

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

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

Vol. LXXV No. 55 - 1:30 p.m., Monday, April 26, 2021

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ADAMS, Danielle	Thompson	NDP
ALTOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne, 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

Monday, April 26, 2021

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): It is my duty to inform the House that the Speaker is unavoidably absent. Therefore, in accordance with the statutes, I would ask the Deputy Speaker to please take the Chair.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Doyle Pivniuk): O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws that may tend to the welfare and the prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only which is in accordance with Thy will, that we seek it with wisdom and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

Please be seated. Good afternoon, everyone. Hope everyone had a good weekend.

Routine—oh, the honourable Opposition House Leader.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Miigwech, deputy speeder—speak.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On a matter of privilege, or?

Ms. Fontaine: Yes.

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): I rise on a matter of privilege. A matter of privilege is a serious matter. It involves a breach of the privileges of members of this House. The matter I am raising concerns of an unprecedented breach of statute and practice, which directly impedes the ability of members of this House to do what is, arguably, the most important part of their jobs as MLAs, and that is the examination of the spending of money of the Pallister government.

There are two tests to a matter of privilege. The first is a matter—is whether the matter was raised at the earliest opportunity. The matter concerns the Supplementary Estimate books, tabled by the ministers of the Pallister government during routine proceedings on April 22nd. I took the time to conduct the necessary research, consult the procedural authorities and examine the documents themselves tabled on that sitting day.

This is the first time the House has sat since that time, and it is the first opportunity I have to bring forward this to the attention of the Chair.

The second test of a matter of privilege is whether or not there is a prima facie case of breach of privilege. May writes, and I quote: Parliamentary privilege is the sum of the particular rights enjoyed by each House collectively and by members of the House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions. End quote. Page 60, House of Commons Procedure and Practice, second edition.

Arguably, the most important function of this House and its members is the direct control, examination and approval of financial matters. House of Commons Procedure and Practice notes the, and I quote, direct control of national finance has been referred to as the great task of 'marden'—parliamentary government. Page 18—eight 18.

Reviewing the spending of government is arguably the most important job this House has a collective duty to. For decades, Supplementary Estimates books have been tabled in this House that provide detailed financial information about government programs, information that is essential and necessary to scrutinize the government's spending plans.

But not this year. The Pallister has hidden information regarding the most important aspects—*[interjection]*

Let's start that again, Deputy Speaker. I apologize.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, okay, the honourable member for St. Johns.

Ms. Fontaine: The Pallister government has hidden information regarding the most important aspects of government spending from MLAs and the public about matters as central as the pandemic response, the education system and certainly our health-care system. While it has tabled so-called Estimates books, these books contain none of the detailed financial information necessary for MLAs to do their job. Nor do they contain any relevant program information that has been part of these books for decades.

To understand the significance of this breach, I think it is important to look at the role this financial

information has played in the activities of this House for decades.

The first Supplementary Estimates book was tabled in this House in 1982 by Finance minister Rick [phonetic] Schroeder. In tabling the Supplementary Estimates that year, he stated, and I quote: "The provision of this more detailed information, both program and financial, represents a helpful step forward in fulfilling the information needs of the Legislature and thus increasing the accountability of the department and of the government." End quote. Hansard, May 4th, 1982.

The innovation of the minister and the Pawley government 'concided' with the fact that the House of Commons modified their financial practices in order to provide more information to members to support their examination of budgets.

I table further procedural guidance from the House of Commons on this matter for consideration of the Chair. Since 1987, Supplementary Estimates books for all government departments have been tabled in this House and every year in keeping with the practices, rules and procedures of this and other Houses across the country—again, Deputy Speaker, except this year. The Pallister government has decided that decades of practice should just be ignored. That is simply wrong.

What's more, their violation is—of privilege is against the law. On the matter of tabling documents by a minister, Bosc and Gagnon cite Speaker Fraser on page 443. And I quote: The Speaker ruled that a prima facie breach of privilege had occurred when the government failed to table a document required by statute in a timely matter. This is a key element of finding prima facie breach of privilege. A member raising the issue must identify where in legislation there is a requirement that a specific document be tabled in this House. End quote.

Section 31 of The Financial Administration Act states, and I quote: The minister who is charged by the lieutenant government—governor in council with the administration of a government department or who is identified by Treasury Board as being responsible for a government entity or program shall table a supplement to the Main Estimates of expenditure in the Legislature at the time in the form and containing the information about the operations of the department, government entity or program required by Treasury Board. End quote.

* (13:40)

This provision was established by a PC government in 1996. In speaking to this piece of legislation at second reading, the minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs noted the bill, and I quote, may mandate greater accountability for money appropriated by government, including the requirement to publish Estimates supplements and annual reports in respect of money appropriated to departments and programs. End quote. Hansard, June 4th, 1996.

The government of the day sought to formalize in statute the practice initiated by the NDP, and it did. And since that time, the form and structure of these books have remained the same because all governments knew they were legally required to comply with this statute.

I have reviewed Estimates books from 1982 to the current day. [interjection] It was very fun. Apart from this year—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —the core information contained therein remained effectively the same: detailed information about the operations of the department, including expenditure and staffing summaries by program area and appropriation combined with a five-year historical 'conspiration' of department spending and staffing.

This is the information required by statute, information about the operations of the department, and it is exactly the information that is missing from the Supplementary Estimates books this year. This is the information I need and the rest of my colleagues need as MLAs to scrutinize the spending of the Pallister government.

Because of the hidden financial information, we do not know, for example, Deputy Speaker: (1) how many people now work at Cadham lab, the provincial government lab that is responsible for helping the fight in the COVID-19 pandemic, or (2) how many staff are assigned and working in the division of public health responsible for helping address public healthy emergencies, or (3) the number of staff assigned to ensure our personal-care homes are complying with standards and regulations.

In the middle of a global pandemic, the Pallister government has chosen to hide this essential information from all MLAs. Last year's supplementary Health Estimates book was 145 pages. This year, it is barely 30 pages, even when including pages left blank. [interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: The book merely reprints information already contained in the budget. It is—in no way supplements the Main Estimates, as it merely repeats it. It does not contain information regarding the operations of the department, as required by Treasury Board, as the statute stipulates.

A ruling on this issue is of great urgency. We are about to enter the Estimates process. I need not remind the Deputy Speaker that the Committee of Supply is a committee of this whole House and all MLAs are fundamentally unable to do their most important work without being provided the necessary detailed financial information required by the statute. This breach impedes the ability of this House as a collective and, as a result, prevents all MLAs from being able to do their job.

The information the Pallister government has chosen to hide is required to be tabled in this House by statute, supported by decades of practice in this House and which is essential for me and my colleagues as MLAs to do one of the most important jobs of this House: the examination of the financial proposals of the executive government.

That is why I move, seconded by the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith), that this House order the government to immediately provide a supplement to the Main—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —immediately provide a supplement to the Main Estimates of expenditure for each government department to the Legislature containing the information—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: If the Finance Minister would just listen, maybe he'd learn something, here. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: Containing the information about the operations of the department—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —government entity or program required by Treasury Board, including expenditure and staffing summaries by program area and appropriation combined with a five-year historical comparison of departmental spending and staffing.

Miigwech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before recognizing any other members to speak, I would remind the House that remarks at this time by honourable members are to be limited to strictly relevant comments about whether the alleged matter of privilege has been raised at the earliest opportunity and whether the prima facie case has been established.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the two issues that you have rightfully cited that we need to discuss in response to the matter of privilege.

On the issue of whether or not it is the earliest opportunity, one could certainly argue that there was an earlier opportunity after the budget books were tabled on Thursday of last week.

But moving on from that point to whether or not it is a prima facie case, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member or the Opposition House Leader rightfully cites The Financial Administration Act, section 31, which indicates that the Estimates books will be tabled in the form required by Treasury Board. It is the determination of Treasury Board in terms of the form by which the books will be tabled.

But more specifically, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I know that the thousands of people who are watching this livestream right now will be wondering about the Estimates process more generally and it is worth informing them that by rule of this House, when we move into the Estimates process, there are 100 hours that are set aside for the opposition to question the government about anything they want.

And so the member opposite raised several questions regarding staffing, whether it comes to Cadham lab or PCHs. Those are entirely appropriate questions that she could raise during the Estimates process to the responsible minister. And the responsible minister would then respond to those questions. That is what the Estimates process is about.

I recognize the opposition hasn't and doesn't want to ask any questions in question period about the budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but there certainly would be opportunity in Estimates.

Now, the member or the Opposition House Leader discussed about how important this process is to the opposition, but I would remind the House and you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that last year, instead of getting to Estimates, the opposition rang the bell for dozens and dozens, maybe hundreds of hours, such that they only got about half of their Estimates time in because they filibustered their own Estimates time.

Now, this year—and I would say to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was our intention to start Estimates this afternoon, and that opportunity would then have availed themselves to the Opposition House Leader to ask questions, very much the questions that she asked today in putting this matter of privilege; she could have asked those questions in Estimates. But we're unable to because they are now filibustering Bill 71. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: It's worth remembering, of course, that this is an opposition, when they were in government, they were willing to sit all summer to stop a tax—or to force a tax increase to happen on Manitobans, and now they're willing to sit all summer to stop a tax decrease from happening to Manitobans, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is the distinction between our two parties.

Now, if the members opposite actually care about Estimates—and I don't really think they do, based on their actions last year—they could simply move Bill 71 to committee so that Manitobans could have their say. We could call Estimates tomorrow, and the very questions that the member asked in her matter of privilege could then be asked to the ministers in Estimates.

* (13:50)

But to the salient point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the act clearly says that the form of these books is determined by Treasury Board. So it is not a matter of privilege either on the earliest opportunity or the *prima facie* case.

But I would urge the members opposite to allow Bill 71 to pass so that Manitobans can get the tax relief that they want. I know that they love to jack up taxes on Manitobans and hate to reduce taxes on Manitobans.

But they could actually get their wish and get into Estimates if they would allow Manitobans to get the tax relief that they want and go against their party brand just for once. They fought to get a tax increase; they're fighting to stop a tax decrease. If they want to get to Estimates, let Bill 71 pass, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, on the same matter of privilege.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, several comments. First of all, I rise in strong support for the MLA for St. Johns.

The Estimates books this year are very thin. They lack a lot of the detail that is necessary for us as MLAs to critically review government expenditures, and this, of course, is a very important part of our job.

The first critique that the Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) raised was that it could've been raised on the afternoon after the books were tabled. Quite frankly, this is a bit disingenuous; it takes some analysis; it takes enough time. It is quite reasonable to consider this raised at the first opportunity.

The second argument that the Government House Leader makes is that the opposition didn't use their full time last year. Well, the problem was that the government themselves didn't call the Legislature, either virtually or in real time, in June, July or in August, in spite of the fact that we had asked the government to do that so there could be a critical review of government expenditures and so that various bills could be looked at.

But the government decided, in their wisdom, to deny MLAs the ability to do Estimates in June, July and in August, and so we ended up with very little time, and that was a disservice to all MLAs, and it was majorly a problem of government, but it was also a problem of the NDP taking time in other matters.

The government provided no warning of this dramatic change in the Estimates books. It would have been reasonable for the government to have talked with the other parties and have a discussion so that we could end up with the best possible Estimates book going forward.

And it's too bad that this government doesn't like to collaborate or partner or work with MLAs in opposition parties in any fashion at all. And it's, as we've seen time and time again, very disruptive to the Legislative Assembly, and we're now in a matter of privilege because of the poor activities of the government. Instead, we could've been moving forward, had the government done some reasonable consultation ahead of time.

The government clearly is following its usual pattern of hiding information, of trying to cover things up. This, perhaps, we shouldn't be surprised at because I think they learned from the NDP, who were quite good at this when they were in government for quite a number of years.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you for this opportunity. As I said, I'm in strong support of the matter of privilege raised by the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine). I believe that it is worthy of our

attention and that the government needs to improve how it handles finances and how it presents them to the Legislature.

Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A matter of privilege is a very serious concern. I am now going to take this matter under advisement and consult with the authorities and will return with the House with a ruling.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 72—The Disability Support Act and Amendments to The Manitoba Assistance Act

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for Accessibility): I move, seconded by the Minister of Conservation and Climate (Mrs. Guillemard), that Bill 72, The Disability Support Act and Amendments to The Manitoba Assistance Act; Loi sur le soutien pour personne handicapée et modifiant la Loi sur les allocations d'aide du Manitoba, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Squires: I'm so pleased to rise and introduce this new legislation today to create a dedicated, dignified, new income support program for those Manitobans with severe and prolonged disabilities. It has been a long-standing commitment of our government to create a program that better supports our vulnerable Manitobans, and I'm excited to be taking this step forward.

Bill 72 also amends The Manitoba Assistance Act by clarifying that recipients and governments have a mutual responsibility towards each other and affirming that the objective of employment and income assistance is to enable individuals to become self-supporting.

The Manitoban Assistance Act will maintain an income assistance category for those clients with short-term, recurring or episodic disabilities, and for those experiencing unemployment, to support them in reducing barriers and returning to the workforce.

Again, I'm pleased to introduce this bill to the House today and I look forward to further debate.

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

Now we'll go on to committee reports? Tabling reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The required 90 minutes has—a notice has been—the 90 minutes notice prior to the routine proceedings was provided in accordance to rule 26-2.

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

The Winnipeg Foundation

Hon. Derek Johnson (Minister of Municipal Relations): I am pleased to rise to celebrate the 100th anniversary of The Winnipeg Foundation and the birth of Canada's community foundation movement here in Manitoba.

In February of 1921, William Forbes Alloway, a prominent Winnipeg banker, convened a group of citizens in his home to discuss the establishment of a community trust for the city. Alloway learned of this concept from the Cleveland Foundation, which was the first-ever community foundation, and thought the concept would work well in Winnipeg. The group struck a provisional board and drafted a petition of incorporation for the Legislative Assembly.

MLA Edith Rogers, which was the first woman to be elected to the Manitoba Legislature, sponsored the petition, and the foundation's act of incorporation received royal assent on April 26, 1921. It was the first community foundation in Canada.

At the foundation's inaugural meeting, Alloway delivered its first gift: a cheque for \$100,000. The foundation did not receive its second gift until more than three years later, in September of 1924. Three \$5 gold coins were delivered anonymously to the Alloway and Champion Bank. This gift solidified the concept which underpins the philosophy of community foundations to this day: it's not the size of the gift, but it is the act of the giving that matters.

Today, The Winnipeg Foundation is one of Canada's largest community foundations that administers more than 4,300 individual funds with a current market value of \$1.5 billion. These funds continue to grow with close to 10,000 gifts being received in 2020.

The growth of community foundations is not limited to Winnipeg. Volunteers across the province have established 56 community foundations over the last 100 years, making Manitoba the national leader of community philanthropy. These foundations hold nearly \$150 million in assets on behalf of their communities.

Our government has been proud to support these volunteers and help them grow their foundations to meet the needs of their communities. Since 2017, our government has been a proud sponsor of the annual Endow Manitoba Giving Challenge. For every \$5 gift made to a community foundation during this event, the Manitoba government contributes \$1. This program sees on average over \$1 million annually donated to the rural community foundations.

