wide range of proposed legislative amendments pertaining generally to rural crime without providing adequate detail regarding the need for and content of the proposals to allow interested individuals to understand what specifically the government is proposing to do in order to promote meaningful public engagement.

For this reason, we are providing the written—within written comments for your consideration. We provide these comments in an effort to set out our concerns regarding proposed legislative amendments dealing with farms, slaughterhouses and transport trucks. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with you in further detail prior to the introduction of proposed legislative amendments.

As a side note, Deputy Speaker, I suspect that those meetings did not occur with any of these groups.

If and when the government introduces legislative amendments alluded to in its online survey, we urge you to provide an opportunity for public consultation, since it is only when interested individuals and groups have seen proposed amendments that meaningful public engagement will be possible.

I'm going to go—I'm going to skip a little bit, Deputy Speaker.

*(15:50)

(1) Background: Animal Justice and the Winnipeg Humane Society, Canadians for Ethical Treatment of Farmed Animals, Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, mercy for Canada—animals Canada and the Humane Society International/Canada collectively represent tens of thousands of Manitoba—Manitoban supporters concerned about the treatment of farmed animals.

We are concerned that Manitoba appears to be considering dangerous agricultural gag or ag gag legislation that will further conceal animal cruelty in the food system.

As explained in further detail below, if Manitoba adopts statutory language similar to that recently enacted in Ontario and Alberta, it may violate Manitobans' constitutional rights to freedom of expression, freedom of the press and peaceful assembly, as protected under sections 2(b) and (c) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Trespassing at farms and slaughterhouses, as well as any other private property in Manitoba, is already illegal, as is any conduct that damages private property or harms farmed animals during transport.

Millions of farmed animals are raised and slaughtered each year in Manitoba with no legally binding standards of care governing their treatment.

The Animal Care Act does not apply to farm animals who suffer harm or injury from agricultural uses. As a result, animals at intensive livestock operations throughout the province are subject to standard industry practices that cause significant pain and distress, including crowding egg-laying hens into battery cages so small that they are not able to spread their wings, confining mother pigs in gestation and farrowing crates so small that they cannot turn around, grinding male chicks alive in macerators, and performing painful mutilations without anesthesia, including slicing off the tails of piglets, debeaking hens and castrating cows and pigs.

Rather than introducing legislation that will make it more difficult to publicly 'expose'—expose and prevent abuse and mistreatment of farmed animals, we urge the government to enact legally binding standards of care for farmed animals to ensure proactive and transport—transparent enforcement of these standards.

Transparency and oversight benefit farmed animals, promote public confidence in farmers and foster public knowledge and discussions regarding the ways that animals are treated on and—on farms.

Although our organizations' focus is on the protection of animals, it is also important to note the physical and psychological health risks faced by workers at factory farms, including slaughterhouses. These health risks have been subject to significant public debate and discussion in recent months, given outbreaks of COVID-19 among workers in slaughterhouses across North America, including the Maple Leaf slaughterhouse in Brandon and the Exceldor slaughterhouse in Blumenort.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to prevent the emergence of new zoonotic diseases that can wreak havoc on human populations. Experts have repeatedly identified intensive livestock operations as breeding grounds for such diseases in the future, just as they have given rise to deadly forms of bird and pig flu in the past.

In light of these important public health and workplace safety risks, more transparency and oversight is needed in our food system, not less.

(2) No demonstrated need for changes to trespass laws: In the government's online survey, it refers to approaches to trespass offences in Manitoba, as compared to Saskatchewan and Alberta. The possible amendments to the petty trespasser act—trespass act suggest that the act could be amended to specify classes of land or land use where entry without the owner's or occupier's permission is presumed to be trespass. Such classes of land include lawns, gardens, land used for animal grazing and land used for raising animals, including birds and fish.

The government has provided no explanation as to why these proposed amendments are needed, making it difficult to meaningfully comment on the proposed amendments.

Given the lack of demonstrated need for amendments to the petty trespasser act, as well as the fact that trespass is already illegal in Manitoba on lands that are wholly or partially enclosed and the difficulty for any individual to determine whether open land without any fencing or signage is used for animal grazing and other purposes, the proposed amendments appear unnecessary. Designating animal protection areas is unnecessarily and potentially harmful.

In the government's online survey, it suggests amending the ADA to designate livestock facilities or vehicles that contain livestock as biosecurity areas or animal protection areas that can only be entered with the consent of the owner and operator. This proposal appears misleading in that it is already unlawful to trespass at farms and slaughterhouses, just as it would be unlawful to enter a transport truck or any private vehicle without the consent of the vehicle's owner and occupier.

Because it is already unlawful to trespass in these areas, there are two potential conclusions that can be drawn. First, the government's proposal is unnecessary and redundant. In the alternative, the government is proposing to expand the class of persons from whom entry into farms, slaughterhouses, transport trucks constitutes an offence. It is this possibility that causes us significant concern, as it appears Manitoba may be considering the ag gag legislation similar to—recently introduced in Ontario and Alberta.

