

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

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

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

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 27, 2021

*The House met at 10 a.m.*

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

Please be seated. Good morning, everyone.

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, could you please call for debate this morning, Bill 222, The Lobbyists Registration Amendment Act.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS—  
PUBLIC BILLSBill 222—The Lobbyists Registration  
Amendment Act

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** It has been announced that we debate for Bill 222, The Lobbyists Registration Amendment Act, and the honourable member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie) has seven minutes remaining.

**An Honourable Member:** A point of order.

## Point of Order

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Oh, the honourable member for Concordia, on a point of order.

**Mr. Matt Wiebe (Acting Opposition House Leader):** You know, new technology and then sort of a changing landscape, we understand there can be issues with how we connect. I did have a chance to communicate with the member for Keewatinook, and, unfortunately, his Internet is having issues.

But I'd like to ask leave that we defer his speaking time 'til a little bit later this afternoon, just to allow him to hopefully—*[interjection]*—or, sorry, this morning—thank you to the clerks—and just to allow

him a chance to reconnect and hopefully join us here this morning virtually.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Well, one thing I will say it's not a point of order.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** But we will put it by through to the House here to have leave to have the honourable member for Keewatinook to be able to do his speech after later on in the morning.

Is it will to the House to allow that to happen?  
*[Agreed]*

So we'll move on to the next speaker.

**Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** Just want to have the opportunity to get a few words on record here.

There are a few parts of this bill that is amending the lobbyists administration act that desperately needs some clarification and—for example, registration through union leaders. The issue if any or all communication that takes place with lobbyists and union members and union leaders in particular would require that union leaders register.

And it's unclear language throughout the bill with respect to representation and advocacy. And there needs to be adequate and justifiable differentiation, as my colleague from River Heights has mentioned, between what is bargaining and what is lobbying. It's important that these different actions—lobbying, bargaining, negotiating—are clearly defined, and this legislation does not do this.

And, you know, Mr. Speaker, I've also spoken with my colleague from St. Boniface, because he has been a union member and has spoken from experience, and he's mentioned that even when he was part of a good union, representation was not always there. And he even had work colleagues who lost their jobs because the NDP freezes at the Manitoba Museum.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I think it's really, really important because bargaining is a right and being able to bargain for the value of one's own work is a fundamental right. And it's very, very different than being a lobbyist, and that's why there is need for a clearer distinction between the two. And until this legislation

brings forth some more clarity, we can't support it going forward at this point.

Thank you.

**Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame):** Bill 222, The Lobbyists Registration Amendment Act, is a bill that amends The Lobbyists Registration Act and it repeals clause 3(2)(e), which now includes union representatives, in that any union representative will have to register if (1) they're administering or negotiating a collective agreement with the government or a government agency, or (2) that they're representing a unionized employee of the government or a government agency.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am still in many ways a rookie MLA who hasn't experienced a full year of a normal session. When I first got elected, we were whirled into Estimates right away, and soon after, COVID hit and the session was stopped until we were able to meet and conduct this innovative and safer hybrid session.

And as a rookie MLA, unfortunately, I'm new to doing close readings of sessional bills presented here in the Manitoba Legislature. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I recently had to email one of our very helpful and knowledgeable legislative clerks to get guidance on how to properly refer to a bill's clauses and subclauses, sections and subsections and the parts with the roman numerals.

With the help of our very smart legislative interns assigned to our caucus, I've been learning how to efficiently navigate the Manitoba Legislature website to look up the current bills and the related bills referring to the proposed amendments.

And with the amazing help of our talented legislative librarians, I've been able to access academic research, community and government reports and media coverage across provincial jurisdiction on the very topic of these bills that I'm studying before me.

And finally, I did my best recently to speak to folks who know a lot more about lobbying, conflict of interest, lobbyist registration acts and the role of unions in lobbying. I interviewed Jeffrey Schnoor, Manitoba's Conflict of Interest Commissioner and Lobbyist Registrar, and I also spoke to Anna Rothney, the executive director of the Manitoba Federation of Labour.