*(14:00)

In 2019, our government also created a \$10-million Endow Manitoba fund to advance the sustainability and growth of our province's community foundations. A first of its kind in Canada, the endowment provides over \$500,000 annually to community foundations to support capacity building efforts related to training, technology, research and staffing.

Thanks to the vision and support of thousands of Manitobans every year, Manitoba's community foundations have a bright future ahead as they begin their second century.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Deputy Speaker, this year, Manitobans are celebrating the centennial of The Winnipeg Foundation. For 100 years, The Winnipeg Foundation has a—been a pillar in the community and has helped create and sustain many important projects and organizations throughout our city.

In 1921, a prominent Winnipegger, William Forbes Alloway, established the foundation with a donation of \$100,000. The second amount donated to the foundation was just three gold coins, by an anonymous donor, which was worth about \$15. This reminds us all that irrespective of the dollar amount gifted to the foundation, every donation makes a difference in the lives of Winnipeggers.

The foundation was Canada's first community foundation, and will continue to support the community for centuries to come thanks to the many amazing and dedicated Winnipeggers who have supported throughout the year. In 2020, the foundation distributed \$73 million to roughly 1,000 charitable organizations. As CEO Richard Frost said, this is a significant response to the needs of our community in light of COVID-19.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is because of The Winnipeg Foundation, that we have seen other

community foundations throughout the province develop to ensure their local communities flourish. It is because of these collective efforts that Manitoba, in fact, has the most foundations per capita in North America. The foundation's support to grow community foundations in the province began more than two decades ago, with a regional scholarships program that supported capacity building throughout Manitoba.

Endow Manitoba, the network of community foundations in Manitoba, has grown from 31 community foundations in 2004 to 56 by 2020. Endow Manitoba gives foundations a variety of supports and the opportunity to pool investment assets with The Winnipeg Foundation, increasing their access to investment opportunities. One successful Endow Manitoba initiative is the Giving Challenge which has contributed to more than \$5.47 million to the Manitoba community foundations.

Community foundations are an integral part of our communities. To celebrate The Winnipeg Foundation's 100th anniversary, the foundation has established the Centennial Institute, a legacy initiative supporting the study of Canadian and Indigenous history here in Winnipeg and Manitoba. The initiative's mandate is to enrich the study of history, particularly in human rights and the evolution of civil society. Ten graduate-level scholarships are already in place, with more exciting projects to come.

I'd like to conclude by saying thank you to The Winnipeg Foundation, and to all community foundations in Manitoba, for the important work that you do to ensure our communities thrive.

In particular, happy 100th anniversary to The Winnipeg Foundation. We hope the foundation continues to be a pillar of our province for another century to come.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I request leave to respond to the ministerial statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the honourable member for St. Boniface have leave to reply to the ministerial statement?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hear a no.

The—further ministerial statements, the honourable member for Sport, Culture and Heritage. Again, the required 90 minutes has—prior to the routine

proceedings has been provided in accordance with rule 26-2.

I would like to—honourable minister to proceed with her statement.

Chernobyl Disaster

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): I rise today in solidarity with our broader international community to reflect on the 35th anniversary of the tragic Chernobyl disaster and to remember those who lost their loved ones and their communities.

On April 26, 1986, a city in Ukraine experienced unimaginable disaster. During a routine cleaning, an aging nuclear reactor exploded. Plant employees and emergency workers worked frantically to contain the fire and the radiation, and many sacrificed their lives to stop further exposure to the community.

At the time, the world watched but didn't really comprehend the extent of the damage that exposure to that level of radiation would cause, nor was it understood how far the radiation would travel, spreading across Ukraine, Belarus and other parts of Europe.

Thirty-five years later, history has confirmed that hundreds of thousands of people were affected by high radiation levels. Some 350,000 people fled from their homes in severely contaminated areas, forced to leave behind all their worldly treasures.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Chernobyl disaster is etched in Ukraine's consciousness and the global Ukrainian diaspora. It is considered the worst nuclear disaster in history both in terms of cost and casualties. It was a deeply traumatic and catastrophic event that continues to have an unimaginable lasting impact on generations of families.

While Chernobyl remains frozen in time, we have a moral obligation to never forget this sad time in our history and never, ever let history repeat itself.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, today we remember those who valiantly sacrificed their lives in the fight to contain the radiation, remember those who succumbed to radiation sickness and we remember those who live with the lasting effects of exposure to high levels of radiation.

This morning, I was humbled to join Metropolitan Lawrence and Metropolitan Yurij, together with Ukrainian Canadian Congress of Manitoba president Joanne Lewandowski at a quiet, somber service here

on the grounds of our Manitoba Legislature to remember this tragic day in Ukrainian history. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it brings comfort to know that on this significant anniversary, people around the globe stand in solidarity with our Ukrainian community.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask for leave to request a moment of silence to remember the Chernobyl tragedy and those lives lost during this dark time in Ukrainian history.

Thank you and dyakuyu.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Thirty-five years ago today, the world experienced the worst nuclear accident in its history. On Saturday, April 16th, 1986, a reactor at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant exploded during a failed safety test. It took nine days for officials to contain the radiation spewing from the plant, by which time the damage had been done.

This accident resulted in a cloud of radiation blanketing a large area of Europe, forcing around 120,000 people to evacuate, some never to return home. The entire cities of Pripyat and Chernobyl, once home to a combined population of over 64,000 people, was evacuated, and they remain ghost towns to this day.

Thirty-one plant workers and firemen died in the aftermath of the accident and thousands more would perish in the following years from radiation-related illnesses such as cancer. Experts estimate that anywhere between 9,000 to 16,000 people died across Europe due to the Chernobyl disaster.

The effects of the disaster are still being felt today, with concerns that the food and water in areas near Chernobyl are unsafe for consumption. Nearby children have been found to have higher rates of cancer, respiratory illnesses and enlarged thyroids.

Perhaps a silver lining of the disaster is how wild-life has rebounded in the area surrounding Chernobyl, with experts estimating that there are now more animals and fauna than before the accident. Nearby abandoned areas have become overgrown and species such as elk, deer, fox, wolves and many more have moved into the area due to the absence of people. Rare species such as the European lynx have been spotted in the area, whereas in other areas its population is declining.

On the 35th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, let us continue to advocate for nuclear security around the world. The Chernobyl disaster—

* (14:10)

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

An Honourable Member: Leave.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there leave to have the member finish his statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Brar: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Chernobyl disaster should also continue to be an example of the need for rigorous safety measures and robust disaster management plans in order to avoid similar disasters in the future.

Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask for leave to speak to the minister's statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the honourable member for River Heights have leave to speak to the ministerial statement? *Agreed? [Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Deputy Speaker, together we remember 35 years ago the Chernobyl disaster as the largest nuclear disaster ever.

Less well appreciated is the role it had in the disintegration of the Soviet Union because it exposed major problems in the supervision of nuclear facilities. In 2006, Mikhail Gorbachev wrote: The nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl 20 years ago this month, even more than my launch of perestroika, was perhaps the real cause of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

There were, in the disaster, two staff killed, 134 people hospitalized, of whom 34 died from radiation and 14 more died in the next 10 years from what's believed to be radiation-induced cancer. There were, as well, many, and probably not fully ever countable, secondary deaths to radiation exposure in countries throughout Europe.

It was very costly, and one example, the total cost for Belarus over 30 years was estimated at US \$235 billion—and, of course, in today's dollars, much more.

There was contamination in many, many countries: 49,800 square kilometres in Russia; 37,200 in Ukraine; 29,900 in Belarus; 12,000 in Sweden; 11,500 in Finland; 8,600 in Austria; 5,200 in Norway; and 4,800 in Bulgaria and others.

There was a major impact of the Chernobyl disaster on global attitudes toward nuclear energy and nuclear reactors, in particular, countries like Italy and Germany. This encouraged and really was a major

start of anti-nuclear movement, anti-nuclear protests and, in fact, in many other countries around the world.

In Germany, there was a minister of the environment started, and that minister has the responsibility, even today, I understand, for safety and disasters like the Chernobyl disaster. It is a warning to all of us of the incredible expense of—and in lives as well as in—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up. Is there leave to—for him to continue? *[Agreed]*

The honourable member for River Heights, to finish his ministerial statement.

Mr. Gerrard: I will be very brief.

It is a warning of the incredible expense of environmental disasters and environmental liabilities. It is a day on which we remember, together with many from Ukraine and other European countries, of what happened and dedicate ourselves to doing better globally in the future.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech. Dyakuyu.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there agreed to observe a moment of silence? *[Agreed]*

Please be—please stand.

A moment of silence was observed.

Please be seated.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Dr. Vanessa Poliquin

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I rise today to honour a remarkable, highly accomplished doctor in my Riel constituency.

Dr. Vanessa Poliquin is an award-winning doctor and leading expert in Canada in the field of reproductive infectious diseases.

In 2020, Dr. Poliquin was one of two doctors in Canada to receive the prestigious Canadian Medical Association Award for Young Leaders. This award is given annually to doctors who have demonstrated exemplary dedication and leadership, shown creativity and initiative and acted as a positive role model for colleagues and peers.

Dr. Poliquin, who specializes in infectious diseases at the health sciences Women's Hospital, is also the co-chair of the society of obstetrics and gynecologists of Canada infectious disease committee and an assistant professor at the University of Manitoba.

As COVID-19 spread across Canada, Dr. Poliquin took on a leadership role in the women's health program, authoring provincial and national guidelines on how to deliver obstetrical care, and she has participated in educational events ensuring expectant mothers had the information they needed about COVID-19 and pregnancy.

Dr. Mary-Jane Seager, the provincial specialty lead for women's health, said this: Vanessa is an exceptional leader and well-respected obstetrician-gynecologist among her colleagues, peers and patients. Her work during the pandemic has been instrumental in our health-care system's response.

Dr. Poliquin has been educating prenatal-care providers on obstetrics and gynecological management during the pandemic. She continues to lead regional and national working groups to ensure prenatal-care providers have the most evidence-informed guidance to navigate the challenges of COVID-19.

I am so pleased to highlight the achievements of such a skilled, caring and talented physician who is a leader in her field and has contributed so much to the health and well-being of expectant mothers in Manitoba and across Canada.

I'd ask my colleagues in the Legislature to help me congratulate Dr. Poliquin, who's watching virtually today, for her tremendous contributions towards women's health.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Anti-Mask Rally at the Forks

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Well, myself and many Manitobans were disappointed to see the anti-mask rally at The Forks yesterday.

Around 400 people broke Manitoba public health orders on Sunday to gather, to share conspiracy theories, misinformation and, likely, COVID-19. This gathering included people from out of the province who did not follow self-isolation rules upon their arrival.

Deputy Speaker, this is just selfish and irresponsible, particularly as case counts continue to rise, increased variants abound and hospitalizations and ICU admissions remain at critical levels. It puts everyone at risk.

The Forks was forced to make a decision to close down the market to protect small-business owners and

their employees. Given the circumstances, it was the right decision.

These are front-line essential service workers, many of whom are teenagers and young adults, who are asked to enforce public health orders and put themselves at risk every single day. No one deserves to be harassed at work and put at risk.

I thank The Forks for their leadership in making that difficult decision and to all the small-business owners for choosing to close for the rest of the day. Small businesses at The Forks Market, like so many other Manitoba small businesses, have sacrificed so much to keep us all safe.

We recognize you've done your part, time and time again, throughout the pandemic. I know this decision came with an economic cost when you're already trying to recover from the whole of last year.

I honour all of the small businesses and staff for their steadfast commitment to keep the public safe as well as their employees. Know that we support and stand with each and every one of you.

Finally, I encourage all Manitobans to support small businesses if you're able to, respect Manitoba's public health measures, stick to the fundamentals and be safe.

Miigwech.

RAF WWII Air Training Schools in Dauphin

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): As part of the Commonwealth initiative to bolster Allied forces during World War II, Canada signed a formal British Commonwealth Air Training Plan agreement, which led to the 1941 opening of two air training facilities in Dauphin.

This Canadian initiative was signed by Canada, Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand. These countries, and countries grouped under the Royal Air Force, all sent airmen to Dauphin for training. Operating from 1941 to 1945, the Dauphin and Paulson district was the base for the No. 10 Service Flying Training School and the No. 7 Bombing and Gunnery School.

Twenty twenty-one marks the 80th anniversary of the opening of these two schools which trained approximately 8,000 of 131,500 air crews across Canada and brought an influx of airmen and their families to be hosted by the Dauphin community.

* (14:20)

Sadly, between 1940 and 1945, 52 trainees gave the ultimate sacrifice and died in training-related incidents. In Dauphin's Riverside Cemetery, 14 airmen from foreign lands lay at rest in the old Legion section, and a group of local citizens are working on a formal commemoration to recognize how they came to rest there.

Without the continuous supply of trained air personnel, the air superiority and ultimate success of Allied forces would not have been as likely. Dauphin played a key role as a home away from home for Commonwealth Allies within the Royal Canadian Air Force No. 2 Air Command. This commemoration project would permanently recognize the history and contributions these two air training schools had on the Dauphin region and would honour all who came before us to defend our land and freedoms.

And Mr. Deputy Speaker, I seek leave to include in Hansard the names of the Commonwealth countries grouped under the Royal Air Force that sent World War II airmen for training in Dauphin, Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there leave to include all the names on the—in Hansard, for the report? [*Agreed*]

Argentina, Australia, Bermuda, Brazil, British Honduras, Canada, Ceylon, China, Costa Rica, Denmark, Great Britain, India, Ireland, Jamaica, Mauritius, Newfoundland, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, South Africa, United States of America

Small-Business Support During Pandemic

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): Manitoba small-business owners are struggling and have been anxiously awaiting the new restrictions for weeks. Small-business owners have abided by public health orders, invested in supplies necessary to operate safely and sustain Manitoba's local economy throughout the pandemic.

This government consistently proves that they cannot demonstrate true leadership when it comes to supporting small businesses. With today's new restrictions, there is clear reduction in capacity for businesses, as well as some closures. But, the Pallister government did not mention any new business supports. The member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister) continuously asked Manitobans today to keep making sacrifices, but failed to mention how they would, in turn, be supported during this time.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has called for more supports for the sector and notes a record high average of debt totalling

\$180,000 per business. Small-business owners in Manitoba need real, tangible, financial resources to withstand the third wave of the 'pandemic', not simply a thank you, good luck and best wishes.

Experts have said this is not a time to be fixated on balancing the books but, instead, ensure that we are stimulating the economy enough so that we can come out stronger post-pandemic.

Further to this, the Pallister government has not done enough to promote local businesses and instill confidence in consumers that the sector is doing everything they can to keep Manitobans safe.

On this side of the House, we know that an economic recovery that includes all Manitoba small businesses is possible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Pallister government had an opportunity today to announce supports for small businesses to make it through the third wave of the pandemic, and they failed.

Thank you.

Jordan Dearsley

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): It gives me great pleasure to recognize a young constituent from McPhillips for her electronics recycling project.

Jordan Dearsley, is a grade 11 student at West Kildonan Collegiate and she is currently running and organizing a series of electronic recycling drives in our community this spring. She has arranged these drives through the electronics recycling association and will either refurbish the collected electronics in order to donate them to Canadian charities in need or pull apart the electronics in order to recycle the pieces for reuse. Every year, the electronics association runs a scholarship contest across Canada, and this year Jordan decided to participate.