Without government regulations or monitoring, animal cruelty on Manitoba farms is typically concealed from public view and even the most egregious cases of abuse go undetected and unprosecuted. One of the only ways for the public to see the conditions in which animals are kept at farms in Manitoba is by the release of footage by employee whistle-blowers.

Such exposés in—are rare in Manitoba, though a 2012 whistle-blower exposé on the Puratone pig farm near Arborg exposed horrific conditions and sparked important public debate about standard industry practices, such as keeping pregnant pigs in gestation crates so small they are unable to turn around and euthanizing piglets by the practice of thumping, whereby an animal is held by its hind legs as their head is slammed in the concrete or wall. The disturbing acts exposed at 'purtoin' resulted in investigations into the treatment of animals at the facility.

Whistle-blower exposés across Canada and around the world have played an important role in allowing the public to see the conditions at intensive livestock operations, promoting public debate and often leading to charges and convictions for animal cruelty.

Recent Canadian examples include horrific abuse of cows at the Chilliwack Cattle Sales in British Columbia, which included cows being punched, kicked and beaten with canes; a cow hung in the air by a chain around her neck. The company and seven employees were convicted of animal cruelty.

Abuse of turkeys at Hybrid Turkeys in Kitchener, Ontario, including turkeys kicked and beaten with shovels among other disturbing acts. Authorities investigated and laid animal cruelty charges, which led the company to plead guilty.

Sadistic physical and sexual abuse of chickens by Elite Farm Services in British Columbia, including animals being kicked and having their wings ripped off while alive. The company has been charged with cruelty and the matter is now before the courts.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I would ask the member if she would like to have it—that letter tabled, or is it a letter?

An Honourable Member: I'm going to table it once I'm finished reading it, just let me finish reading it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Ms. Fontaine: In the government's explanation regarding possible amendments to the ADA, it notes

that Manitoba is exploring potential legislation that would protect biosecurity at food production premises where livestock and other animals are being kept in order to protect animals from hazards that may compromise food safety.

In order to achieve the objective of protecting animals from hazards to their 'houth'—health, we encourage the government to adopt binding standards of care for farmed animals, including standards aimed at reducing the risk of the emergence and spread of disease such as avian and pig flu that can jump the species barrier to humans.

* (16:00)

Such standards would include not only requirements regarding cleaning and disease testing but also improve animal-care practices such as reducing stocking densities and prohibiting painful mutilations that are a significant source of stress and contribute to the immune suppression in intensively raised farm animals.

Deputy Speaker, I know that my time is very short because we have another bill in the queue. I'm just going to wrap up by saying that the—Bill 62 is more likely to be challenged within the court as unconstitutional. And it—we know that there is already—and I will table this as well—Animal Justice has also filed a Charter—against the Attorney General of Ontario for their ag gag bill.

And so I know I don't have much time to read everything into the record, which is unfortunate because I really did want to ensure that the minister's actually heard—because I'm not sure if the minister's actually read the letter that has been—actually, several letters that have been sent to them in respect of Bill 62 and Bill 63.

So I wanted to make sure—although I was not able to read all of it, I wanted to make sure that I was able to get at least partially some of it on the record and to voice the absolute dismay that this government would introduce a series of bills, including Bill 62 and Bill 63, that does nothing to protect animals in Manitoba, but ensures that whistle-blowers, animal-welfare activists and Manitobans concerned with animal welfare in Manitoba, that those things will be kept secret, if at all, will ever come to light.

Deputy Speaker, as the minister—we've said before, we know that there are not—we know that none of these have come before him. We know that this is the agricultural industry that are asking for these changes, but it is in violation of people's Charter rights

to be able to protest and be able to ensure that whistle-blowers are protected from legislation.

And so I will leave my comments there to allow us to get on to the other bills.

Miigwech.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to just say a few words about this bill, Bill 62, The Animal Diseases Amendment Act.

We've seen over the last 50 years increasing concerns for a whole variety of reasons about biosecurity at hog operations, at some grain operations. And, you know, increasingly it is has become apparent that such biosecurity is vital to the agricultural industry, and it is very important.

The recent coronavirus pandemic, COVID-19 infections, has highlighted once again the potential for transfer of diseases like this from animals. This occurred in the Wuhan market area, and although we don't have definitive information, the suspicion is that this originated in a transfer from animals, in this case perhaps bats.

And although they are—no one is farming bats in Manitoba, certainly there are a lot of concerns about the transfer of viral infections, influenza variants and so on, from hogs, as an example. And so we need the biosecurity, not just for the animals—to protect the animals, but we need the biosecurity to protect people.

We've had, as is known, globally, epidemics and instances of porcine epidemic diarrhea, and this is critical for a whole lot of reasons. Infections getting into animals can result in loss of a lot of animals. They can result in multiple problems for those raising animals. And so the biosecurity in this and in other instances is vital in today's world. There's just no arguing about that.