With these impressive resources at my disposal, I slightly feel more equipped to adequately do the job

that my Notre Dame constituents sent me here to do: to hold this government to account and, in this case, to argue why the government's bill before us this morning, Bill 222, The Lobbyists Registration Amendment Act, is not worth the focus of this government nor the time and resources of everyone employed here in this Legislature that they spent in order to get this private member's bill here in front of us today.

First of all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Bill 222 is an amendment to the original Lobbyists Registration Act. The original act, not this amendment, is an important foundational act for our province that deals with lobbying, transparency, conflicts of interest.

This original act defines what lobbying is and talks about the two different kinds of lobbyists: consultants and in-house lobbyists. The original act also sets out the office and the role of the Lobbyists Registrar. Again, our current registrar is commissioner Jeffrey Schnoor, who was gracious enough to respond to my questions on the original act and on the proposed amendment.

Again, the member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma) is making an amendment to the original act, proposing that any union representative will have to register if administering or negotiating a collective agreement with the government or a government agency or representing a unionized employee of the government or a government agency.

After doing my readings and interviews on this proposed amendment, I'm very disappointed to say that this is a completely useless amendment proposed by the member.

\* (10:10)

In many ways, our current 'lobbis'—or Lobbyists Registration Act needs improvement. For instance, the current act has no teeth. The current act gives no investigative powers to the commissioner nor does it give the commissioner any power to reprimand those that transgress the Province's law with penalties. That would be a useful amendment that the member for Radisson could have brought forward. That would have strengthened the act.

If the member would've taken the time to study, for instance, the lobbyists registration act in neighbouring Saskatchewan, the member would see that Saskatchewan recently made good reforms to increase transparency and strengthen democratic principles by correspondingly strengthening the powers of their

lobbyists registration—to lobbyists registrar, rather, to investigate and reprimand with penalties.

There are provinces like Saskatchewan, even the federal government, that have reformed their respective lobbyist registration acts to provide for increased transparency, but none have seen fit to make the kinds of useless amendments that the member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma) has proposed. I repeat: there is no other jurisdiction in Canada that sees this as a top or necessary improvement.

A real improvement or amendment to The Lobbyists Registration Act, one could argue, would be to decrease the hours from 100 to 30 hours before in-house lobbyists are required to report their activities. Currently, in-house lobbyists only need to report or take the time to register their lobbying activities if they spend 100 hours or more per year on lobbying.

Again, jurisdictions across Canada are finding that this section of their current act might be wanting, so they are making improvements and amendments here. Jurisdictions, again, like Saskatchewan, have recently reformed their act to include this necessary and wise change. Again, this is not what we're talking about here in Manitoba for some reason.

Other jurisdictions are looking at ways to include other kinds of lobbying not currently covered in the act. For instance, the work that some charities and non-profits do or other kinds of lobbying engaged by organizations like public campaigns or folks putting out billboards. Again, this was not considered by this government.

Apparently, it is also well known that Manitoba's current online system, the lobbyists registration is quite wanting. Instead of looking to improve or modernize or sufficiently fund our online lobbyists registration system, bringing it in line with other jurisdictions—namely, the federal government—with more transparent, stringent, publicly accessible online registration, Bill 222 proposes none of that.

The purpose of the original, foundational Lobbyists Registration Act is to create transparency. The act of lobbying decision-makers is appropriate, but it must be done in daylight. It shouldn't be done in shadows, and that's why improvements or amendments like the ones in Saskatchewan should be considered because they provide more transparency.

But this government's proposed amendment, it's not about strengthening the democratic process or even lobbying at all. Instead, Bill 222 attempts to further hamper a union of workers' constitutionally

enshrined right to collectively negotiate bargaining agreements and hamper a worker's right to stand up for herself when provisions in those agreements are not being upheld.

What kind of daylight or more transparency are we bringing to bear on the act of scrutinizing union representatives as they administer and negotiate collective agreements with the government or government agency or in their act to represent a unionized employee of the government or a government agency?

As the executive director for MFL put it—Manitoba Federation of Labour, Anna Rothney—she said: This is our job description. She said: This is what we do every day. We are not hiding in shadows. We proudly say that this is our purpose and that we stand up for workers every day.