Jordan's passion for protecting the environment made her decision to participate easy for herself. She had already arranged an old phone collection drive at her school earlier last year. And much to her disappointment, it was cancelled due to COVID.

Jordan hopes the scholarship that she's applying for can go towards paying her tuition to study environmental engineering. By collecting e-waste and paying her tuition to study environmental engineering, her hope is that we can reduce pollution and—that is putting lakes like Lake Winnipeg at risk. As we know, Lake Winnipeg is an incredibly important body of

water, and so campaigns like Jordan's help clean and ensure its stability.

Jordan is currently running drives at the Sunova Centre, West Kildonan Collegiate, Don's Photo, Garden City mall, Stonewall and Teulon libraries. She still hopes to be able to organize more electronic recycling drives in more locations.

Please join me in recognizing Jordan Dearsley for her dedication to an impactful project and initiative that will help protect our environment. But more importantly, Mr. Speaker, if you are able to, please add Jordan Dearsley to your social media outlet and advertise for her on her program and help her recycle hard-used electronics.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

COVID-19 Restrictions Timeline for Implementation

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, the Premier's run-and-hide-on-Thursdays-through-Sundays-and-hope-for-the-best strategy clearly isn't working. On Saturday and Sunday alone, we saw 535 new cases, today 210, with rising test positivity and hospitalizations. It's déjà vu that none of us wanted.

Now, last fall, the previous failed minister of Health accused doctors of causing chaos. This time we've got the Premier who, once again, dismissed physicians' and front-line workers' concerns, and if it wasn't for the public backlash over the weekend, it's highly doubtful the Premier would have appeared publicly today.

Just like the fall, we've got a government that is reactive instead of proactive.

Why does the Premier wait so long to implement needed restrictions?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, I can only say to the member he seems to demonstrate somewhat more courage on screen than in the Chamber. I can say to him that we are pursuing balanced restrictions that have shown us that, as people here in Manitoba, we can bend the curve. We've bent the curve effectively in the past—better, frankly, than anyone else from Quebec to the west coast.

We cut our cases down from their peak by 88 per cent, other provinces far less than that. Every

province is approaching highs now in this third wave. We've seen an uptick. We've taken the necessary balanced actions with our restrictions to achieve positive changes for Manitobans. And we'll continue to follow the advice of health experts such as Dr. Brent Roussin in making the recommendations that we make. And we encourage Manitobans to abide by them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a second supplementary question—his first supplementary question.

Front-Line Health Workers Request for Premier to Apologize

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, the fact is that doctors, nurses and other front-line health-care workers are going to be the ones left to clean up after the Premier because of his hide-and-go-seek strategy to responding to the pandemic.

Now, the Premier's wait-and-see approach has led to case numbers climbing and hospitalizations increasing yet again. Even today during his press conference, he said that he doesn't have the benefit of hindsight; surprising, given what all Manitobans lived through in the second wave.

It's leaving our front-line workers feeling ignored and defeated. I'll read a quote from ICU doc Anand Kumar, quote: I've had more than one nurse suggest they feel less like heroic soldiers in a winning war and more like expendable ammunition in a losing battle. End quote.

Now, these are folks who are already dealing with burnout.

Will the Premier simply apologize for the out-of-touch comments he made disrespecting doctors and other front-line heroes last week?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): There are some people—like the individuals in the group that gathered at The Forks on the weekend—that think there shouldn't be any restrictions, and there are people like the NDP leader who think that we should all live in bubble wrap and shut down the economy. There are people all along that continuum. We'll continue to listen to reasonable advice from reasonable people, not unreasonable advice from unreasonable people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable leader on the—of the official opposition, on a final supplementary question.

COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Request to Accelerate

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): You know, it's a real shame that the Premier comes out again, after the benefit of hiding out for four days, and instead of apologizing to ICU doctors and front-line nurses, he instead calls them unreasonable. That is shameful. He should apologize.

We also know that the slow vaccine rollout under his watch has been a shame. You know, we had a chance to get it right; we had a chance to speedily deliver those vaccines to prepare for the third wave, and yet the Premier didn't do that.

In fact, just yesterday he continued the practice of winding down many vaccine clinics on Sundays. Meanwhile, there's 100,000 doses waiting to be distributed.

With case numbers climbing, more vaccines arriving and new restrictions, will the Premier finally staff up and speed up the vaccine rollout?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, all I can say to the member, as gently as possible, is that he needs to take a look in the mirror.

We just listened to a very—I thought—very good statement from the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) speaking about the irresponsible behaviour of people who break the health rules. She also spoke about the selfishness of people that would break the health rules. She also said that breaking health rules puts everyone at risk. And she was right, right and right again.

That's exactly what the Leader of the NDP did three weeks ago just before Easter break: he went out and broke the health rules. He organized a gathering which broke the group number rules. He didn't wear a mask. He encouraged people not to social distance. And now he talks about leading by example.

* (14:30)

I'll continue to abide by the rules. I'd encourage the member to get in touch with his own caucus. They're doing their best to get people vaccinated and to have people follow the health rules. He ignored them and, in the very area that he ignored them, we now have hot spots and most of our people who are infected with COVID are coming from right around where he did his publicity stunt.

He needs to smarten up. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a different question.

COVID-19 Vaccinations Priority for Teachers

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, after hiding out for so many days in a row, you really would expect the Premier to be a lot calmer when he finally decides to show his face again.

And you really would expect him to take advantage of that time to craft an apology to doctors, and instead to see him come out today and call them unreasonable while he's the one getting angry and losing his cool really does highlight a lot of the mistakes that the Pallister government has made time and time again with the pandemic.

Up to now, we still see that they refuse to prioritize teachers and other school staff to get the needed vaccines. That's even as multiple schools in the province move away from in-person learning to remote as a result of outbreaks.

Now, will the Province expand eligibility to teachers and other school staff, by extension help our kids by prioritizing those teachers and school staff for vaccinations?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Is it brave to beat up a cab driver and then write a book and blame it on the cab driver? I mean, seriously. We keep hearing about bravery from the member, but his record shows that he covers up everything he's ever done. And he deserves to cover it up, I guess, if he wants to cover up his actions, he should do that if he thinks—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —that's the right thing to do. But, you know, I don't.

I think that what we're doing here is we're focusing on a COVID pandemic, not trying to score cheap political points. And what we're doing is we're getting vaccines out to people. And what we're doing is reducing the age of access as rapidly as we can. And what we're doing is focusing on getting these vaccines to vulnerable communities in the North. And what we're doing is focusing on getting these vaccines to hot places in our city, where there's too much COVID running around.

And we're doing this because we're focused on the COVID pandemic. And I don't know what the

member's focused on—maybe getting the spider webs off his office door, where he was nowhere to be seen for two months last summer.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a supplementary question. *[interjection]* Order.

COVID-19 Pandemic Transmission Data

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): You'll notice that the Premier had a Freudian slip there. Instead of saying hot spots, he said hot places. I think someone's got Costa Rica on the mind.

For the rest of those of us who plan to stay in Manitoba for the foreseeable future, we want to see the vaccine rollout succeed. That's why we're asking, yet again, for teachers and other school staff to be prioritized as part of the vaccine rollout.

Now, the Premier has announced further restrictions today, but what he refuses to do is to release 'workplass'—workplace data. Now, that's a shame because, so far, the data that has been released has not been updated since numbers from September. The vast majority—well over 90 per cent—of COVID cases happened between September and now.

If you want public buy-in, you need to release the information to the public.

Will the Premier release transmission data to the public today?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): We've been an open government, releasing information on a regular basis. We've shared an accurate, up-to-date vaccine chart that actually isn't reflective of the actual number of vaccines until we know that they're in arms. It makes us look bad in the short term, but the reality is we're getting the vaccines out there just as good or better than anybody in the country.

And so when the member speaks about openness, he should admit that he covered up the actions that he didn't account for in his little book; that he covered them up from the NDP, perhaps, I don't know; that he actually didn't admit to several criminal actions which he left out of the book; that he actually has a record he's been covering up and hiding that's even bigger than his members know about right now.

The member needs—if he's going to keep talking in this Chamber disrespectfully to me and to other members he's referenced today—if he's going to keep

doing that, he needs to understand that it goes back to him and that he needs to be accountable for his own record. And blaming his former partner and saying she's a liar when she says that he abused her is not the way to be accountable for your personal record ever, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary question.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, if you could unmute your mic?

Manitoba's Workforce Paid Sick Leave

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Thanks for the reminder there.

You know, I think Manitobans are disappointed to see that the Premier only has ad hominem attacks instead of real answers when it comes to the pandemic. And again, it's disappointing that the Premier would hide out for a number of days during a series of rising case counts one after the other and then come back with only attacks but no answers.

Case numbers continue to be on the rise. We see that the variants of concern are here, more contagious, potentially deadlier. We know that Manitobans need paid sick leave and they need paid sick leave that is easy to access in the workplace, that doesn't rely on them having to apply to the federal government.

Now, we know that along with being more transparent and releasing data, this could be an important part of helping to bend the curve.

Will the Premier stop attacking physicians? Will he stop saying that he doesn't have the benefit of hindsight and, instead, take real action to end the pandemic, including expanding sick leave to make it more accessible?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, the member wants to have it both ways. He wants to launch personal attacks on the one hand, but doesn't want to be accountable for personal behaviour on the other, and he can't have it both ways.

He broke the—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —public health orders. He broke the public health orders—he's never apologized for that—precisely three and a half weeks ago, and since that time the COVID numbers have risen precisely in the

area where the NDP has the greatest influence and the greatest support in the province of Manitoba, and yet he doesn't want us to link those things. Instead, he points to other things as a distraction.

This is childish, and as the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine)—[*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —accurately referred to it earlier, it's selfish, it's irresponsible, it puts everyone at risk.

We'll stick to the fundamentals, we'll work with the medical health authorities and we're going to do our absolute best to make sure that Manitoba bends this curve just the way that we bent the second curve effectively together.

COVID-19 Third Wave Health-System Staffing

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Last week, we learned that there are nearly 1,300 nurse vacancies in Winnipeg hospitals. That's unacceptable, and even more so during this public health emergency. As we ascend the third wave, we need all the help that we can get by the bedside but, a year into this, it's still not there, and health workers are already stretched too thin.

Just yesterday, the Province put out a statement on social media that case numbers were going down when they're going up.

Why is the Pallister government misleading Manitobans and why don't they provide our hospitals with the resources they desperately need?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): We certainly recognize the incredible work that nurses and all health—and doctors and all health 'cal' workers are doing to help vulnerable Manitobans during this pandemic.

That's why we're expanding the bachelor of nursing program to get more registered nurses into our system. That's why we have instated 20 new spaces that have been created at our University College of the North's diploma in practical nursing program, which is now being offered to students in and around Thompson and Flin Flon and other areas in northern Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we recognize the value of these individuals. We know they're helping Manitobans. They're our partners in all of this. We would just hope that the members opposite would also

be the partners in all of this, to ensure that we get through this pandemic together.

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

MLA Asagwara: COVID-19 grows exponentially and variants have made the situation worse. Test positivity is going up in this province and we've all watched with concern the situation unravel in Ontario, who look like they're simply a week or two further ahead than Manitoba.

Last fall, the former minister said ICU doctors were causing chaos in the health system and he questioned their motivations. Now critical areas in our hospitals still aren't staffed up. Consolidations to ICU beds cut. Doctors and nurses have warned this government again that they do not have what they need to withstand a third wave.

Why has the minister left this issue untended as we mount a third wave of this pandemic?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, certainly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's why the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and Dr. Roussin announced today further restrictions in the province of Manitoba to ensure that we are in a position to protect Manitobans further, but also—which is the biggest part of all of this—is to ensure that we roll out our vaccine.

* (14:40)

And that's why we're expediting our vaccine delivery. That's why we're expanding our vaccine eligibility, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's why we're expanding asymptomatic rapid testing.

We'll continue to work along these lines to ensure that each and every Manitoban who wants to be vaccinated is vaccinated, and we encourage all Manitobans to get vaccinated.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Union Station, on a final supplementary question.

MLA Asagwara: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Pallister government has failed the test of this pandemic. So much more should have been done to prepare. During the second wave, the former minister questioned the motivations of ICU doctors and said deaths were inevitable. Now there's still 1,300 vacant nurse positions, and the current minister doesn't have a plan to fill them. That's care missing by the bedside as we mount a third wave in a state of emergency.

This government is not bringing to bear the resources needed to deal with this like the crisis that it is.

Why have they left us so badly prepared for a third wave of this pandemic?

Mrs. Stefanson: While the member opposite continues with their fear mongering, we'll continue to ensure that more nurses are trained in the province of Manitoba.

That's why 37 registered nurses have recently completed the critical-care nursing orientation—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson:—program. That's why—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: That's why all of them have been offered full-time permanent positions in Manitoba ICUs.

Forty more registered nurses are signing up for the critical-care nurse orientation program. The first of the classes started last week.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are continuing to train more nurses. We recognize that this has been a long-standing problem, not just in our province but, indeed, across the country, and that's why we're taking the necessary steps. We know members opposite, when they were in government, didn't take those steps. We will continue to take those steps on behalf of—

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

Deaths in Correctional Facilities Request for Mandatory Inquest

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Despite our vocal opposition, this government passed The Fatalities Inquiries Amendment Act in 2017.

As a result, mechanisms of accountability for deaths in correctional facilities are the weakest in all of Canada. This is all the more concerning as those detained are most—are more likely to die in jail here than anywhere across the country.

Because of changes the Pallister government made in an attempt to cut costs, inquests are no longer mandatory when a person dies in any correctional facility here in Manitoba. That means no one is required to investigate how or why a Manitoba—a Manitoban has died.

Will the minister reverse these and restore mandatory inquests today?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank the member for the question.

Every time that there is a fatality or negative event in our correctional institutions, it is a serious thing. You know, when those things happen in federal penitentiaries and federal facilities, Mr. Speaker, we have confidence in our system that matters like this are investigated well and thoroughly.

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

Ms. Fontaine: Since March of 2017, 23 deaths have been reported at Stony Mountain correctional facility.

However, due to the choices this Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his Cabinet have made, only two of those deaths have had an inquest called on them. This means that there are at least 21 families in Manitoba that—who do not have a definitive answer to what happened to their loved ones. This is simply unacceptable.

The Premier needs to reverse this decision and bring back mandatory inquests into all deaths that occur in correctional facilities within Manitoba.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have *[inaudible]* in our Chief Medical Examiner's office in Manitoba. We continue to have that confidence.

We know that it is an office that takes very seriously their responsibilities to investigate. And so we will continue to have that confidence. If this member doesn't have confidence in the Chief Medical Examiner's *[inaudible]*.

Ms. Fontaine: We've raised our concerns with the weakening levels of accountability within Manitoba justice system for years now, Deputy Speaker.

Inquests are essential to determine what those reasons are in an unbiased manner and then work towards implementing reform to prevent people from dying in that manner again.

Manitobans deserve dignity in death and Manitoba families deserve to know how their loved ones died while incarcerated, Deputy Speaker.

Will the minister reverse this change, restore accountability and bring back mandatory inquests?