Now, I asked the minister about the size of the biosecurity zone, and I did this very deliberately because I think it's very important to have a minister who can communicate not just to farmers but to the general public. People in the general public need a picture of what a biosecurity zone is, how big is it, how far out it extends from, for instance, a hog barn, whether it's a few metres, whether it's a kilometre and so on.

I think it's really important, and we emphasized this just the other day, when we were talking about agricultural awareness day and the really, really critical importance of giving Manitobans—the general public in Manitoba—a much better understanding of,

and concern for agriculture, concern for our producers.

And yet, the minister was not able to communicate except by saying, oh, it's in some regulation somewhere, I have no idea what the size is myself. That was too bad because it missed an opportunity to communicate and provide people a better understanding of, you know, what a biosecurity area actually looked like.

Now, as well as the concern over the security, which has grown steadily over the last 50 years, there is also an increasing concern about the ethical treatment of farm animals, and this ethical treatment of farm animals has become very important to the general public. It has also become very important to the markets that we would have for livestock, that animals which are not well treated will create problems for our industry and for our farmers.

And thus, when we're looking at ensuring that there is good animal husbandry, it is not just a matter of referring to some auto-obey standards. It is a matter of being able to demonstrate to the average person that animals are being looked after well, and so that Manitobans—and the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) has mentioned, a whole number of groups who are concerned about the ethical treatment of animals—are able to better understand what is happening with animals, how they're being cared for.

There needs to be a level of transparency. Now, precisely how we achieve that transparency is not entirely clear. This is not a bill which will enhance transparency. It appears to be a bill which, if anything, goes the other direction.

And it's too bad the minister didn't take this opportunity to provide a better balance, because that enhanced openness and 'transparety' is—transparency is really critical to having a greater acceptance of how animals are looked after in Manitoba, to having better opportunities in terms of markets for the long run and, of course, that the animals themselves are well and carefully and ethically cared for.

This is an aspect which should not be put aside. It should not be forgotten. It should not be passed over. It is a really important part of how most farmers raise their animals, but it is something where we will have to, over time, figure out how we are more open and transparent about the care of animals and being able to demonstrate that on an ongoing basis.

This challenge, which is there for all of us, to figure out ways to be able to be sure that we're going

to be able to, as it were, look in on animals in some fashion or another so that the general public will see that the standard of care in our animal facilities is high.

* (16:10)

Now, there's not a lot of trust right now with the Minister of Agriculture, certainly not after he closed many, many agricultural offices. And it's no excuse that this process started under the NDP. The minister is responsible for his own actions.

I have talked to farmers who feel that this is going to be a retrograde step, because agricultural offices, where there were people who would get out on the farms, were very important in terms of sharing good practices and keeping an eye on what was happening in the farms and this should not be forgotten; it should not just be a relic of the past. It needs to be something that is particularly important for helping young farmers get started and to grow their business and to do well in their business because they are the ones who need, in particular, the mentoring.

And it is particularly now, when we've got increasing use of technology in a whole variety of different ways, that it would be helpful to ensure that farmers are there to be helped by agricultural officers and agricultural offices. Not that the offices need to be occupied all the time, just because of the way we now work with cellphones and other things, but we certainly mustn't forget this because agriculture's tremendously important to our province in a whole lot of ways. Agriculture is very important in producing the food that we eat. It's very important in terms of exports and wealth generation in our province. So we must never forget this.

It is not just the closure of agricultural offices, it is the way the minister has approached the treatment of people who have been leasing Crown lands for ranches. The minister has, instead of recognizing that many of these people have been on the land and taken care of the land for years and years, that many of these people have not only taken care of the land, but they have been building up what they believe was equity which would be their pension when they were able to have a unit transfer to somebody else, that they could get an income from that and that that would be like selling a farm. It would be an income.

But, of course, the minister, with one stroke of his pen, has in fact eliminated their pensions. I wonder what the minister would think if he walked in one day and found that his own pension had been completely

eliminated and had gone from whatever it is now to zero. That would not be fair to him and, just so, it is not fair for the minister to get rid of pensions that people who have been leasing Crown lands have been planning to have, based on their stewardship of that land. And that is unfair treatment and it's unfair the way this has been done, in many different perspectives, including the dramatic tripling of—300 per cent increase in—the lease rates.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

And so that—the minister, well, he talks about what he does for farmers and the other hand has been working hard to cause trouble for farmers.

The minister's also been slow to sign on to the AgriStability program to give greater stability for people in the agricultural community. It is there being offered from the Government of Canada, and yet the minister has not seen fit to give the security to farmers in this respect.

Now, in summary then, this bill, I believe, needs a better balance of biosecurity and openness and transparency which looks at and enables people to see better how our animals are being raised, because only when we have that will we have a province which is fully supportive of the farmers in our province and of the way that our livestock is being looked after.