I have to point out that whoever drafted this proposed Bill 222 amendment did not do a close reading of The Lobbyists Registration Act. Unions are explicitly, as an example, already under the definition sections of organization along with the long list of defined organizations of business, trade, industry, profession or voluntary organizations.

And if any of these specified organizations engaged in the definition of lobbying, those organizations' actions and those unions' actions would be definitions—be engaged in lobbying. If they did, they would see at the very beginning in this section with the definitions—are very exact, full definitions of the word lobby and its implications for this act.

Please permit me to read for the record the definitions of lobby from the said act. And while I do, please try to catch which of these definitions of lobby could possibly apply to a union representative in the course of their job negotiating a collective bargaining agreement.

Lobby means to communicate with the public official in attempt to influence the development of a legislative proposal by the government of Manitoba; the introduction of a bill or resolution in the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba; the making or amendment of a regulation to which The Statutes and Regulations Act applies; the development, amendment or termination of a program or policy of the government of Manitoba; the awarding of a grant, contribution, either financial benefit on behalf of the Crown; to arrange a meeting between a public official and another person; to communicate with a public official and attempt to influence the awarding of a contract.

None of these lobby definitions explicitly relate to the work of a union representative in their duty to specifically negotiate a collective bargaining agreement or the right of a worker to be represented by her union if her CBA provisions are not being upheld.

We are—again, I refer to the government workers as she and her, and I do so purposely because research shows that majority of public sector employees are women, and research also shows that across jurisdictions, since 1990s, public sector workers have had a very difficult time in negotiating collective bargaining agreements with their employers, specifically the government, who are also legislators like this PC government.

And that is because governments who are not successful in negotiating cutbacks—these governments, when they're not successful in negotiating cutbacks for their unions, they've simply reverted to legislating these provisions by law. And with this amendment, we are seeing this attempt of this PC government to do that.

Bill 222 is another blatant attempt to whittle away and delegitimize workers' rights to collectively bargain and the workers' rights to call their employers out when—

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

**Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital):** I'm pleased to speak on this bill this morning, although I think the bill is, you know, not brought in good faith, but I'll discuss those points in a few minutes.

I did want to just begin by thanking the previous speaker, my colleague and the lady from Notre Dame, who did an excellent job in summarizing some of the issues with Bill 222 and showed that the excellent research that she put into identifying the—not only issues, but the historical reasons why those issues are so concerning and why this proposed bill not only doesn't serve a purpose, but actually, in some cases, it goes against its actual intentions. So thank you to the previous member for enlightening us and this House with some fantastic factual information.

With regards to Bill 222, The Lobbyists Registration Amendment Act, I think it's important to note that there's not a proper definition of what lobbying is in this bill, as well as it—this bill specifically talks about union representation and doesn't refer to any other lobbyist—any other groups that may be lobbying the government or elected official.

It's important to note that it targets unions and union representation, and in terms of registering as lobbyists specifically, because I think it goes to a broader attack that we've seen from this government on unionized workers, on labour movements in general, and that's been consistent, I think, since the Pallister government took office.

I've noticed that in many of the government bills it's been quite evident that they have been against what we've seen from the positive movements from labour unions over the course of the many generations that labour movements have brought to workers in Manitoba, things like increasing the average wage for workers, which we know is something that not only benefits workers, but allows those workers to go in enhanced and spend that money throughout our economy.

That only—not only raises our economy and improves the quality of life for those individuals, but is surely something that our government would see as a—should see as a value in a depressed economy that we're experiencing right now.

And so one of the benefits of unions is having that emphasis on improving wages for their workers, which I think the government should, at this see—at this time, see as a benefit. Instead, they apparently see it as an attack, something that Manitoba workers shouldn't have, and that it's apparently—that must be the reason they're bringing bills like this Bill 222 forward for us to debate today.

I mean, we also know that unions provide fantastic 'benits' when it comes to workplace health and safety and workplace benefits. You know, in an age when we're looking at not only the safety issues when it comes to job site safety and working in safe work environments that keep you physically safe and allow you to go home.