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me correct the record. Inquests continue to take place in this province

under the Chief Medical Examiner's office. The member seems to imply that inquests have now stopped taking place. That is incorrect.

We have confidence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the process in that office to make those determinations about how to keep people in facilities safe, and we'll continue to have that confidence.

Freedom of Information Legislation Ombudsman's Recommendations

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Last year, the Ombudsman found the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) own department was simply not responding to freedom of information requests in anywhere close to what the law says: 78 per cent of requests in ministries like Finance, Executive Council and Crowns were overdue.

Part of those delays were due to interference by management, staffed, we have learned, by PC political staff and the Conservative campaign manager. I'll table the briefing note that demonstrates that.

However, Conservatives have no shame, as they have now introduced Bill 49, which will make Manitoba the slowest to respond in the whole country.

Will the minister reconsider and stop undermining transparency in this province?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Legislative and Public Affairs): Mr. Deputy Speaker, we were pleased to introduce amendments at committee stage to address some of the concerns that were raised by the Ombudsman, because we are a listening government.

Certainly, I remember—when I was in opposition—freedom of information requests that went from the deputy premier email to the now-member of St. Johns which tried to eradicate, tried to black out a statement that was derogatory, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to people who were trying to do good work. Fortunately, that came to light, and I wonder if the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) might want to shed some light on what interference she may have had in that email. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

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

Ms. Marcelino: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Bill 49 would make Manitoba the worst in the country for FIPPA. The Ombudsman has expressed concern, as Bill 49

creates the longest waits in the country for information crucial to journalists, unions and lawyers. Access to this information is a matter of justice for the public.

What's worse, Bill 49 ignores all of the recommendations the Ombudsman made to improve the FIPPA act in Manitoba. It ignores the recommendations made by the public and the media, who were calling for improvements so Manitoba could be more transparent and accountable. Bill 49 ignores all the recommendations from independent offices and instead makes it harder for Manitobans to hold this government to account.

Why did the minister refuse to listen to the recommendations from the Ombudsman?

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's not true. In fact, we heard many submissions, when it came to the public consultation. There were recommendations that were brought forward by independent officers that were adhered to, as well as the public.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are more amendments made at committee to listen to independent officers. But, more specifically, we are making more things proactively disclosed than has ever been done in the province of Manitoba, and we're not trying to black out emails, as was done by the former deputy premier to the member for St. Johns.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Notre Dame, on a final supplementary question.

Ms. Marcelino: The Pallister government has a problem with transparency. Their omnibus legislation proposes changes to dozens of acts, they withhold reports on public finance and health and, with FIPPA, the Ombudsman has found a recurring pattern of delay by the Pallister government.

* (14:50)

Requests in key areas of government go unanswered for months and months, if ever answered at all. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Marcelino: Conservatives are making this problem worse with Bill 49, which makes response times the worst in the country, and it creates loopholes. The Ombudsman is rightly concerned that the public's right to know is being watered down in favour of this government's wish to control and withhold.

Why is the minister avoiding transparency and accountability? And will he scrap Bill 49?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Deputy Premier.

Mr. Goertzen: Whatever, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've been called worse, even today.

I would say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that, of course, the Leader of the Opposition himself has a long record of covering things up. The member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) was involved in a FIPPA cover-up.

We continue to want to be proactive and we are proactively disclosing things, but we would also like to get to Estimates. If the NDP would stop blocking Bill 71, which would reduce taxes on virtually every Manitoban, we could actually get to that Estimates process.

I would ask them to stop blocking tax legislation—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: —to bring relief to Manitobans and be transparent about why they want to jack up taxes when we want to bring down taxes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

Education Property Tax Legislation Renters and Small-Business Owners

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): Bill 71 gives big benefits to corporate landlords, gives the Premier thousands of dollars, but far too many Manitobans, such as renters and small businesses, are left out.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliv: It's clear that the Premier wants to mail out cheques with his signature, but we have real questions, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We want to ensure that this legislation, any changes, work to the benefit of Manitobans who really need it, not just the Premier and his wealthy friends.

Is the minister willing to work towards a more equitable piece of legislation to ensure that it helps Manitobans who really need it?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): The member opposite raised the taxes on residents in one of the poorest school divisions in the province by 40 per cent-plus in seven years, and now he tries class warfare. You know, it just doesn't work, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You know, the people of that area of the province have struggled to make ends meet. Many of them really need more money on the kitchen table. He took it off for years. We're going to put some back.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Wasyliv: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know that the only kitchen table the Premier is worried about is his own, and kicking a few scraps off the table for Manitobans just isn't fair.

We also know that school boards in Manitoba have had to raise taxes to backfill the cuts to education that this government—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliv: —has made for five years in a row.

So I'll ask this Premier: Will he work with us to ensure that renters and small-business owners get a better deal than they currently have under Bill 71? *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I appreciate that the member's pretty defensive because his rebate's bigger than I get, but I think the fact remains that my concern, and our concern on this side of the House, is making sure that we have a fairer way to generate money for education and to fund it.

If two houses on the same street have the same value, and one family and one house makes \$500,000 and the other family makes \$50,000, the NDP says it's fine to have them both pay exactly the same amount towards education. Think about that. Think how unfair that is. So we're changing that old NDP system.

The member doesn't like it because he liked his junkets better than he cared for the people in the school division that he was supposed to be serving. But the fact remains, he'll take money off a kitchen table if he has a chance. We're going to put it back because we have the chance to do it, and we're going to do it because it's the right thing to do. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

The honourable member for Fort Garry, on a final supplementary question. *[interjection]* Order.

Mr. Wasyliv: Well, we've seen over the last five years with this Premier and this government that they've been putting on the thumb on the scale of the tax fairness system in Manitoba and they've been

skewing it overwhelmingly to corporate landlords and to people wealthy like the Premier.

But that's not equitable, especially during a time of a pandemic. The burden of this pandemic is being borne on renters and small businesses. The Premier once again has misplaced priorities.

Will he commit today to working with us to ensure that this legislation benefits Manitobans who really need it?

Mr. Pallister: We've been putting money back on the kitchen table for five years without any help from the NDP and don't need any help now. No.

The member's fighting for the status quo because he's got a vested interest in it, okay? It worked for for him. It didn't work for the people. It didn't work for the kids in our province. We want to take the children in our province and give them a better education. He wants more money for trustees. He wants more money for junkets. He wants more money for superintendents.

We want \$40 million more in the classroom, where it can help the children instead: better outcomes, better results and better futures for all Manitoba schoolchildren.

COVID-19 Vaccinations Priority Populations

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): The National Advisory Committee on Immunization, or NACI, has clear priorities for key populations in stage 2 and stage 3 of its recommendations.

Right after first responders—who include paramedics, firefighters and police—the next in line are supposed to be front-line essential workers who can't work virtually: people working in education, early childhood educators and transit workers, essential caregivers for vulnerable people and individuals aged 16 to 59 with a underlying medical condition.

Is this government going to follow NACI's advice and make those people a vaccine priority, and if not, why not?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I appreciate the question. I think that we're doing our best to have a system that benefits Manitobans in vulnerable areas, in particular, and to get the age down and the access down and to promote vaccine use.

I thank the members opposite. The member from Union Station, I know, is putting up posters in her area to encourage people to go and get vaccinated. The

member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) has made the effort—sincere effort—to try to get more people vaccinated. These are positive, positive efforts that MLAs can undertake together to make sure that we get more folks vaccinated in our province. That's the big challenge.

This is a race between variants and vaccines. Up until now the vaccines haven't been winning but we want to get more people vaccinated because that's how we get Manitoba their lives back.

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

COVID-19 Pandemic Financial Supports

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): There are over 2,000 active COVID-19 cases in Manitoba and hundreds of cases—new cases—a day. There are warnings from ERs, ICUs and hospitals that staff are already run ragged. We are on the same path we were on in October, and this government is forcing the same choice on people: either stay home and go broke, or work and get COVID. And given that choice, of course Manitobans' mental health is suffering.

No one is saying there should be no economy. We're saying that if the government orders someone to stop working, you better make sure that you can pay—they can pay their bills, so there's an economy to come back to when this crisis is over.

We're getting greater restrictions.

When is this government going to give Manitobans the greater financial supports they want, need and deserve?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Largest supports for small business in Canada, according to my friend, Molly McCracken, who says we're second only to BC on individual supports. So I answer that question.

What I will say to the member is that the federal Liberals have demonstrated a patent disrespect for women. When they put Jonathan Vance in charge of the mission to root out sexual harassment in the military, that was an abject failure. That was culpable negligence. It was shameful and they need to be accountable for that. They need to understand that.

And the members of the NDP need to understand, too, that when you don't interview your people properly, when you don't ask about previous records of abuse, of misogyny, when you don't do that, you end up carrying the burden the federal government has

addressed by firing Vance. And you need to take that same burden seriously in your party because you did the same thing with your leader.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, on a final supplementary question.

EIA Constituent Case Concern Residential School Settlement

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, James Favel and others are finding a major problem with the provincial government's operation of the EIA system.

For example, an individual who received money from a residential school settlement and gave the money to his daughters to help them out, has had his EIA money clawed back. He has been taken off EIA and is now living rough on the street, as he has no other option.

As the minister knows, and I table, residential school settlements are not to be considered as income under EIA in any event and even less in this instance, where the money has been given to his daughters.

Why is the minister's government taking money from those who are most in need and then turning around and giving the money, through Bill 71, to those who are most well off in our province?

* (15:00)

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I'm always open to taking matters of individual household cases.

I would be more than happy to review this one with the member for River Heights. We know that we have made some exemptions and some exclusions and certainly willing to work with him on his particular constituent issue.

Our government was very proud today to table Bill 72, which will be taking people who have severe and prolonged disabilities off EIA and putting them onto a more dignified income support program to help them as they're dealing with their disabilities and to have a better quality of life.

That is our government's record. We'll continue to work on behalf of all—

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

Winnipeg Football Club Vaccine Ambassador Campaign

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): As we continue our battle against COVID-19, getting Manitobans vaccinated is our government's priority.

Can the Minister of Health and Seniors Care please tell the House how her ministry is getting the message out that vaccinations are an important part of defeating this pandemic?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): Today, we announced a partnership with the Winnipeg Blue Bombers and the Valour Football Club to become vaccine ambassadors and lend their voices to our protect MB campaign.

Manitobans are grateful for their leadership in speaking up and getting the message out that widespread vaccination is our best strategy for a return to a post-COVID normal. Together, we can protect ourselves, each other and our communities, and we appreciate the Winnipeg Football Club in lending their strength to this important work.

The best choice for your vaccine is the first one that is available to you. I encourage all Manitobans to get immunized as soon as you're eligible. Protect yourself, protect your loved ones, and protect your community.

AgriStability Program Federal Enhancement

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Manitoba's response to AgriStability is half a loaf when the federal government has offered so much more.

The minister's own briefing documents that I table show that one of the main impediments to the success of the program is its low compensation rate. The federal government has proposed enhancements, but Conservative premiers in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba stand in the way.

Why is the minister withholding support for an enhanced AgriStability program for Manitoba farmers?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development): Well, in case the member missed it, we did remove the reference margin limit here about a month ago. We can—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Pedersen: That helps our farm sector and particularly the mixed and livestock operations who were

penalized before under the previous program, and we'll continue to work with our farm community.

And I should mention, too, that we have—we are working on more programs, too, that will be actually much more responsive to cash flows. Perhaps the member thinks that AgriStability is good when you have to wait at least 18 months to get any cash out of the program.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Brar: The NDP in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba have come together. We are standing up for farmers. We realize—like the minister's own department realizes—that participation in AgriStability has fallen because of its low compensation rate. Too many producers just don't see the benefit.

The federal government has indicated that the offer still stands. There's still time to get this right.

Will the minister do the right thing and support enhanced compensation through AgriStability?

Mr. Pedersen: Well, when the member from Burrows is talking about farmers, did he happen to mention to farmers that the NDP opposes Bill 62, which will protect farm families and livestock on their farm from people coming in and trespassing on their farm?

Did he mention that the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) is accusing all livestock farmers of being cruel and inhumane treatment of their animals?

I hope that he's sharing this information with the farmers when he's talking about his pretend support for farm communities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Brar: I want to say that Manitoban farmers are listening who is doing what. That's why they're asking for the resignation of our Ag Minister.

Farm organizations across the Prairies are in agreement on this issue. The federal government agrees. Department staff agree that low compensation is driving down enrollment. The only people who stand in the way are Conservative governments.

This minister has never put forward an explanation for why he went support this. He should get out of the way, remove his obstruction and support enhanced AgriStability compensation.

Will he do so today?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): You know, the member opposite speaks about agriculture. I can get him a backroads of Manitoba book so he can become familiar with areas outside the Perimeter Highway. It would help him very much, you know, because the NDP's position is, of course, that they're for 170 points on the carbon tax, and farmers aren't for that. I can share that with him.

And the NDP's position is that they don't want farmers to do anything but pay an outrageously high education tax on their property. And we're taking that and phasing it out. Farmers don't want to do that either.

So I want to share these things with the member and share also with him that they—farmers also don't like the fact that the NDP want to bring back that night hunting. They don't like that one, either.

So, if the member would like, I can get him that backroads of Manitoba book so he can actually see where farmers live all around the province, and he'll understand why this Ag Minister is celebrated by every farmer out there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for question period has expired. *[interjection]* Order.

PETITIONS

Vivian Sand Facility Project—Clean Environment Commission Review

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The Vivian sands project is a proposed silica sand mine and processing plant to be built in the RM of Springfield. The overall project includes mining claims of over 85,000 hectares, making it the largest claim ever given to a single company in Manitoba's history. It is larger than the city of Winnipeg, which has 46,410 hectares.

The amount of dry, solid sand mined—produced per year according to the EAP is 1.36 million tons, and much of this sand will be used in fracking.

A major concern of the proposed mine and plant is that, if developed, it could contaminate the Sandilands aquifer, including both carbonate and sandstone aquifers, which covers most—much of southeastern Manitoba. It has excellent water quality and is the water source for tens of thousands of Manitobans, including many municipal water

systems, agriculture, industry, private wells, an abundance of wildlife and ecosystems. Further, people in the Indigenous communities that are potentially affected by this were not afforded the required Indigenous consultation from either federal or provincial government officials.

The sustainable yield of the combined sandstone and carbonate aquifers has still not yet been established by provincial authorities.

The mine could cause leaching of acid and heavy metals and pollute the aquifer, as it will go down 200 feet into the Winnipeg formation of the sandstone aquifer. There is concern that the shale, which separates the carbonate and sandstone aquifers—sand and pyritic oolite itself contains sulphides—will, when exposed to injected air from the CanWhite Sands extraction process, turn to acid.

An additional concern with the proposed mine and plant is the potential to pollute the Brokenhead River and the aquatic food chain leading to Lake Winnipeg.

Residents in the area have also expressed fears of being overexposed to silica dust during production, as there has been a demonstrated lack of safety and environmental procedures by the CanWhite Sands Corporation during the exploratory drilling phase. Signage and fencing has been poor; identifying and required mine claim tags were missing; there were no warnings for silica dust exposure and no coverings to prevent exposure of the silica stockpiles to the elements.