I look forward to the comments which come forward at the committee stage, because I hope they will provide them a solution, some opportunities to look at ways in which these areas can be handled and can be improved, so that we do better for animals and we do better for people in our province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Merci, miigwech.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I move, seconded by the member for Thompson (Ms. Adams), that debate on this bill now be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

**Bill 32—The Election Financing Amendment
and Elections Amendment Act
(Government Advertising)**

Madam Speaker: We will now then move to Bill 32, The Election Financing Amendment and Elections Amendment Act (Government Advertising).

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Legislative and Public Affairs): I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal Relations (Mr. Johnson), that Bill 32, The

Election Financing Amendment and Elections Amendment Act (Government Advertising), be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Goertzen: It is indeed, again, a pleasure to be in the House this afternoon and to speak to Bill 32. It doesn't feel like I've left in the last 18 years, but it is a pleasure to speak to this issue.

Manitoba's elections laws aim to ensure that there is a level playing field for all parties and to prevent the party in government from using taxpayers' resources to gain an advantage in an election, Madam Speaker. However, the current legislation has proven to be overly restrictive of normal government operations and, in some situations, has impaired the provision of services to the general public.

We are introducing amendments to the elections financing and The Elections Act to allow more open and clear communication to the public in the months leading up to a provincial election. These amendments will ensure that government business can continue during elections, but that the party in power does not receive an unfair advantage from having access to government and thereby, taxpayer-funded resources.

Media, the opposition, the government leaders, have regularly criticized the current rules and their impact on delivery of government services and sharing of government information. And, Madam Speaker, I can say that that criticism has extended across governments. It extended to when the current government was in opposition.

We are proposing a number of changes to address these concerns while ensuring that playing politics with government resources will not be tolerated. The new act will reduce the period in which advertising and publication restrictions apply from 90 days to a more reasonable 60-day standard. It will require that the same restrictions on government advertising for fixed-date elections also be in place for non-fixed-date elections, other than when a government has lost the confidence of the House.

It would permit the government to publish information about public health or safety matters during the restriction period without having to demonstrate that each advertisement or publication is required at the time. And this has been a matter of some public debate, Madam Speaker, in recent times.

For example, there was uncertainty during the 2018 by-election period about releasing the report on lead levels in St. Boniface. This uncertainty was due to the unclear requirement in the old act about publications, that they'd be required at that time. Under the changes we are proposing, there will be no doubt that publishing information on health and safety is not only permitted, but encouraged and valuable.

The act will also request for proposals, tenders, contracts and government job advertisements to be published even during an election period. These are the normal operations of government and they are expected operations by the public.

The act will permit advertisements and publications that are in continuation of earlier publications concerning ongoing or reoccurring programs or activities to continue, Madam Speaker, so that those ongoing programs are not interrupted by an election, because they are in place for an ongoing period because the public expects those services or those programs to continue.

* (16:20)

The act will prohibit advertisements and publications that target a constituency for by-elections being held so there is not unnecessary expenditures or unusual expenditures in a by-election constituency that is being contested.

It will also clarify that Cabinet ministers are permitted to speak publicly during restriction periods, provided that no government resources are used to advertise or publish the date or time, location, or the contents of the minister's speech and, Madam Speaker, I know that this has been a particular issue for members of the media and members of the opposition who are expecting the government to respond to certain matters, or the media who are expecting the government to respond to certain matters, but it was unclear whether ministers were actually allowed to do so.

We also recognize that there will have to be guidance developed to assist departments and other government agencies to comply with the advertisement and publication restrictions. The legislation requires that the government develop these guidelines and make them publicly available.

A consequential amendment would be made to The Referendum Act to reflect the change from 90 to 60 days for the government advertising restrictions because similar provisions apply to referendums.

The government retained Michael Green to review the restrictions under The Election Financing Act, and his report on proposed legislation concerning government advertising was released to the public on May 1st of 2019.

The proposed changes are reflective of Mr. Green's findings and the wording of the current legislation that is unclear and overly restrictive of normal government operations. And these changes reflect the feedback that we have heard from Manitobans, from the public service and from the media.

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.

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Would the minister—honourable minister please explain how does reducing the restriction period on government advertising for a fixed-date election from 90 days to 60 days help Manitobans make their choice on election day, free of undue influence?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Legislative and Public Affairs): Certainly, when we look at what is the appropriate time frame, this is legislation that is still relatively new in the context of Manitoba elections. It was brought in with the idea that it would have to be tested, that there would have to be some consideration about how it was working. And there's a number of things, I think, that do work well.

And the spirit of the legislation is to ensure that there isn't undue ability for a government to use taxpayer funds to influence an election, but there is also now a better sense of what an appropriate time period would be, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Marcelino: Would the honourable minister please explain why is the advertising restriction period also being shortened before the votes on referendums?