\* (10:20)

But it's also important to factor in the mental health and safety of employees. So I know that many unions have talked about this with their workers, and it's something that is—that they have made endeavors to employ employers to develop practices to ensure that their workers have safe mental health environments, environments that are safe for their mental health.

And for them to—and for unions to really look—take a look and say that, you know, this is important, we know that our workers are experiencing in some cases mental health issues, and it's important for their

employers to have safeguards in place to prevent issues that might cause stress and strain on the workforce, and which may lead to more, you know, time off work, which I think, again, is not good for employers.

Bill 222—which, again, it attacks unions—doesn't go to serve any of these purposes. While this bill does claim that it's going to be—to add transparency to a system, it really is unnecessary bureaucracy. And for a government that claims it is about reducing red tape, this bill is nothing more than red tape. It is a frivolous piece of legislation that would force additional paper-work and additional bureaucracy that would be undertaken by unions, and would serve no purpose to add to transparency in our system.

And when it comes to transparency, this—that this bill claims it would increase, I find that hard to believe that this government would be seeking for the transparency when—because they have a track record of doing the exact opposite. And that track record of decreased transparency is quite evident when we look at the many bills—the 19 bills that over the past—that for four months were hidden from not only this Legislature, but from the Manitoban people who rely on seeing what the text of their—of legislation is so that they know the impact that it will have on their lives.

We know that transparency, as it's trying to attempt to increase in bill 22—in 222, is not obviously apparent. And we've seen another example of that again just this past week with the many documents being brought to this 'houth' with reduced information and a lacking of financial figures and the vital information that all MLAs seek. I think it's very important that increased transparency be actually brought to this House.

You know, time and time again we see that this government fails to recognize the importance of all members' ability to do their jobs, and that is to be able to have the necessary information—both in texts of bills and financial information as it relates to government departments—so that we can actually critique, analyze and suggest ways and question how this government is running and how this government is doing its job.

It's obviously failing. That's clear. By the many number of attempts at hiding the actions of this government and its plans, it's clear that this government is failing.

And increased transparency is not just something that we want in this House on the—as the opposition,

but it's something that Manitobans are calling for, something that not only are they calling for, but something that they quite frankly they deserve. They deserve transparency.

Bill 222 does not add to transparency. It clearly is an attempt to make life more difficult for unions, to maybe possibly shame unions or their work for doing or not doing their perceived job in a manner that is apparently fit for—in the eyes of the government members. And not only does it create unnecessary work and it creates more red tape, but it's not going to serve the purpose the government or the member is seeking to bring with—forward with this bill, but it's not going to serve any useful purpose at all.

So obviously, quite frankly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we stand, or I stand opposed to this bill.

You know, it defines in this bill that lobbying is a legitimate activity. You know, Manitoba Lobbyist Registrar defines that it's a legitimate activity in a free and democratic society, to act and define as lobbying. And we support the fact that we know many organizations lobby, not just unions, but organizations made up of students, organizations made up of business sector individuals in various industries. Even faith-based institutions all have and are looking for their say when it comes to how this government run. But all those groups are excluded from this legislation.

The member simply chooses to single out the unions and the work that are done by the unions in our province. And I think this, again, clearly shows that this member has no interest in actually seeking transparency, no interest in actually making our system work better or their registration list work better, but simply is looking for another reason to attack unions and another reason to single them out. And I think that that is shameful because that, you know, unions, as we all know in our province, support workers, defend workers and stand up for their rights.

We, and myself, as someone who has been a worker knows the importance of this, support this. And we're happy that unions are here to fight and defend workers in our province, and so I think that this bill that clearly attacks unions does nothing to benefit our province.

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

**Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson):** I rise to speak about Bill 222, put forward by the member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma). It speaks volumes to me and Manitobans that we are again speaking about this bill.

We are in a third wave, and this government's priority is to try and take cheap political shots at unions. Why? Because unions see the PCs for what they are, a party that doesn't help working Manitobans. They are about their rich union-busting friends. After members opposite introduced bill 28, the illegal wage freeze act, much of—many private businesses followed suit.