Residents' concerns, including the fact that boreholes which should have been promptly and properly sealed were left open for a year. The drilling of hundreds of improperly sealed boreholes yearly creates significant risks of surface contamination, mixing of aquifer waters and drainage of surface fecal matters into the aquifer.

* (15:10)

There is also a risk of subsidence around each borehole as a result of sand extraction.

There are also potential transboundary issues that need to be addressed as the aquifers extend into Minnesota.

This project should not proceed, as no licensing conditions and mitigation measures will alleviate the risk to all Manitobans and the environment since CanWhite Sands Corporation plans to use an unprece-

dent mining technique with no established safe outcome. The corporation has gone on record indicating that it does not know how to mine for the silica in the water supply and need to develop a new extraction methodology that has never been done before.

Contamination of the aquifers and the environment is irreversible and there are many surface sources of high purity silica that can be extracted without endangering two essential regional aquifers.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to undertake a combined review of the Vivian Sand Facility processing plant and the mining/extraction portion of the operation as a class 3 development with a review by Manitoba's Clean Environment Commission to include public hearings and participant funding.

(2) To urge the provincial government to halt all activity at the mine and plant until the Clean Environment Commission's review is completed and the project proposal has been thoroughly evaluated.

Signed by Kelly Shields, Rob Miller, Gerald Choudant [*phonetic*] and many, many others.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In accordance with rule 133-6, when petitions are read they must be deemed to be received by the House.

The honourable member for Elmwood.

Can the member from Elmwood unmute his mic? Or turn on his video, too?

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I have.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. The video—we can't see you on the video.

Mr. Maloway: Let's see. Oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There we go—oh, we lost you. Now we see you. We can hear you and can see you.

Lead Water Pipes

Mr. Maloway: I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) 2,755 homes in the Elmwood-East Kildonan area have lead water pipes connecting their basements to the City-owned water pipes at their property line. Homes built before 1950 are likely to have lead water pipes running to this connection.

(2) New lead level guidelines issued by Health Canada in 2019 are a response to findings that lead concentrations in drinking water should be kept as low as reasonably achievable, as lead exposures are inherently unsafe and have serious health consequences, especially for children and expectant mothers.

(3) 31 per cent of Winnipeg's 23,000 homes with lead water pipes connecting basements to the City-owned water pipes at their property line were found to have lead levels above the new Health Canada lead level guidelines.

(4) The City of Winnipeg has an inventory of which homes and public buildings, including schools and daycares, that have the lead pipe–lead water pipe connection to the City's watermain and will only disclose this information to the homeowner or property owner. The cost of replacing the lead water pipe to individual homeowners is over \$4,000.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately contact all home and property owners in Manitoba with lead water pipes connecting to the City watermain line and provide full financial support to them for lead water pipe replacement so that their exposure to lead levels is reduced, their health is better and costs to our provincial health-care system are also reduced.

This petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Dauphin Correctional Centre

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this has been signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Grievance—any other petitions? Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I leave—I would have—I would like to have leave to request for this House for the information of all members during the April 14th, 2021 meeting with the Standing Committee of Social and Economic Development; leave was granted to be—have a written submission of Bill 45 registered under the name of Katrinka [*phonetic*] Stecina included in the Hansard's transcripts for that meeting.

This is an error and contrary to what the author intended. The written submission in the question was originally submitted on April 13th, 2021 meeting of the Standing Committee of Social and Economic Development in response to Bill 33. It 'appears' that—the Hansard's transcripts in the committee report for that meeting.

Is there leave to have the written submission of Bill 45 registered under the name of Katrinka [*phonetic*] Stecina at the April 14th, 2021 meeting of the Standing Committee of Social and Economic Development removed from the committee report and not to have it appear on Hansard transcripts for that meeting? [*Agreed*]

Thanks to all honourable members here for putting that through.

* * *

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Could you please call for second reading debate, Bill 71, followed by Bill 40.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been requested by the honourable Government House Leader that to continue rebate—debate on Bill 71, The Education Property Tax Reduction Act, the property tax insulation assistance act and the income tax act amended, and Bill 40. Agreed? [*Agreed*]

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

**Bill 71—The Education
Property Tax Reduction Act
(Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act
and Income Tax Act Amended)**

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, then we'll go on to Bill 71, and the honourable member for St. James has four minutes remaining.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): It's great to have an opportunity to put some words on the record regarding the need to amend Bill 71.

This bill is being presented as some sort of gift, but as usual with the PCs, we cannot trust what they're bringing forward to be transparent or in the best interests of Manitobans. We know that this bill is more of a Trojan Horse that will hurt regular Manitobans in the long run.

And a few of the key reasons why this bill is so harmful as written and why it's so desperately in need of an amendment is that firstly, this bill proposes to phase out the Education Property Tax Credit for renters. That means that thousands of lower income Manitobans will have even less money in their pockets in the midst of an affordability crisis in Manitoba.

So, the PCs are essentially proposing here to fund a large portion of this tax cut, which will disproportionately benefit the wealthy by using monies that they're taking from renters in Manitoba.

Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

And that's happening in the midst of an affordability crisis. That's happening when above-guideline rent increases are spinning out of control in this province, which the PC government seems to have no interest in actually responding to. And it's happening when Manitoba Housing units are being sold off and we're losing more and more social and affordable housing units in this province as a result.

You know, secondly, this bill as written does nothing to support small business owners. Many small business owners rent their space and will not be receiving any kind of benefit through this bill. But you know who this bill will benefit? It'll benefit large corporate landlords, many of whom are in the province but many of whom are outside of the province. So after a year of struggle and hardship, after they fought tooth and nail to get supports from this government and were, you know, given scattering of peanuts

long after these supports were needed, now they're being totally left out again here.

* (15:20)

So, the PCs think that the property management companies are going to just generously dole out funds back to their tenants. They are dreaming here.

The third and perhaps most important short-coming of this bill, of course, is that it is a huge giveaway to the wealthiest Manitobans. It's a giant Trojan Horse, and it looks like a gift on the surface, but let's summarize what the bill does.

It moves us from a progressive system of taxation to a regressive form of taxation. Currently, we have about an \$800-million bill associated with educating kids in our province, and this proposal, this bill, marks a huge change in who will pay the biggest share of those costs for education in Manitoba. And the story can very simply be told by comparing the average benefit to the average Manitoban that Bill 71 will bring, which is \$400 in the immediate, to a \$4,000 benefit to the Premier (Mr. Pallister).

So, the impacts of this bill over the long term are obvious. It's not tax relief at all; regular Manitobans are simply going to be footing a much larger share of the bill over the long term, which is why it's so incredibly important that this bill be amended.

So, if there's any shred of seriousness to this bill—the government's contention that they're looking to provide relief for regular Manitobans here, they would be looking at ensuring that seniors are given some kind of special accommodation; they would be looking at ensuring students or lower income Manitobans are getting a lion's share of the benefit; and they would be ensuring that Manitobans of means are asked to contribute a little bit more to ensure that the costs of education over the long run are distributed more equitably and that lower income and regular Manitobans are not left footing the bill for this wrong-headed piece of legislation.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): So, just before recognizing the next speaker, just a reminder to all members that we are carrying on with the debate on the reasoned amendment to the second reading of Bill 71.

And with that, I'll call on the member from Tyndall Park.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'd like to thank the member for bringing forward this important amendment. You know, last week I had the opportunity to speak in the Chamber virtually here just about Bill 71 and how it appears to be creating a further divide here in our province.

It's not very well-intentioned, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and over the weekend, I had the opportunity to talk about this bill with several people, and a lot of concerns are being raised.

And people agree that this legislation is actually putting up barriers and it's creating more obstacles for people, for everyday Manitobans wanting to have the opportunity to one day maybe purchase property, wanting to be able to plan with their finances a little bit more. And what we need to be doing is creating these opportunities. We want to make sure that all Manitobans have opened up pathways where they can pursue their dreams here in Manitoba, whether that's a career, whether that's their dream house, many different options for Manitobans, and this bill actually makes it more difficult for those who currently have not maybe achieved where they want to be to get to where they want to be.

It makes it more difficult for anyone who wants to eventually be able to purchase a house, purchase property, to do that, but it further enables people who currently own property to own even more property. It saves money for every single person who currently owns property, who is a landowner or a homeowner.

And if you own a house, you're going to get a nice rebate; you're not going to have to pay as much taxes, as many taxes, as everyone else. And if you own a second house, you're going to get an even further, an even bigger, rebate. And every single house or piece of property you own, you're going to be getting more and more and more money back for that. And then anyone who does not own property is actually going to be paying more and more and more money.

This bill essentially is going into the pockets of anyone who is a renter; going into the pockets of many, many students; going into the pockets of seniors on fixed incomes; going into the pockets of farmers, and putting their hard-earned money in the pockets of anyone who currently owns property and pays property tax, making it cheaper for them, making it harder for everyone else.

And it's just—it's a bad idea and a bad, bad move for the economy here in Manitoba. It's helping those

who own property and hurts everyone else. We can't seem to stress that message enough.

And, you know, just to paint a little bit of a picture, Mr. Deputy Speaker: if this legislation passes, a renter who is currently receiving \$700 rebate on their income taxes due to renting will now only receive \$500. And this is because those who own property will be paying less, therefore providing less of a tax break for those who do not own property.

Another small part of this bill that I think is important that we touch on, that we talk about, are the rent freezes. And we are actually for rent freezes; we like this idea, but we don't understand why it doesn't come into effect until January 2022, if the bill passes. If this government actually cared about renters, they would have this come into effect immediately. They would consider and they would take care of everyone currently renting here in Manitoba, not just people who own property and who own more than one piece of property, furthering them even more.

We can tell this government has no problem backtracking, because they're willing to do that with the property tax changes and saying that people will be refunded for 2021. But they won't do anything for renters who are fearful and who are nervous about what could be happening between now and January 2022. It's a double standard for those who own land, and it's taking away from those who don't currently own land.

This legislation is just—it's giving more and more money to people who are economically favoured for those who may own one piece of land; maybe they own one house—but even if they own two houses or three houses, they're going to be saving and receiving more money. Meanwhile, anyone who does not own property—pay into property tax—they're actually going to be losing rebates on their taxes.

So we're hoping that a lot of people will come out to committee and speak to this legislation as we're curious what others have to say. But I do think it's really important that this amendment be brought forward and, again, I'd like to thank the member for bringing it forward.

Thank you.

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Bill 71, The Education Property Tax Reduction Act, the purpose of this is a levy, which is imposed in lieu of school taxes on the incremental assessed value of properties designated under The Community Revitalization Tax

Increment Financing Act as community revitalization properties.

School taxes include the community revitalization levy, and Bill 71 is designed to reduce school taxes by means of a system of rebates. It also amends The Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act to provide for the following rebates in 2021: 25 per cent of school taxes on farm and residential properties, 10 per cent of school taxes on other properties. And, after 2021, these percentages may be increased by regulation.

The school tax rebate is payable to a person in whose name the school taxes are imposed, according to the municipal tax rules, and if there are multiple owners of a property, the rebate may be paid to any of them. If a person other than the rebate recipient is responsible for the property tax, the person may recover their share of the rebate from the rebate recipient, and the rebate may be paid before or after the school taxes are due.

There's no application for the rebate; that's not required. And if a rebate recipient who pays a community revitalization levy is entitled to a refund by way of a grant under The Community Revitalization Tax Increment Financing Act, the rebate in respect of that levy reduces the amount of the refund.

* (15:30)

The following items are also reduced by the same percentage that applies in determining the school tax rebate for residential and farm properties: the school tax assistance of up to \$175 to pensioner tenants whose family income is less than \$23,750, and also the Farmland School Tax Rebate of up to \$5,000.

The Income Tax Act currently provides for the following in respect of a taxpayer's principal residence: a school tax reduction of \$700 to be credited on the property tax bill for a single-family dwelling and Education Property Tax Credit of up to \$1,100 for seniors and \$700 for everyone else, less any school tax reduction applied to the property tax bill; a school tax credit of up to \$175 per person aged 55 and up whose family income is less than \$23,750; a Seniors' School Tax Rebate of up to 4,000—sorry, of up to \$470 for a senior whose family income is less than \$63,500.

And Bill 71 amends The Income Tax Act to reduce these benefits by 25 per cent for 2021 and later years. After 2021, the percentage may be increased by regulation to match the percentage of the school tax rebate for residential properties under The Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act.

Education property tax credits, or as the school tax reduction for a principal residence, is also reduced for 2021, to 75 per cent of the lesser of \$700, and the school taxes otherwise payable.

Under The Community Revitalization Tax Increment Financing Act, the community revitalization levies imposed on some properties are refunded to the property owner as a grant. This act is amended to allow such properties to be exempted from the levy by regulation, and The Municipal Act is amended to require tax notices to include material supplied by the minister.

The Residential Tenancies Act is amended to provide for a rent freeze for 2022 and 2023 for properties that are subject to rent regulation under part 9 of the act. A landlord may still apply for a rent increase under section 123 of that act, that application for an increase above maximum permitted by regulation, but the landlord's school tax rebate under The Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act will be taken into account.

The \$50 school tax reduction provided for in the school tax reduction regulation is reduced by—*[interjection]* thank you—25 per cent for 2021. In subsequent years, it will be reduced by the same percentage that applies in determining the school tax rebate for residential properties under part 2.1 of The Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act.

So, at this point, municipalities impose property taxes that include the amounts they are required by The Public Schools Act to raise for school purposes, and these are commonly referred to as school taxes.

A levy is imposed in lieu of school taxes or the incremental assessed value of properties designated under The Community Revitalization Tax Increment Financing Act as community revitalization properties. And, for the purpose of this, school taxes includes the community revitalization levy. This Bill 71 is designed to reduce school taxes by means of a system of rebates.

In the amendment today—that the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word that, and substituting the following: this House declines to give second reading to Bill 71, The Education Property Tax Reduction Act (Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act and Income Tax Act Amended), because Bill 71 fails to ensure an equitable distribution across income groups and makes life less affordable for renters in Manitoba—so, our amendment today to this bill speaks to the failure of Bill 71 to

ensure an equitable distribution across income groups because it also makes life less affordable for renters in Manitoba.

As part of the jobs and economy committee of the NDP caucus, we've been doing some research and outreach on several pressing issues, including growing Manitoba's main economic drivers, growing Manitoba's care economy, Manitoba's training and education policy including adult literacy, Manitoba's social enterprises. We research barriers to newcomer recognition, accreditation, tax reform, energy reform and green jobs.

Members of the jobs and economy committee, like the chair of the committee, the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw), the NDP Finance critic; we also have the member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses), critic for jobs and economy; member for St. James (Mr. Sala), critic for Manitoba Hydro; the member for Burrows (Mr. Brar), critic for Agriculture and agribusiness; and me, as the Status of Women and Immigration critic—we've studied and are continuing to meet and familiarize ourselves with the business community, with the work of team Manitoba, like the Economic Development Winnipeg, Yes! Winnipeg and provincial departments.

We are familiarizing ourselves with economic drivers of our province, including agribusiness, aerospace, advanced manufacturing, information and communications technology and creative industries. We're reaching out and familiarizing ourselves with the different social enterprises across Manitoba. We're looking at and reaching out to folks in the construction sector and folks across the province with small businesses because these are areas that we're interested in growth and expansion. We're interested in knowing how the pandemic has impacted these sectors of our economy and what we might be able to do for these sectors as we try to recover from the pandemic recession.