Mr. Goertzen: It would be similar to the previous answer. I think that there is now a better understanding, having seen legislation like this in effect in

Manitoba for some period of time, about what is an appropriate period of time, Madam Speaker, for there to be restrictions in place.

So I think that given that experience that we've had, given the reflections that we've had from outside individuals who've come and looked at the Manitoba experience and situation, we believe that the 60 days strikes a better balance.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I know that the minister—there have been challenges before with legitimate information being released, whether it's about health or public safety during elections or by-elections.

I did—I was wondering about the exception on government advertising when it comes to publicizing a throne speech or a budget. Why would those be exempted?

Mr. Goertzen: They're matters of high public importance.

Ms. Marcelino: Will the honourable minister please explain: how will ministers be monitored during election periods to ensure that their messages are not partisan?

Mr. Goertzen: Of course, an individual who's a minister of the Crown maintains their role as minister of the Crown during the election period. MLAs are no longer MLAs during an election period. But, of course, there's a requirement that the Executive Council continues into that election period.

There are always, I think, during an election, more scrutiny on MLAs and those who are running for office, including ministers, than at any other time probably during the election cycle. And so there'll be, of course, a number of different ways not limited to the media and, of course, opposition parties or those who are looking to obtain government who will be watching, I'm sure, what ministers say.

Madam Speaker: Does the honourable member for St. Boniface have another question?

Mr. Lamont: Yes, Madam Speaker. Just on the question of budgets and throne speeches, these—they may be of high public interest but, ultimately, this is one of the areas where I don't agree that any budgets should be advertised in newspapers because, ultimately, it's a budget that's supposed to be argued about and decided upon. It amounts to a government using public funds to promote its agenda in a way that there's no real way for the public to respond.

So I'm just trying to understand—they might be—they might well be important, but I—this seems to be that—am I correct in thinking that a government could release a throne speech and then have a throne speech or a budget and then call an election the next day and there would be no issue there?

Mr. Goertzen: I think I've already answered the question for the member.

It is important that Manitobans know about a budget and a throne speech, other than the limitations that exist within the Legislature.

Ms. Marcelino: Will the honourable minister please explain why this government did not listen to the lawyer that they hired to analyzing advertising restrictions, who told them not to go ahead with the formulation of this bill?

Mr. Goertzen: I think that there was a clear understanding from those who reviewed the bill, both formally and informally, through the media and from the opposition, I would say, who were demanding that there were changes made to this bill, that it was necessary to make those changes. Madam Speaker. It was the opposition that was sometimes the most strongly vocal about the need for there to be changes.

And, of course, it was the opposition, when they were in the government, that most often broke the legislation, Madam Speaker. I can think of ministers who handed out cheques during by-elections who were found to be in violation, ministers who toured facilities in violation of laws. So there's clearly a need for a clarification because the NDP were found to be in violation of the law so many times.

Mr. Lamont: Again, I mean, the idea that we're going to have throne—I'm sorry to return to this, but the idea that we're going to advertise throne speeches and budgets but we don't. We haven't been advertising public health measures or pandemic measures. Again, I have to wonder why that's the case.

But isn't it also the case, I mean, this emerged in part because of the by-election in which I was elected, because the government had failed to reveal that there were high levels of lead in the community that I represent. But are there sanctions being considered? Because I know the Premier (Mr. Pallister) also crashed a press conference prior to the 2019 election.

Mr. Goertzen: The member makes a habit, both in this House and on social media, of repeating erroneous comments, Madam Speaker. But just because he repeats them doesn't mean that they're true.

And just because he puts incorrect facts on the record doesn't mean I have to respond to them.

Ms. Marcelino: Will the minister please explain if this—will this government respect fixed-date election law if this bill is passed?

Mr. Goertzen: We debated, of course, the issue around fixed-date election laws. There have been a number of situations in Canada, Madam Speaker, that have required there to be elections at different times. It's a debate that has gone on around Canada for quite a long time, of the issue of fixed-date election laws. It was a debate that happened when Gary Doer brought the legislation here in Manitoba. I'm sure that it will be a debate that will continue.

* (16:30)

Madam Speaker: Was there another question from the honourable member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont)? No?

Ms. Marcelino: While this government can say they will respect fixed-date election law, how will that be guaranteed if they can simply have 32 days of restricted advertising and then call a snap election?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I suppose it's the definition of what a snap election is. If you have to make the declaration that you're not going to be doing the advertising for a certain period of time to conform with this legislation, then it wouldn't be a surprise that you're having an election. I think if she's referring to the last election, which the NDP seem to want to refight over and over again, Madam Speaker, probably because they lost the election, there was a clear declaration by our government that an election was coming and that we'd be respecting the no-advertising rules.

Ms. Marcelino: Are these changes connected to the 2017 increases on individual and third-party donations to allow this government to use increasingly more party money to circumvent advertising restrictions during election periods?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I think there's a distinction that needs to be drawn, Madam Speaker. Our government has always been one that has advocated that political parties should raise their own money from individuals who want to donate to a party. The NDP have a long-standing record that continues on to this day, believing that they should get more money just by decree from the public, that it should just be given to the political parties regardless of whether or not taxpayers want to give that money or not. We will continue to fight for

the principle that the primary way that political parties should be funded is by asking for donations from Manitobans.