There are many things we have today, thanks to unions, like overtime pay, the five-day work week, parental leave, workplace health and safety. And we've seen from this government that they continue to try and roll back safety, because why? Because they don't care about working Manitobans. They care about businesses. And that is evident in everything they do, the bills they put forward and their priorities. And that is unacceptable to members on this side of the House and to Manitobans.

Manitobans want to know that they can go to work safely. Unions are accountable to their members. Being a former member of a union, I'm proud to say I was a member of UNITE here and UFCW. Unions will show their books to any member. Unions' books are audited and provide financial updates to everyone at their meetings. Any member can ask about a cheque or an expense incurred by the union. Unions do not have to answer questions to non-members. Why? Because is it not their business. Unions are accountable to their members.

I wonder if the member from Radisson would feel the same way if this bill was about the chambers of commerce. Forcing unions to register as lobbyists is just another way for this government trying to attack unions, making it harder for them to do their jobs. Members are doing their job when they're negotiating a bargaining agreement. They are not lobbying, they are bargaining, which is a protected right.

How are they deal—how is dealing with a grievance lobbying? They're just trying to make it—they're just trying to stand up for their members and protect their members.

This bill is about making it harder for union members to get involved and they're trying to discourage members from being involved in their unions, because one of the things that the members opposite don't like is a strong union.

Manitoba lobbyists defines lobbyist as a legitimate activity in a free, democratic society, and the act defines lobbying as a need to—concerning and consult lobbying in an in-house lobbyist, communicate to

public officials in an attempt to influence or develop legislative proposals by the government of Manitoba or by members of the Legislative Assembly.

How does that fit for bargaining or grievance? That has nothing—the definition has nothing to do with bargaining a collective agreement or fighting for a member when it comes to a grievance.

I would encourage members opposite to actually pay attention to what goes on in unions and see what unions actually do because they seem to be misinformed on what unions are doing.

\*(10:30)

The introduction of this bill or of—to this Legislative Assembly, passage or defeat of any bill resolution before the Assembly is making amendments to the regulation as it defines this act, because it's an attack on unions. Members opposite just don't like them because they will call members opposite to account when they are attacking workers in this province. They have continued to attack workers, and unions have been one of the groups standing up to them.

And this bill isn't about accountability. It isn't about lobbying. It is about them trying to take cheap political shots at their opponents, and I find it absolutely disgraceful. The member from Radisson and members of his party are trying to use legislative powers to have a political fight against their perceived enemies, and that's just unacceptable. That's not what legislation is for. And they are misusing that, and I think it's absolutely abhorrent.

A free and open access to government is important for the public interest, which I support. The people need to know who is talking to their elected officials. But I question, how is bargaining a collective agreement or dealing with a grievance lobbying? It's not. Lobbying of public officials is a legitimate activity when appropriated conducted.

It is important that that be part and it be public, able to know who is attempting to influence the government. A system of registering paid lobbyists should not impede access to government. Lobbying, when conducted ethically, is a legitimate legal activity and is part of the democratic process. It is important that the public interest know and able to attempt to use influence in their government and in the details of lobbying.

The purpose of the registry is to provide transparency about lobbying in Manitoba. Following



the requirements of the act, lobbyists must file returns on their lobbyists' activities. There is no fee for filing, as a Lobbyists Registry on the online act. Lobbying—lobbyists can fill out any time and do a public search on who is lobbying their government.

This bill is about members opposite and their disdain for unions, and that is shown in their actions. Bill 222 is just another blatant attempt in a wide way of delegitimizing workers and their collective bargaining rights and trying tilt the favour into their rich union-busting friends' hands, and that's just abhorrent.

Bill 222 is a waste of Legislature focus because the resources—because the public represented does not need the government to be engaged in useless worker baiting. This government should be supporting and protecting every lives of essential workers that are critical to our infrastructure that are all dependent on this Province.

Once again, it shows the lack of priorities that this government has: it is not to Manitobans. They have kept child-care fees frozen. They have politicized the vaccine rollout. They're just not here for Manitobans, and this bill is just evident of it.