And as part of our committee's studies and outreach on tax reform, our committee found that we should strongly advocate to also reduce school taxes levied by municipalities, at the same time ensuring that the Province has greater responsibility to sufficiently fund education in Manitoba and have a sustainable, provincial model to properly fund education in Manitoba.

So I'll say that again: the NDP, as part of our caucus of jobs and economy, was also planning to reduce property taxes, but there are fair ways to do this and there are unfair ways to do this. And our Bill 71

amendment speaks to this need for an equitable tax system.

Obviously, this PC government is not reducing taxes in a fair way. As it is, Bill 71 outlines a tax break for the wealthy. High-income property owners will get huge refunds and lower income and middle-income property owners will get small to non-existent amounts back. Folks who rent will actually get clawbacks.

Why is this PC government letting rich people get richer and letting poor people get poorer? With this rebate, the people with the most ability to pay will get the most benefit from it. For Bill 71, the more you own, the more you get to save and, conversely, with Bill 71, the folks with the least ability to pay will get the least benefit from this rebate.

* (15:40)

I recently spoke to a retired senior citizen couple living in a small bungalow in Gimli, and they've calculated their rebate at a whopping \$30. Compare that to our Premier (Mr. Pallister), who will be sending a cheque with his name on it to himself to the tune of over \$7,000. And that amount is for the rebate for the property that the public knows about and, at this point, the public doesn't know about what he's going to be getting back for the rebate on the Premier's other businesses.

For folks who rent, like many in the constituency of Notre Dame, my constituents will actually lose the very small benefits that they do get now. Renters and tenants will no longer be able to get their yearly tax rebate, but their landlords, who own the buildings, will be able to get their large tax break. Bill 71 makes no distinction between huge, corporate landlords or out-of-province real estate landlords or huge property owners and with folks with small, modest bungalows.

I recently spoke to a friend of our family. This is a family with a husband and a wife and two very small children. They actually rent and have been for the past four years in the constituency of Assiniboia ever since they moved to Canada from Bahrain. And each year, they are able to save that \$700 rebate that they know will be coming at tax time, and they're using those savings so that they can one day be able to raise enough money for a down payment so that they can buy a small house of their own.

When they found out what this PC government is doing with that tax rebate that they've come to depend on to help sock away that money for their own down payment one day for their own small home, this

family that I spoke to in Assiniboia were very disappointed.

Why do the PCs structure the supposed tax relief this way? Regular Manitobans are literally getting crumbs from the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) kitchen table. Flat taxation rates and rebates like what this government is proposing with Bill 71 actually causes more inequality among Manitobans.

If the PCs truly wanted to provide tax relief for those most affected by the pandemic, they would be able to do so by accepting our amendment to Bill 71 to ensure that lower income Manitobans can continue to receive the rental rebate and that they would work towards an equitable tax system.

If the PCs truly wanted to provide tax relief for those affected by the pandemic, then they could see that this asymmetrical COVID recession has not affected everyone equally. We know that there've been certain folks that have been most affected by this recession and they include young people, women, newcomers, racialized Manitobans. We know that it's certain industries and certain small businesses, especially in tourism and in hospitality.

And, in general, we've seen job losses across the board for folks who earn less than \$27 per hour. And actually for those with income over that \$27 per hour, they've seen growth since this pandemic.

So those are the folks that this PC government should be targeting with their supposed tax relief. And instead those types of folks—young people, women, newcomers, racialized Manitobans, for instance, and folks that make under \$27 per hour—a lot of these folks rent and a lot of these folks have smaller properties and they're the ones that would really need this tax relief or more supports from this government in order to transition after this COVID recession.

But the PCs don't seem to want to provide tax relief for those most affected by the pandemic with Bill 71 as it is. So we would encourage the MLAs on the other side of the House to truly consider the amendments that we're putting forward.

So, according to a new study by the CCPA, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, economists Marc Lee and Iglia Ivanova, they have an article called: Canada's tax system needs fairness reform. These authors argue that Canada's tax system is in dire need of reform. And their work, *Fairness By Design: A framework for tax reform in Canada*, finds that ad hoc tax changes over the last two decades similar to what this government is now proposing with Bill 71,

these types of ad hoc changes have seriously weakened the redistributive role of Canada's tax system at a time when market inequalities call for more and not less redistribution.

The study also presents a framework for a progressive tax reform strategy and recommends the establishment of a fair tax commission to examine how federal and provincial taxes and transfers work together as a system and make recommendations for changes.

Now, we know that there hasn't been a tax reform commission since 1966 and I think that a lot of folks on both sides of the House would agree that it's time to take a look at some tax reform and have a commission be set up so that this is properly researched and not just, you know, a measure of political pandering to an electorate due to low polling numbers.

Now, we know that these ideas for progressive taxation and proper redistribution of income, these are ideas that are not just held by folks on the left and these are ideas that we are proposing in our amendment to Bill 71, but even people like the father of modern economics like Adam Smith has, you know, talked about progressive taxation.

In the 18th century, his work, *The Wealth of Nations*, he wrote: The necessities of life occasion the great expense of the poor. They find it difficult to get food and the greater part of their little revenue is spent in getting it. The luxuries and vanities of life occasion the principle expense of the rich, and a magnificent house embellishes and sets off, to the best advantage, all the other luxuries and vanities which they possess.

A tax upon house rents, therefore, would generally fall heaviest upon the rich, and in this sort of inequality there would not perhaps be anything very unreasonable. It is not very unreasonable that the rich should contribute to the public expense, not only in proportion to their revenue, but something more than in that proportion. End quote.

*(15:50)

Again, that's from Adam Smith, the father of modern economics, from his work in the 18th century from a book called *The Wealth of Nations*. Adam Smith was one of the first advocates for progressive taxation, like what we're recommending in our amendment to Bill 71. The fundamental principle of progressive taxation is that those with higher incomes pay more tax, not only in dollar terms, but also as a share of their income, than those with lower incomes.

In economics, this principle of basing tax contributions on ability to pay is known as vertical equity, and some form of it is built into every tax system today.

Governments need revenue to provide a safe, stable environment for all communities and individuals to thrive, and this makes taxes fundamental to a modern society. They pay for setting up and enforcing regulations to ensure that our food is safe, our water and air are clean, our human rights are respected, and they allow us to provide supports and services to one another when facing illness, disability, unemployment, crime, natural disaster, poverty or old age.

The global financial crisis of 2008-2009 and this ongoing economic recession caused by this current pandemic both serve as very recent painful reminders that our economy and our people and our communities demand a stronger, not weaker, role for governments, both in terms of regulation and in stepping in to provide an economic stimulus when the private sector is weak, which it often does if you remember those capitalist critiques about the waves of when our capitalist economy goes up and down in terms of strength and weakness.

So, for instance, here's a—just a real life example of why we need a publicly funded system to help enforce regulations. Just a few weeks ago, we had, in our Notre Dame constituency office, some constituents who called in because they felt that their manufacturing workplace wasn't safe. They said that it's not safe in terms of not enough public health restrictions are being followed, especially in their locker rooms when everybody's changing.

So what I did was I called in this complaint to Public Health with the name of the workplace, and within two days we had a response from Public Health. They had a Public Health inspector visit that workplace that my constituent was very concerned about, because my constituent mentioned that there were over five people that already had been tested COVID-positive in that workspace.

And, again, this is what progressive taxation can pay for. It can pay for folks to come out, like that Public Health inspector, to make sure that what's happening in that workplace is safe for the rest of the workers that need to work there.

Ensuring that the tax system can raise the appropriate amount of revenues in a fair and equitable manner is of essential importance to the functioning of a modern state. And especially in times of this

public health crisis, this economic crisis, we know that government needs to step up and support the economy and to serve our people here in Manitoba.

Flat taxation rates and rebates, like what this government is proposing through Bill 71, as opposed to our amendment on progressive taxation rates and rebates, cause more income inequality among Manitobans. Conversely, progressive tax rates and rebates would result in a more just distribution of income and direct improvement in the lives, especially of low-income households.

A good tax system, including rebates, must be progressive for reasons of fairness and justice, but also on economic grounds. Raising the same percentage off income and tax requires less sacrifice from those who are already able to provide for a comfortable life than from those who are struggling to make ends meet.

In economics, the marginal utility of money declines as income rises. That is, the perceived and actual benefit derived from an extra dollar of income is much higher for someone panhandling on the street than for someone driving past in a Porsche.

Progressive taxation serves to redistribute opportunities and improve social mobility.

In a hypothetical world where market income is distributed equally, there would be no need for progressive taxation. Government revenues could be raised optimally with a single tax rate, a flat tax, like that described in Bill 71—refers to a flat taxation system.

But in the presence of significant income inequality, like what we're experiencing here in Manitoba, progressive taxation ensures that necessary revenues are collected with a smaller shared sacrifice than a flat tax system would impose.

Progressive taxation, not flat taxation. This reduces the incomes of the richest and generates revenues that can be used to reduce inequality through public expenditures on the provision of public services and infrastructure that have greater relative benefit to low-income households.

And even if the rich had a moral claim to keep all their high income, there are good reasons why redistribution benefits society as a whole. We know that income inequality is rising. The average income of the top 10 per cent of Canadians was 10 times higher than that of the bottom 10 per cent.

And the richest 1 per cent of Canadians received almost one third of all income growth in the past two decades.

Incomes at the top have more than doubled over the last 30 years. And what is also particularly relevant for tax design is that the recent sharp growth in inequality is driven by—

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): The member's time has expired.

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): I rise today to speak about the amendment for Bill 71, The Education Property Tax Reduction Act.

This bill isn't about Manitobans. This bill is about this—the caucus opposite being ashamed of themselves and hoping Manitobans will forget about how badly the PCs have mishandled the pandemic from the beginning.

Bill 71 doesn't help Manitobans. It helps members opposite and their rich friends get richer. The PCs are hoping Manitobans will not notice how the rebate isn't about them, it's about helping their friends get rich.

Some key questions have not been answered. Is this government going to make up the difference to the school boards? School boards have already outdone their budgets for the school year 2021 and 2022. It is unacceptable that once again this government is selling out our kids for some cheap, flashy headlines.

This bill doesn't help—

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): I'll ask the member to unmute herself and continue.

Ms. Adams: I was muted by the moderators and I apologize.

This bill does not help people who rent. As my colleague from Union Station pointed out, people who own multiple properties will be receiving the rebate as well. I was left speechless about that. The blatant favouritism that the PCs were showing is shocking.

This government has not done what it needs to do to protect Manitobans. The PCs have said it's okay, that there's going to be a rent freeze for three years, yet the minister has not indicated whether or not above-guideline rent increases will be included. Why is that important? Because since they have taken office they have approved all above-guideline rent increases. They have not met above-guideline rent increases they don't like. How is that helping Manitobans?

* (16:00)

This is why there's the need for the amendment to Bill 71, so we can ensure Manitobans have—so this is fair for all Manitobans.

You have to ask yourself: who is this government working for? Because it doesn't seem like it's for Manitobans.

It is clear, when I talk to Manitobans and—they are not happy with how this government is handling the pandemic. I ask them and tell them about what we are doing to, what we've been doing the last number of days debating Bill 71, and they tell me that that is unacceptable, that there is much more needs in this province than this.

The Pallister government needs to be listening to Manitobans. Manitobans are wanting actual investments for education and—stop attacking education in this province. Look at what they're doing with Bill 64. Bill 64 is atrocious and needs to be repealed. Bill 71 is just flashy and trying to make Manitobans forget the attacks on education, and I—Manitobans are listening. Manitobans are watching.

They're—want investments on health care. We have seen how their cuts to health care is impacted. We have seen that nurses leave. We have seen wait times go up, ERs close, surgical units close, OBS units close, the list goes on. They are—they privatized Lifeflight. They don't even know how many Lifeflight planes are in the province, which is important to Manitobans because these are some of the priorities.

Bill 71, as written, needs to be amended and is not a priority of this province.

They've cut northern patient transport. The vaccine—they need a vaccine rollout that makes sense. The northern MLAs have been asking the minister for a meeting regarding vaccine rollout, because we are hearing real concerns, and the minister doesn't seem to care to hear them. They're putting their choices ahead of northerners, and that is putting northern health at risk, which just shows that the priorities for this government are not Manitobans'; it is for themselves and what can they get out of being in government.

They want affordable, quality access to child care. We heard from countless Manitobans at committee that this is what they want. They want a government—they don't want a government that is going to open the door wide open for profit centres. They want wages in—where we've seen wages and quality go down.

Why? Because profits are the goal, not children or their families. How do we know this? Because we've seen this play out in other provinces and countries.

If members don't believe this, just look at the facts and do their own research. And we can see with long-term care, when profits are prioritized, it doesn't help the people in the care home; it helps the people make more money. And we need to ensure that the care sector is there for the people and not for people trying to make money off the backs of some of our most vulnerable citizens. Long-term care: we need more money for long-term care.

Bill 71 doesn't address anything and it's—what Manitobans are wanting is a government that is going to prioritize their needs. And the amendment—the members opposite need to support the amendments that have been presented. We need to get for-profit out of the care sector. We need to stand up and do the right thing by our elders. They have given so much. It's the least that we can do to make sure they are safe and cared for.

I don't know about members opposite, but I can tell you that, on this side of the House, we were heartbroken to hear about the stories coming from care homes and outraged that the government didn't do more to protect our elders. They knew and they had a choice and they chose to do nothing. We saw from other provinces how at risk care homes were, and they did nothing. They refused to acknowledge it was a problem until it was too late. They former Health minister said that deaths were inevitable.

Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker; no one believes him, because the deaths were preventable if they just would put in the supports needed. And this just shows a pattern that this government has. They're not paying attention; they don't seem to be putting Manitobans first.

Addiction and overdoses. They want—Manitobans want answers and supports for people struggling with addiction issues. The minister talks about what her government has done, but we had just learned a couple of days ago that 'overdoses' deaths are up by 87 per cent. I don't know about you, but that tells me what you're doing isn't working.

Does the minister apologize to this House? No. Does the minister say they're going to listen to experts? No. And if they were, why was getting naloxone made widely available like pulling teeth? They would be opening safe consumption sites. We

know safe consumption sites save lives and they help get people sober.

Housing: Manitobans want housing to be a priority for this government, and Bill 71 as written—what will it—it will barely help them get by. This government has not built any affordable housing and there's been a loss of affordable housing under this government, and yet they continue to sell off housing units and not repair damaged ones.

And there needs to be real support for businesses. We have heard from countless small businesses that they need support from this government.

This government has kept the CEDF non-fishery loans frozen. How does that help northern Manitoba?

The truth is this government doesn't care about small businesses or families. They care about big business and big commercial farms. We have seen that just with this bill alone. While this bill gives a small amount to families and small businesses, what they are doing—they're doing this at the expense of our children. Who does this bill really benefit? It benefits big business and out-of-province real estate firms.

So let's look at who benefits from this and why the amendments are needed. The following rebates are from the beginning of 2021: 25 per cent of school tax on farms and residential property, no matter how many properties you own; 10 per cent of school tax on other businesses.