Ms. Marcelino: This will be my last question. Will the honourable minister please tell me if you have a timeline yet for guidelines described in section 5?

Mr. Goertzen: Once the legislation passes—not to presume anything, Madam Speaker—but if it passes in this Assembly, guidelines will be—start to be developed with the guidance of those who have an interest in this particular issue, and they will be published to ensure that all those members, including members of the opposition and other individual members in this House, independent members of this House, they need to see those guidelines.

It'd be important for all of us to understand the rules of which we're operating under. There's been too much confusion when it comes to this legislation, both by the previous government and by this current government. That confusion needs to be cleared up so it doesn't continue on to be a problem, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Lamont: I know the minister was referring to, you know, the need to—for political parties to fundraise, but clearly, that's not a question that has to happen with government.

Is there—when we talk about, you know, the advertising spending that happens around a budget, it can easily exceed that of an entire—of a by-election. So I was wondering if there's any commitment to transparency around the spending—on government spending on advertising in—as well as limitations on it.

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, there is always transparency when it comes to government advertising. There's a number of ways that opposition members can question the government about the expenditures advertising. If the Leader of the Liberal Party is having a difficult time raising party—or raising funds for Manitobans and they're struggling to raise funds, he may want to consider his strategy in this House and otherwise, Madam Speaker.

Debate

Madam Speaker: Are there any further questions to be asked? If not, then we will move forward with debate. The floor is open for debate.

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): It's my pleasure to put a few words on the record for Bill 32, The Election Financing Amendment and Elections Amendment Act.

So we know that the purpose of this bill is to make amendments to change the restrictions on government advertising set out in The Election Financing Act.

For a fixed-date election, the restriction period is shortened from 90 days to 60 days. For other elections, the restrictions continue to apply during the election period, and during these periods, the government can advertise or publish information about a budget or throne speech [*inaudible*], or safety matters, requests for proposals for tenders and government employment without having to demonstrate that the advertisements or publications are required at the time.

A similar exception is provided for advertisements and publications concerning ongoing programs. Ministers may speak publicly during these periods, provided that no government resources are used to promote what they say.

The Referendum Act is amended and co-ordinated amendments are made to the Elections Act and the Election Financing Act to require that the restrictions on government advertising be in place for at least 32 days before a non-fixed date election is called.

We know that Manitobans value the principles of democracy and they expect their elected officials to uphold the principles of free and fair elections. Unfortunately, this is another bill that walks back the standards for a free and fair election, for the free and fair elections that we've been building in this province since the NDP introduced this legislation in 1983, restricting government advertising.

Our province modelled this legislation on Saskatchewan's, and for a long time, we were the only two provinces who had this type of legislation restricting advertising that created sufficient government advertising blackout periods.

The Election Financing Act, when it originally came into force in 1983, used to have a 30-day blackout period for government advertising. In 2008, that was amended to 90 days to reflect equity and fairness, as the former Attorney General, Roland Penner, used to describe this early legislation in 1983.

Fixed election dates keep our government accountable and a blackout on government advertising leading up to provincial elections is an integral part of our democratic process. Bill 32 shortens the advertising restriction period for a fixed-date election from 90 days to 60 days. It also amends restrictions on

advertising before a vote on a referendum, shortening the restriction period from 90 to 60 days as well.

Under Bill 32, government is free to do unlimited advertising of a budget or throne speech right up until election day. With this legislation, the Pallister government can theoretically drop a budget or a throne speech and immediately call an election, during which then it can spend an unlimited amount of government money promoting their budget or their throne speech. And that would be including TV ads, billboards, direct mailers to citizens all on the government dime, and that would be both immediately before and during the election period.

This bill also gives the Pallister government the ability of their ministers to make budget or throne speech amendments—announcements, sorry, before and during the election period. So this makes a mockery of the limits on government advertising.

The legislation gets around the use of government resources to advertise and make announcements on other matters, simply by shifting the costs on to the government party. This allows ministers to make government announcements, so long as the government itself doesn't support the announcement during the blackout period.

* (16:40)

So, for example, an announcement could be made but supported with party staff, but still put forward as a government announcement.

This bill will gut our fixed-date election laws. The act allows for snap elections to be called as long as the government restricts advertising for 32 days.

And with this amendment, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is effectively admitting that he is not going to honour fixed-date elections. Manitobans should be able to make informed choices on election day without being hounded by government advertising for weeks and months prior.

We will not be supporting this government in its attempt to create loopholes to influence our elections and make it easier to disregard fixed-date election law.