As we're entering the third wave, this is what we're talking about, this is a priority to this government—taking cheap political shots at unions that are standing up and saying, no, we need to protect essential workers, we need to ensure that front-line workers are rolled out at the—with the vaccine and we need to have transparency. And this government isn't interested in any of that. This government is interested in making sure that their friends are protected.

Any member of the public can proceed here in the morning and listen to our discussion on bill 22. Would it be a disgrace and disappointing and unbelievable that we are here at the brink of the third wave, and this government, even though backbenchers could try and come up with something positive, supportive of this private member's bill to improve the ability of accountability and the democratic transparency of our role as members to the public is served.

Who does it actually—who actually needs help? Essential workers and their families, to most vulnerable in our province to properly fund and design a vaccine rollout. Instead, we are debating bill 22, which is proposed amendment that doesn't even closely satisfy stated seven different definitions of lobbying the original bill specified.

We are elected more—we are elected to do more than this, and it is currently living the time when

people serve—need this more. Bill 22 is a half-baked attempt to fan partisan flames, delegitimize necessary work of union representation. It has nothing to do with actually improving the democratic process and transparency, modernization—strengthening provisions and the regulations related to the original lobbying act.

Bill 22 is a waste of this Legislature's focus and time and resources. We are in a very devastating position in this province and a race against time against COVID-19 variants. This government should be laser-eyed focused on fighting this pandemic. Instead, this PC government continues down this ever—attack on workers and in not ensuring people are protected.

We need a capable, responsible, evidentiary-based government. This government's—and that is not this government.

Bill 222 is a—blatant anti-worker. That's horrible, out of step, out of touch with what the essential workers need at this time. A government that will not support workers or their families, and essential workers—that have not done any of the heavy lifting through this pandemic. Where's the paid sick leave? Where is what essential workers and workers and Manitobans want?

I have not spoken to a single Manitoban that feels that this is a priority for them. It is unacceptable, it is apparent. And it's a partisan attack that—this government is trying to make it sound like this is a very prevalent issue. It is not. Unions are accountable to their members; they're not accountable to the member of Radisson.

And that is just what gets them going, that unions are accountable to their members and their members alone, and not to members opposite.

And this is also an attempt to make it so their union-busting friends can have access to the unions' books. It's not a business's business on what is in the strike fund for a company that—

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

#### House Business

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Okay, just—I just wanted to make it—just to mention this, that—for the information for the House, there was an issue in—this morning at 10 a.m. with the mic on—at the table. The mic was not on when I—the Deputy Clerk announced the absence of the Speaker.

For clarity, then, at 10 p.m.–10 a.m., it was announced that the Speaker was 'unavoidably' absent. And, accordance to the statutes of—the Deputy Speaker was asked to take the Chair.

Thank you. That was this—the announcement for that.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I have been informed that the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie) is still unable to connect to the Chamber Zoom call.

Accordingly, to—there is also leave—is there leave in the matter of—to remain standing in the name of the honourable member for Keewatinook? Agreed? *[Agreed]*

So when the matter is called again, the honourable member for Keewatinook will have—will be the first to have the seven minutes remaining if—when—if it has to go another day of this debate.

**Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows):** Thanks for the opportunity to put a few words on the record regarding Bill 222, The Lobbyists Registration Amendment Act.

First of all, I would like to appreciate my colleagues who spoke on this topic recently and raised a few very good points. When I think about this Bill 222 and—we realize that we have that—we already have The Lobbyists Registration Act, which is being amended through this proposed bill. And it repeals clause 3(2)(e), which now includes union representatives.

Now, any union representative will have to register if administering or negotiating a collective agreement with the government or a government agency, representing a unionized employee or the government or a government agency.

So let's try to understand the intentions. In simple words, this bill is an effort to put hurdles in the way of the people who stand up for workers, for labour, for common people. It puts additional barriers so that their job becomes harder, not easier.

\* (10:40)

So the time at which this bill is being brought forward is not appropriate, first of all. We are in the middle of a pandemic, and this is the time when people are asking for better vaccination plans. People are asking for prioritizing educators, teachers in the vaccine rollout. Transit workers have approached many of us, the legislators in Manitoba to raise our voice in support of them and prioritize them. Why?