In my community of Thompson, most of the commercial property is owned by real estate firms not in Manitoba. Why does this government love giving our tax dollars to people outside of Manitoba? How does that help Manitobans? How does that help schools in Manitoba? Many apartment blocks are owned by real estate firms outside of Manitoba. Once again, it's our tax dollars leaving the province. What is it with this government in wanting to give all of our tax dollars out-of-province?

I've just listed seven things that Manitobans want over this bill. When I tell them what we're debating, they're just shocked and they are saying: Really?

We're heading into a third wave of pandemic. We need to be having paid sick days. We need to make a vaccine rollout that makes sense, supports teachers and EAs, ECEs. If this government thinks that this will make Manitobans forget how horribly they've handled this pandemic, they are sorely mistaken. This will make Manitobans even madder because they know—because they think Manitobans can be bought.

There are currently an Education Property Tax Credit of up to \$1,100 for seniors and \$700 for everyone else. And school reduction applies—property tax—school tax up to seven—\$150—seven hundred and fifty—\$175 for a person, age 55 and the whole family's income is less than \$23,700. A senior's school tax rebate is up to \$470 for a senior's family whose income is less than \$63,500, but only on the dwelling that you live in. Real—rental and real estate properties are not included. The PCs don't like the part of rental property and commercial property not being included because it means it doesn't benefit them or their friends.

Me, I'm completely fine with real estate firms outside of this province not receiving our tax dollars. Apparently, members opposite hold a different opinion. The rent from the property doesn't—their rents from the property doesn't stay in Manitoba.

This rebate also doesn't help renters by removing the \$700 rebate when they—at tax time by giving it to their landlords. Most landlords aren't going to deduct that from their rent.

This bill will send millions and millions of our tax dollars out of Manitoba. It is unacceptable that the PC Cabinet has yet again made changes that will benefit the wealthy on the backs of middle- and low-income Manitobans.

This bill, as written—which is why there needs to be an amendment—will have long-term impacts on our province, and like always, this government is picking winners and losers; and the winners are always their friends and never Manitobans.

This bill is just a ploy and is about the Premier (Mr. Pallister) trying to get Manitobans to like his party. The PCs have not learned their lesson. They keep thinking Manitobans will forget that this government mishandled the pandemic. They've sold out our children and their futures and they keep making life more expensive for Manitobans.

They raised hydro rates in the middle of the night. They say that they're trying to put money back on the kitchen tables of Manitobans, but how does that help when they're raising the hydro rates in the middle of the night?

There is a clause tucked away underneath—unrelated, that The Municipal Act requires tax notices to include materials supplied by the minister.

Why is this government trying to legislate the ability of government to include propaganda in our tax

notices? This is just unacceptable. If you're going to be doing something good, it speaks for itself. You shouldn't have to send out propaganda to tell everybody.

*(16:10)

If the Premier and his government care about Manitobans getting money, they would do the right thing. They would have done it yesterday or last week. He and his government are entirely capable of getting the money to Manitobans without new legislation, but they are doing it in a way that doesn't let the Premier sign the cheques or send it out in a flyer or with his face on it, which is what this legislation is about, which is why there needs to be the amendments.

The Premier is trying to buy back his dying popularity. You can tell that this bill is about their dropping popularity, because they could have introduced this bill so that there would be guaranteed passage, but they chose to wait so they could have the headline.

This government previously said that this—they would be phasing out the education tax over 10 years when they balanced the budget, but now they're doing it escalated—over an escalated period when they're facing a record deficit due to the pandemic, and no consideration that they're introduced a tax break when the Premier's popularity is at an all-time low.

We are two years from an election and they are using borrowed money to buy future votes. This government needs to realize that other governments have failed—have tried this and failed. I have wondered if members opposite like to be in opposition, because they seem to be doing everything they can to get back there. There's a lot of concern over how the government will make up the lost revenue in years to come, nearly \$900 million.

The current education property tax pays for education our children receive. Manitobans are justifiably concerned that this tax cut will come at the expense of funding our children's education. The government doesn't seem to have a plan on how to make up the funding except by cutting most of the important services: health, education. This government is putting our children's education at risk, and this needs to stop. They need to stop trying to—with Bill 64, and now doubling down with Bill 71.

One has to ask: why do they keep putting our children at risk no matter what happens? Our children's education is not for sale. They do not need the

legislation for the rebate. The government has similar rebates with \$200 for seniors.

I might add that was a failure. I heard of many low-income seniors that did not receive their cheques because they had moved or are now living outside their community for medical. Countless elders in Thompson or in Winnipeg are in long—are in Winnipeg for long-term medical, but they still have their mailing addresses in their communities because, to them, that's where they live. And they are now in Winnipeg or Thompson for medical and they couldn't get their cheques due to travel restrictions.

Like the rebate, this bill doesn't have an income test, whether—meaning wealthy Manitobans will just, once again, benefit. This bill continues to show how out of touch they are with Manitobans. This bill is just a PR stunt trying to save face from a tired old government that doesn't have any new ideas.

Like the senior cheques, these cheques will cost \$1.3 million to mail. Why mail the cheques? Why? Because it's not about the cheques, it's about the credit.

If this was really about getting money into the hands of Manitobans, they would do things likely to make Manitobans' lives better. They would get out of the way; there would be reasonable expensive attempt. But this is irresponsible and an expensive attempt to be popular.

Manitobans want vaccines, paid sick leave. They don't want to have to pick between staying home or getting—or being—getting sick and not being able to pay bills. Manitobans want a government that's going to stand up for them and put them first.

This original—this rebate was originally supposed to be over 10 years after the balanced budget, but now we're supposed—we're two years away, and the Pallister government are sending out please-like-me cheques. This is what they've decided to do during a pandemic in the middle of a third wave, is to prioritize sending out like-me cheques to Manitobans.

Does nobody at the Cabinet table see the flaw in this plan? Do none of the backbenchers speak up and say, hey, Manitobans want real supports, they want investments in their kids' education, they don't want to see their tax dollars that is being spent on their children's education to leave the province?

The amendments needed for Bill 71 make it better, but members opposite are trying to say—are

trying to make themselves sound good, like this bill will help small businesses.

Like everything else this government has done, it shows that they really don't want to help small businesses. Small businesses are looking for long-term support as we head into a third wave. They need coverage for PPE. They need wage subsidies to help pay for the additional staff that they've had to hire to meet the cleaning requirements and all of the other requirements to keep people safe. Restaurants have been forced to rely on delivery services that—and have seen their revenues cut by 30 per cent.

But this government doesn't seem to want to prioritize that. They want to prioritize Bill 71, and it is unclear if they're going to be supporting the amendments but the amendments are needed so that way it's more fair and equitable for Manitobans.

They seem intent on sending out the like-me cheques. I don't know why they want to do that and not listen to Manitobans. Currently, there are six school divisions in Winnipeg. We—having an unelected—we would have an unelected school trustee anymore to advocate for—if Bill 64 passes. Some neighbourhoods would be forced to pay more while living—while having less and will—less say in what happens in their schools.

Fair taxation is a strategy to make an ability to pay more accountable. This bill, along with Pallister's government's other decisions, flips the principle on its head. People with the most accountability to pay will get the biggest break and vice versa. This is shifting the tax burden to people who don't have the ability to pay: the low and 'middle-comin' families who have been hit hardest by the pandemic. These tax changes will increase inequities in Manitoba and the derailment of all of our schools.

This government plans to cut education for students across the province and remove the—any authority from local communities. In the North, they're making the school—the North one school region, and it just shows how out of touch they are. They know that—how upset people in the North are with Bill 64, and that's why they've introduced Bill 71, as a way to try and say, hey, we're screwing up your education but we're going to give you a little bit of money.

Northerners aren't not—are not that dumb. Northerners see right through this bill and know what it is. It is the government trying to say, hey, while we're screwing over your kids' education, we're going

to give you a little bit of money. And that's not what Manitobans want. They want to have the best education for their kids.

And the facts are clear with Bill 71. It doesn't—it wasn't thought out. It was a quick response to low polling numbers and their rich friends being mad, resulting in the amendments needed because, once again, Bill 71 shows just who the PCs are working for and it's not for Manitobans. And if it wasn't for the amendments—we need the amendments.

Bill 71 isn't about fairness, it's about trying to make other people happy. Hopefully the members opposite will be supporting the amendments introduced so that way, that tax—so that way, it's fair for all Manitobans.

I've talked a lot before and I keep going back to our tax dollars going to real estate firms outside of Manitoba. How does that help Manitobans? The PCs are—the PC government is out of touch with Manitoba and it's—Manitobans, and it's baffling.

This isn't the first time the Pallister government has manipulated public figures and the law for their own political benefit. Last summer, the government issued \$200 cheques to Manitoban seniors that was—didn't require legislation because the government had the authority to do it and send Manitobans these rebates without legislation. The Pallister government is misleading Manitobans about the public finances to mask the true scale of the cuts and what it is making to our public service sector.

Manitobans want to trust that their government is transparent and responsible with their tax dollars, but it is simply not happening under the Pallister government.

For the first time in modern history, the Manitoba government has received back-to-back qualifications from the provincial auditor from Public Accounts. The Pallister government has continued to defy the auditor's direction about the funds and organization must be accountable to the summary budget, making deficits seem worse than they are. These are serious erosions of the public's ability to trust the Pallister government's bookkeeping abilities.

It's easy to understand why they're doing this: they need to be obscure why they're cutting. Since they came to power, thousands of people have been left—have been laid off or fired: the government's own Crown corporations; emergency rooms have been closed; health clinics have been shuttered; school funding isn't keeping up with the growth of population

or inflation. And Bill 64 doesn't help that and Bill 71 just makes matters even worse. And amendments are needed.

* (16:20)

These—they have frozen funding to child-care centres and post-secondary 'institutions'. This is the first time the Pallister government has played fast and isn't the first time they've played fast and loose with financial reporting.

In 2018-2019, the Finance Minister removed details in the estimates—revenue from the annual budget. This has never happened before. In 2019, the Pallister government refused to release the first quarter financial statements—another departure from long-standing practices.

This government continues to defy and ignore what is in standard practice because they're ashamed of what they are doing. And their quarterly financial reporting has been removed from virtually all the details, which goes part and parcel for what they've been doing—is when they don't like something or something is in their way, they just change the legislation to make it better and easier for them, which isn't better for Manitobans.

And we see that with Bill 71 and the needing—the need for the amendment, because, once again, they are picking winners and losers because they don't like Manitobans, and it is clear when they're sending how many of our millions of dollars—of our tax dollars to real estate firms out of Manitoba.

This is arbitration compared to past and very—other provinces. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when Manitoban was in dire need of support, the Pallister government's first instinct was to slash and cut our public institutions and social services. He made the biggest single-day cut in Manitoba history: \$816 million.

And their so-called fiscal update from the pandemic was nothing more than a flimsy PowerPoint presentation with no details, which, once again, highlights why there is the need for bill—the amendments to Bill 71, because this government is not being accurate with what they've been doing and what they've been saying. Manitobans need to know that they have a government that is going to stand up for them.

And Bill 71 as written, without the amendments, does not stand up for Manitobans. We are falling behind several other provinces. They are committing to

be a—they were committed to being a responsible government, but that doesn't make cuts that hurt Manitobans during times when—during a time of crisis.

An NDP government would restore the public's trust in government that the Pallister government has lost.

Bill 71 has serious implications for education funding across our province. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) has no plan to make up the \$900-million funding shortfall this bill is expected to have. The Premier's cuts to health care is impacting our kids' education. He is putting education further and further away from the classroom.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

The Pallister government's funding for education does not keep up with inflation, nor does it increase the need for the growing student population. As a result, class sizes are getting bigger while supports are going down instead of our cost and getting it to our educators. Our students need supports.

This government introduced Bill 64 as a—consolidation power with the minister to eliminate local voices because they don't want to hear local voices, as evident with Bill 71. Because if they actually listened to what Manitobans were talking about, this would not be on their to-do list.

Bill 64 does nothing to improve our children's education and keep class sizes small. There is no commitment to provide more supports for teachers in the classroom, hire EAs, or to ensure students have more one-on-one time to get the supports that is needed. Instead, Bill 64 is intended to take control from the local voices and give it to an unelected appointee by the government.

We saw how poorly the Premier and his government managed health-care reform. Staffing shortages and chaos remain under their leadership. Now they are trying to do the same chaos and confusion in our kids' classrooms. And it is evident, as they don't have a plan on how they're going to make up the \$9 million—\$900-million shortfall.

If you're going to make this cut, where is—the money's got to come from somewhere. Why are they putting our children's education at risk. After taking control of our health-care system, the Premier made such a mess with the cuts that his own consultant said that confidence had been lost.

In an overhaul, they are posing to do the same radical changes to education. They're dissolving school boards and handling—handing the control over to the minister and his Tory-friends-picked appointees. This decision-making further away from the classroom. This is an attack on teachers, on our educators, and the ability to parents—for parents to make decisions for their children.

This bill, Bill 71, is not about what is for Manitobans; it's about how to make Manitobans try and forget how horrible this government has handled the pandemic, and that's all this is. They've made such a mess with everything—dissolving schoolboards and handling—handing it over. We've seen this happen in over provinces. In Nova Scotia, the education professor explained that parents' voices are still missing and they actually want to move back to a school board method.

Everything that the PCs have done and have implemented have failed in other parts of the country and provinces. Why are they trying to continue to do things that fail? We've seen them fail in other parts of the country. With the amalgamation of regions and dissolving the school boards, many parents are wondering how their voices will be heard.

I know so many school trustees that advocate for their kids in the communities because they are a part of it. I know, and I think of some really great work being done by schools that are now at risk. Why? Because the PCs want power.

Bill 71, like Bill 64, isn't for Manitobans; it's helping a few. The Winnipeg region will now be 41 times the size of the smallest region, and some voices will not be heard. They are making the North one big region. The voices will be lost.

This bill turns education into a business. Regional directors can be business managers, KPMG accountants. This will help push the Premier's—Pallister government's agenda. They have—they removed the cap on the K-to-3 class sizes—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

I just want to remind the member for Thompson that you basically said Premier's—Premier Pallister. If you go—it's either Pallister government or the constituency name or the member's title. So, if—

Ms. Adams: Thank you for that guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I tried to catch myself before I said it. I do apologize.

They're trying to remove principals and vice-principals from the—for the union. They are setting the stage to have principals and vice-principals not be teachers. Are you kidding me? Principals and vice-principals need to be teachers. They need to have an understanding of what's going on.

I have news for members opposite: Our kids' schools are there for—our kids are in school for education. Schools are not a business. As soon as we start looking at schools—

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

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): The member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) has moved an amendment, which is based on the fact that the bill fails to ensure an equitable distribution across income groups and makes life less affordable for renters in Manitoba.

I support this amendment to Bill 71. Quite clearly, as I pointed out in my earlier speech on Bill 71, this bill does not ensure an equitable distribution of benefits across income groups and will produce greater inequalities among Manitobans.

This bill, which reduced education property taxes by 25 per cent—that's Bill 71—this year will benefit about 650,000 Manitoba property owners, according to the minister. The precise number could be argued, as some property owners do not pay property taxes because of the resident homeowner property tax reduction or perhaps for other reasons, as I pointed out.