In continuing along with moving this bill forward, the government is disregarding professional advice. The Pallister government hired a retired lawyer to analyze advertising restrictions set out in this bill and make recommendations. The Green Report on Proposed Legislation Concerning Government Advertising was written by Michael T. Green. He was a lawyer and former Commissioner of Elections for

Elections Manitoba and he gave his recommendations after reviewing proposed legislation.

On page 40 of this report, Mr. Green advised that, quote, it is my recommendation, based upon my consultations with interested parties and my review of the approaches that have been tried in other jurisdictions, that the government should consider implementing a policy of guidelines on paid government advertising instead of proceeding with legislation.

And Mr. Green—the key stakeholders that he interviewed concerning this proposed legislation included the Auditor General of Manitoba, the Chief Electoral Officer of Manitoba, the commissioner for Elections Manitoba, the non-governmental political parties and the Auditor General of Ontario.

Again, in Michael Green's report, the government, along with—due to all the folks that he interviewed from his report, the government was advised against proceeding with this legislation. Yet, the government proceeded with Bill 32 anyway. So, it just really begs the question, why did they have to hire Mr. Green to assess this legislation if they then refused to listen to the resulting advice?

Mr. Green offered several reasons, as follows, for why this legislation is not the most desirable way to achieve the lofty and important goals of this bill.

First, the government is under no immediate or urgent pressure to pass this legislation, and it has the time and the flexibility to begin with a more modest approach.

Secondly, no other jurisdiction in Canada has passed similar legislation so, therefore, there is no precedent to base it upon. Ontario did pass legislation dealing with partisan government advertising but, to quote Green, the eventual outcome was not a happy one, again, from the Green report on page 40. And so it's not advisable to model our legislation here in Manitoba after that one.

This type of legislation is also inherently difficult to draft, Mr. Green was quoted in saying, because the definitions for partisan advertising still need to be established and providing objective tests for these types of definitions, such as no party logos or colours, no pictures or likenesses of MLAs and so on, still runs the risk of failing to capture much of what is partisan.

However, too much discretion over what is partisan may leave those responsible for creating

government advertising programs unable to confidently predict what is and what is not prohibited. This uncertainty will lead to a need for multiple revisions of this legislation.

And, finally, amending an act of legislature is no simple feat, and it can become cumbersome to implement even the most rudimentary and necessary of amendments.

Mr. Green advised that it, quote, seems unwise to legislate restrictions if another, more flexible, option is available. End quote.

Mr. Green concluded in his recommendations that the advantages of adopting a policy-and-guidelines approach would be better than legislation. Doing so would be in accordance with the practice that has been adopted in many other jurisdictions, including the federal government, which he referenced a few times in his report.

A policy and guidelines would allow the flexibility to make changes more easily and be more responsive to changing times, he argued. This would also give the government some time to learn and adjust before solidifying things in legislation. And the fact that this government has ignored this advice speaks volumes about their true agenda.

This legislation is not about better regulating partisan advertising, but rather, it's creating loopholes for government advertising to be allowed all the way up to election day.

Again, the Green report on proposed legislation concerning government advertising was written by a former commissioner of elections for Elections Manitoba, and, again, he quoted—he was quoting saying there that it is my recommendations, based upon my consultations with interested parties, in my review of the approaches that have been tried in other jurisdictions, that the government should consider implementing a policy and guidelines instead on paid government advertising instead of proceeding with legislation. End quote.

This PC government has a history of messing up with election law. Conservative governments have a long history of trying to twist election law to favour them and their friends. In just the recent 2017 elections amendment act, this government disenfranchised unregistered voters who do not have a photo ID. This was outright voter suppression, targeting people without photo IDs who are missed from enumeration.

According to this government, this was done to prevent voter fraud. However, the Chief Electoral Officer of Manitoba said that voter fraud is a problem that doesn't exist in Manitoba. And that was said at the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs on November 25th, 2016.

If this Premier (Mr. Pallister) wanted to help improve the voting process for Manitobans, he would have created a plan to help provide photo IDs for more people. Instead, the Premier restricted access to photo identification by cutting a \$13-million plan to combine health cards with drivers licences—and that this plan would have ensured thousands more Manitobans would have had photo ID. This is yet another example of the cuts by the Premier that are not in the best interests of Manitobans.

The Premier's cuts are hurting Manitoban families and the important services that they depend on. Again, this Premier has proven he is willing to break the rules to gain an advantage. When he was in the Filmon government, his party was responsible for the biggest vote-rigging scandal in Manitoba history. Justin Monnin—Justice Monnin described the Tory plot as, quote, an unconscionable debasement of the citizen's right to vote. End quote, from the Monnin inquiry in 1999.

* (16:50)

Justice Monnin recalled that the scheme was, quote, "unethical and morally reprehensible," end quote, and said that, quote, "in all my years on the bench I never encountered as many liars in one proceeding as I did during this inquiry." End quote, again from the report of the commission of inquiry on March 29, 1999, page 13 and page 16.