In addition, some of the 650,000 property owners in Manitoba do not live in Manitoba. Thus, there are at least 700,000 Manitobans who will not benefit directly from Bill 71 and its 25 per cent reduction in education property tax. This is the first major inequity.

Second, it is uncertain to what extent renters will benefit. Although the bill specifies a two-year rent freeze, this is hardly comparable to a long-term decrease in the property tax, which property owners are expected to receive.

Further, landlords have found ways, through renovations, as an example, to avoid rent freezes. This is the second great inequity between property owners and renters.

* (16:30)

Third, there are many Manitobans who live in First Nation communities and who do not pay property tax on land within the First Nations community.

These Manitobans will not benefit. This is the third great inequality between First Nations people and others in Manitoba.

Lastly, those who are experiencing homelessness and are neither property owners nor renters will receive no benefit. This is the fourth great inequity.

Thus, I believe I have clearly established that this bill will produce inequities. But in order to support this amendment, it is important to show that addressing inequities and inequalities is an important part of what governments should do. To address this, I will refer to a great deal of research, which has shown that inequities in income have a very negative impact on societies.

Interestingly, the negative impact of inequalities in income is on everyone. The negative impact is on everyone in society, even those who may, in the short term, have greater wealth or benefit as a result of reduction in property tax.

Let me explain, and to do this, I will refer specifically to work of Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. They have written an article titled, Greater Equality: The Hidden Key to Better Health and Higher Scores and they have reviewed a lot of research. This article was published in the American Educator, several years old, in spring of 2011, but its message and the research on which it is based have been shown to stand on good ground and to have been research which is well done.

What they show, Wilkinson and Pickett, is that inequalities appear to be a driving force in problems in societies. Egalitarian societies are more healthier. The big idea, which has been supported by much research is that what matters in determining mortality and health in a society is less the overall wealth of that society and more how evenly wealth is distributed. The more equally wealth is distributed, the healthier the society is.

Inequality is associated with lower life expectancy, higher rates of infant mortality, shorter height, poorer self-reported health, low birth weight, increased AIDS and depression. I will go on and talk about more.

When international comparisons were made and a whole variety of conditions were looked at, the list of problems which are more common in more unequal societies and more unequal countries include level of trust; mental illness, including drug and alcohol addiction; life expectancy and infant mortality; obesity;

children's educational performance; teenage births; homicides; imprisonment rates; social mobility.

To document this with very careful research, Wilkinson and Pickett formed an index of health and social problems for each country and for each United States state. And they looked at this pattern among many countries and among states in the United States, and what they showed is that there is a very strong tendency for ill health and social problems to occur less frequently in more equal countries.

Health and social problems are more common in countries with bigger income inequalities. To emphasize that the prevalence of poor health and social problems in rich countries really is related to inequality, rather than to an average living standard, they compared the index of health and social problems to average income.

And what they showed is that there is no clear trend toward better outcomes in health and social issues in richer countries. And this is true across states in the United States as well, that health and social problems are related to income inequality, but not to average income level.

The importance of community, social cohesion and solidarity to human well-being has been demonstrated repeatedly in research showing how beneficial friendship, involvement in community life are to health. Equality comes into the picture as a precondition for getting optimum healthy societies with optimum friendship and involvement in community life.

It may seem obvious that problems associated with relative deprivation should be more common in more unequal societies, however, if you ask people why greater equality reduces these problems, the most common assumption that greater equality helps those at the bottom. The truth is that in fact, when you increase the amount of equality—when you decrease inequalities—the vast majority of the population is harmed by greater inequality.

Thus, as examples, across whole populations, rates of mental illness are three times as high in the most unequal societies compared with the least equal societies. Similarly, in more equal societies, people are almost 10 times as likely to be imprisoned and two or three times as likely to be clinically obese, and murder rates may be many times higher in more unequal societies.

It looks as if based on all this research that the achievement of higher national standards of

educational performance may actually depend on reducing the social gradient in educational achievement in each country.

This is a really important message for us in Manitoba. We are debating now—and have been for some time—how we improve the outcomes of education in Manitoba. And what this research is showing is that an important aspect of this is actually reducing inequalities in Manitoba. And this may actually be a much more effective way than all the totality of measures which are put forward in Bill 64.

It is interesting. It is interesting. Since 1980, income inequality in the United States has increased rapidly. And in this same period, public expenditures on prisons has increased six times as fast as public expenditure on higher education. That's not a direction that we want here in Manitoba. We would rather be spending that money on getting greater equality and on helping students get better education.

What is actually most exciting about this research is that it shows reducing inequality would increase the well-being and the quality of life for all of us. Too often, every problem is seen as needing its own solution, unrelated to others. People are encouraged to exercise, not to have unprotected sex, to say no to drugs, to try to relax, to sort out their work-life balance and to give their children quality time.

* (16:40)

The only thing that many of these policies have in common is that they often seem to be based on the belief that the poor need to be taught to be more sensible. The glaringly obvious fact that these problems have common roots in inequality and relative deprivation disappears from view and is not considered. We need in Manitoba to consider it.

It is clear that income distribution provides policy-makers with a way of improving the psychosocial well-being of whole populations. It's interesting countries like Japan manage to achieve low levels of inequality before taxes and benefits. The Japanese differences in gross earnings before taxes and benefits are smaller, so there is less need for large-scale redistribution.

But other countries have operated differently and treated—created greater equality by having more redistribution of income. There are more than one way of getting to a goal of achieving greater equality among people in Manitoba.

It is of interest that this research extends a clear warning, a clear warning to those like the government in Manitoba right now who want low public expenditures and taxation. Because if you fail to avoid high inequality, you will need more prisons and more police; you will have to deal with higher rates of mental illness, drug abuse and every other kind of problem. If keeping taxes and benefits down leads to wider income differences, the ensuing social ills may force you to raise public expenditures to cope. This Bill 71 is counterproductive, and it's counterproductive because it will increase inequalities, and those inequalities will cause greater social problems and social health problems.

There is a choice between using public expenditure to keep inequality low—which is the best option—or Pallister government option to cope with social harm where inequality is high. We need to bring all this together. Our drive should be to reduce inequalities in Manitoba. And by reducing inequalities in Manitoba, we will improve school performance, we will improve health of people, we will improve our whole society.

Bill 71 makes a big mistake because what it's trying to do is to create greater inequality. It is providing more benefits to those who are already well off and less to no benefits—some cases actually may be worse—to those who are less well off.

This amendment is very important because it points out that we don't want to create greater inequalities; we want to create greater equalities. And so I and the Manitoba Liberals will be supporting this amendment because equalities are important and they are very important to government policy. And creating greater equality is important if we're going to have a better community, a better society.

What the Pallister government is proposing takes us in exactly the wrong direction, the direction of greater inequalities, more social problems and poorer health. Let us all support this amendment. Let us pass this amendment and get on with making a better Manitoba. Let us turn around from the direction of Bill 71, which creates greater inequalities. Let us support the amendment which creates a more—recognizes that a more equal society is a better society. Let us support the amendment.

I hope all MLAs will do so and so that we can move forward at this stage and get on with Estimates, get on with dealing with the other business of government and create a better Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker—Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I will now pass it on to others, who I'm sure will have their own comments. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Any further speakers?

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): In respect to Bill 71, I rise today to put a few words on the record in support of the reasoned amendment, that the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word that, and substituting the following: this House declines to give second reading to Bill 71, The Education Property Tax Reduction Act (Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act and Income Tax Act Amended), because this bill fails to ensure an equitable distribution across income groups and makes life less affordable for renters in Manitoba.

Members on the other side of the House don't want to pay taxes, and they try to shame those of us who believe in paying our fair share to support social programs, health care and education. Taxes are a way that we keep our communities safer, we keep our water safe, we protect provincial parks and we pay the salaries of nurses, teachers, education assistants and firefighters.

In Manitoba, all education is funded by taxes: one portion by income tax, collected by the provincial government; and one portion by property tax, collected through the municipal government at the direction of school boards.

This government has hamstrung school boards' ability to adequately fund education by cutting their provincial contribution year after year and also imposing a cap on property taxes. Now, after saying they would phase out property education taxes over ten years, after they balance the budget, but now they're borrowing money to reduce the property tax.

I wonder if Manitobans realize that their taxes also pay for government debt? This government are masters of the sleight of hand. They'll send Manitobans a cheque, signed by the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Pallister), while raising their hydro rates, firing nurses, cutting school staff, telling teachers to buy their own supplies and charging Manitobans more to enjoy provincial parks.

Bill 71 is turning the Premier's education property tax rebate into a political ploy. If the Premier and his government cared about getting money to Manitobans, they could do it right now; he could have done it yesterday or last week or the week before that. He and his government are entirely capable of getting this money to Manitobans without any new

legislation, but doing it that way doesn't let the Premier (Mr. Pallister) sign the cheques or send out flyers with his face on it.

It's obvious to all of us that the Premier is trying to buy back his dying popularity. They could have introduced this bill earlier so that it would be guaranteed passage, but they chose to wait—or maybe they never thought of it at all until the Premier saw in the polls that he was the second least popular in all of Canada—and now he's trying to pay for people to like him.

Manitobans are smarter than that though, and as I mentioned, this government previously said that they would be phasing out education taxes over a 10-year period after they balance the budget.

But now they've accelerated that when we're facing record deficits due to the pandemic. It's no coincidence that they've introduced this tax break when the Premier's popularity is an all-time low and we're two years away from an election. They're using borrowed money that Manitobans will pay for to buy future votes.

* (16:50)

There's a lot of concern over how this government will make up the revenue lost in the years to come, nearly \$900 million. Currently, the education property tax pays for the education our children receive, and Manitobans are justifiably concerned that this tax cut will come at the expense of funding education.

Some of the things that property taxes have specifically paid for over the last number of years—and I know this isn't an extensive list, because I haven't reviewed every budget of every school board across Manitoba—but I have a pretty good sense.

For example, this year alone, \$210,000 had to be cut for a milk subsidy. This subsidizes milk to make it more affordable to students in Winnipeg School Division so that they can have something nutritious, something with protein in it, at lunch time. This has been provided—a subsidy that's been provided for—since the '80s. And that was cut because this government isn't funding education or funding students adequately.

Adult crossing guards: these are paid for out of the provincial taxation dollars. They've always been paid for out of—at least in—within the city boundaries—out of the funds provided by property taxation. So many adult crossing guards are being cut this year, and I think a lot of parents, especially those that live

near very busy intersections and busy streets, you know, multiple lanes of traffic, really appreciate the safety provided by having adult crossing guards in those locations.

Number of school clerks are having their hours reduced this year from full-time to part-time positions. One thing we know is that this government has been holding schools at a 2.7 per cent for administration costs, which is much lower than a lot of other places. We—there are private schools in this province whose administration costs are as high as 15 per cent.

There's even members on the other side of the House whose children have attended these schools, and they've happily paid for those administration costs, but they don't want to pay the fees for public education.

Some of the other things that property taxes have helped fund are First Nations and Indigenous Elders in schools. Those dollars have provided additional supports for mental health and for specialized programs such as an autism program or a specialized program for teens with high anxiety. And property taxes have paid for millions of dollars for nutrition programs.

So I'm not going to argue that we have to continue to collect property taxes. I think that there are lots of different ways to go about how education is funded, but I am going to argue that it's completely inappropriate to not have a plan to—as this government never has a plan, which—that's been so apparent over the last 14 months—painfully apparent. People have died because of the lack of planning. But here we go again.

There's no real plan; there's just a decision to borrow money to make the Premier look popular right now or to buy some votes right now, and the only real plan is to make up this revenue through so-called economic growth, which, of course, means they don't have a plan.

It's completely fiscally irresponsible during a time we're facing a massive deficit thanks to the pandemic. There's no reasons for why this government had to offer these rebates through legislation. The Premier sent out similar rebate cheques to seniors early in the pandemic, and he did so without legislation.

You know what was similar about that? People got \$200 whether they needed it or not. So, I knew all kinds of seniors who feel like their income is adequate based on the pensions that they collect. It didn't change at all because of COVID. Their expenses

didn't really change because of COVID, but they got a \$200 cheque.

Unfortunately, all kinds of families didn't and there were seniors who were desperately impacted by these changes who still only got a \$200 cheque, which barely paid for some extra groceries. I think all of us would have rather seen those dollars get invested to actually saving seniors' lives for those that died in personal-care homes because of the lack of planning. But no lessons learned from that.

The Premier (Mr. Pallister) is still going to go ahead and send Manitobans signed cheques that will cost Manitobans an additional \$1.3 million; \$1.3 million could fund the entire nutrition programs to all Winnipeg-area schools. It's irresponsible and an expensive attempt to buy popularity and the support of Manitobans to invest that money in postage stamps when children are starving, but that's what our government's doing.

This bill does nothing for renters long-term, and it takes away the rebate they did have. This tax change benefits the wealthy more and shifts the burden to lower-income Manitobans. This is really a tax cut for the rich that will hurt regular Manitobans and their families as it fundamentally shifts the future tax burden onto middle-class and low-income Manitobans.

What the Premier doesn't want Manitobans to know is that while he touts fiscal responsibility, sending out these cheques with the Premier's signature on it costs people—costs us, Manitobans, taxpayers—\$1.3 million, and this money could have been sent yesterday. It did—never needed—it never needed postage stamps and envelopes. It never needed this bill to be passed; if there was any real meaning to this.

It's obvious that this government only cares about helping themselves and their wealthy friends. A 25 per cent rebate across the board means that landlords and wealthy Manitobans will benefit the most. This bill gives wealthy Manitobans the same 25 per cent rebate on their second property and on their third and on their fourth and as we've heard in this House before, there's simply no limit. Meanwhile, the average Manitoba—Manitoban will get only \$375, but most of that will get eaten up by this government's hiking of utility rates.

Manitoba renters currently get a \$700 tax credit. This will be reduced by 25 per cent each year and ultimately phased out completely, meaning they will lose out while others gain. Landlords will continue to get more and more benefits; renters will lose the few benefits that they had. All the while, their rents can still get jacked up through above-guideline approvals.

You know, Manitobans who are renting are the same people who've been hit the hardest by the pandemic: women, seniors, Black, Indigenous, people of colour, young people, people with disabilities and low-income Manitobans.

I can really appreciate this. You know, I was a renter until I was 35 years old and my partner was 39 years old; it was a really big deal when we got to buy a house. But I remember how much the property tax helped us when we were still, you know, struggling in jobs that didn't pay that well, when we started a family. So I can understand what this loss will be like for people.

Small businesses will also lose out from this tax cut, as they won't see any of this money if they're renting. This tax cut will reward landlords who didn't even want to participate in the federal commercial rent assistance program back in spring of 2020. What incentive do those landlords have to pass along their savings to renters? None at all. And this bill makes that completely okay.

Small businesses are also not included in the rent freeze, which means their costs could still go up exponentially but landlords reap the business—the benefits. Small businesses have been hit extremely hard by the pandemic, and this bill provides them with no relief whatsoever. I've seen businesses closing throughout my constituency and it's devastating. Many businesses have been forced to lay off staff and others close the door—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

When this matter is before the House, the honourable member for Wolseley (Ms. Naylor) has 16 minutes left—remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, April 26, 2021

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