In reference to the testimony of a number of Tory insiders, Justice Monnin lamented that it was, quote, "disheartening indeed to realize that an oath to tell the truth means so little to some people." End quote. That's from the report of the commission of inquiry on March 29th, 1999, on page 64.

Given his track record and participation, it is clear that this Premier cannot be trusted to do what's right for all Manitobans in respect to electoral fairness and transparency.

In 2017, this government passed the Election Financing Amendment Act which increased the limits on individual donations and third-party spending. The annual contribution limit for individuals was increased from \$3,000 to \$5,000. A self-employed person would no longer be considered to be making a

contribution if they volunteer services for which they normally charge.

And this act also shortened the period in which advertising expense limits apply from one year to 90 days prior, to the start of the election period for a fixed-election date. Bill 32 is just another step along this government's agenda to advertise their—advertise longer through election periods using increased funding from their wealthy friends and donors.

Our party has consistently stood for ensuring a level playing field for all parties and all citizens. We will continue to advocate for an election system that is independent, fair, and representative of the whole province.

In general, democratic principles are being eroded in this government—in this province by this government. Instead of a government that is respectful of and responsible to the will of the people it serves, committed to both the responsibilities and the spirit of democracy as stated in the values of Manitoba's Progressive Conservative party, this party is moving our province further away from fairness and equity.

A very heavy anti-democratic thread has been seen in these PC bills introduced this session. Bills 49, 35, 64, 57, Bill 37—these bills have a tendency to centralize power, to remove local voices from decision-making, and silencing opposition.

I would also argue that significant parts of Bill 49, the FIPPA bill, which we just talked about last week, is moving this PC government away from their commitment to a government that is respectful of and responsive to the will of the people it serves, to their commitment to the responsibilities and the spirit of democracy.

After our session, when we did discuss that FIPPA bill legislation, I reached out to some of the NDP MLAs in BC to find out why their existing FIPPA bill would be left like that, to be one of the lowest, you know, standards for getting the information back to the public. We're still last—10 out of 10—with our proposed bill here in Manitoba that the PCs have proposed.

But I just wanted to inquire from the NDP MLAs why that was, and I had the opportunity to speak to the NDP BC MLA from Vancouver-Kensington who—

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Madam Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on a point of order.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I recognize the member's relatively new and I don't want to stop her from debating the current bill that's before her, but she's debating a bill that was now debated several days ago, I think, the freedom of information and privacy protection act.

I would ask you to draw her to this bill which is now up for debate, not the bill that was up for debate several days ago.

Madam Speaker: The member may have a point. I would ask the member for Notre Dame (Ms. Marcelino) to pull her comments, her remarks, back to the bill that is currently before us in debate.

* * *

Ms. Marcelino: I'm just trying to explain about the heavy anti-democratic thread that this bill makes in addition to all the other bills, including the bill—the FIPPA bill that we discussed last week. And I think it's important to put on the record that after speaking about that bill—those FIPPA bill changes, the PC MLA—

Madam Speaker: Order. Order please.

I would urge the member that I was asking for her to make her comments relevant to the bill that is up for debate. That means that she needs to do that and not make reference to other bills that have already been debated, that her comments right now need to be relevant to the bill that is on the floor for debate.

Ms. Marcelino: Again, when you take a look at the sum total of the actions of this PC government, including your very own Speaker rulings, Madam Speaker, that this government—where you ruled that we are, as opposition, unable to do our jobs—

Madam Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Whoa.

I would just indicate to the member that my Speaker rulings have nothing to do with leaning towards a government. My Speaker rulings are all based on research; they are quasi-judicial; they are based on procedures that have happened before; they have been based on legislation, on laws that have been indicated earlier. My rulings are totally non-partisan and they are absolutely neutral and they are supporting nobody. They stand on their own.

So, the—members are also not allowed to reference Speaker's rulings when—or reflect on Speaker's rulings when they are speaking in debate. That is not something that is allowed.

So I'm going to ask the member again to very cautiously look at what she is—the words she is using in debate right now and to bring her comments back to the relevance on the debate that is on the floor.

Ms. Marcelino: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for that explanation. I did appreciate that your research and your close examination was not partisan.

In addition to, you know, those activities that we've been having here where we talked about your rulings, in addition to that, there is also the 19 hidden bills, in addition to all those other bills that I mentioned earlier. You know, the 19 hidden bills, those delays—

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

The member is quite way off track right now in terms of her comments. The legislation before us is

actually on election financing amendment and elections amendment act, government advertising. It has nothing to do with the 19 bills or any rulings by the Speaker. And the member needs to very, very clearly zero in on the—Bill 32 that is before the House.

And I'm going to ask her to please do that.

Ms. Marcelino: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for your patience.

Again, you know, this is all—you know, we have Bill 32 and then we have the rest of what this government has presented in this past session. And we do have to appreciate that, you know, when you're governing, there is this balance between democracy and efficiency and I would just urge this government—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have five minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 23, 2021

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