Because we want to stand together as a community, as Manitobans, to fight this pandemic. But the government has other priorities.

This bill, this is not the time when we should be talking about how this government can use their political power to weaken the unions, the union representatives. This government has a track record, and it's very clear that they take every opportunity to speak against, stand against, work against the unions. What does that mean is that this government tries to stand against people's rights because unions—what the unions do is they stand up for common people's rights.

This government has brought forward bill 28, Bill 16 and so on, and we all have witnessed that this government has failed in their agenda to work against common people.

Manitobans understand the way this government is working. In the middle of the pandemic, there are so many other important things that we should be talking about in this Legislature.

Our time is important. Our time is priceless. And when we decide a topic on what we should be debating on a particular day, that's an important decision to be made. Just for an example, if we think that all the 57 MLAs sitting in this Chamber, they start wishing themselves happy birthdays every other day, that would be 114 minutes of the time of this Legislature, and that's a lot of time: 114 minutes could be utilized to talk about something which is important.

We should be coming together, we should be rising above the parties and politics, and we should be bringing about some topics that are really, really, really important. And when I hear this member, the member from Radisson, talking about unions and the workers, he often mentions union leaders and the workers. Clear-cut politics of division: he looks at a group of people who are building Manitoba, divide them into two groups, and emphasize again and again and again and to divide them so that they can pursue their own political agenda.

This bill does nothing but addresses their own political agenda. Manitobans who negotiate collective agreements with the government, they expect the government to come to the table in good faith, and this bill would force union representatives to register as lobbyists for doing standard things like negotiating a collective agreement. And it adds unnecessary bureaucracy for workers to simply do their job, adding an extra step to the process, which is going fine already. And it forces contract negotiations and

grievances to be reported by union representatives as lobbying when they are simply not lobbying efforts.

Workers should be able to do their work without unnecessary burdens put in place by this government, but this government is doing that knowingly. It creates unnecessary work for union representatives and creates an unnecessary amount of disclosure. So, again, the intention is to put extra items on their plate so that instead of standing up for their colleagues, for common workers, for labour, they should be lost in these procedural things.

It's unfortunate for this government to work this way. This is not the best use of the opportunity that we all have been blessed with. We should be prioritizing our work, our bills, our efforts so that we really work for Manitobans and to make our province a better place to live, not just picking up the things that make yourself happy, like just wishing yourself a happy birthday—

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

**Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, can you hear me—thank you.

It's a absolute honour and privilege to put a few record—a few words on record on Bill 222, brought forward by the member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma)—probably a slightly better gesture than the two minutes that could have been best—used better for his member's statement, rather than a birthday, which was quite odd, but let's talk about this bill that this member has brought forward, which is The Lobbyists Registration Amendment Act.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, pretty much this bill amends this act. It repeals clause 3(2)(e), which now includes union representatives. Now any union representative will have to register if (1) administering or negotiating a collective agreement with the government or a government agency, or (2) representing a unionized employee of a government or government agency.

So pretty much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Manitobans who negotiate collective agreements with government accept the government—expect the government to come to the table in good faith.

\* (10:50)

Bill 22 would force union representatives to register as lobbyists for doing standard things like negotiating a collective agreement. This bill adds unnecessary bureaucracy for workers to simply do their

jobs. This bill forces 'contrac' negotiations and grievances to be reported by union representatives as lobbying when these are simply not lobbying efforts.

So, workers should be able to do their work without unnecessary burdens put in place by government because this creates unnecessary work for union representatives and creates an unnecessary amount of disclosure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government is trying to create new hoops for unions to jump through so that they're too busy to stand up to this government's poor, poor decisions. Administering and negotiating collective agreements is not lobbying. Neither is simply—neither is simple—it is the simple act of representing a unionized employee of the government. Currently, the Lobbyists Registry and how it functions is completely inaccessible for Manitobans to access.

So the Manitoba Lobbyist Registrar defines lobbying as a legitimate activity in a free and democratic society and says the act defines lobby, quote, to mean in relation to a consultant lobbyist or an in-house lobbyist, to communicate with a public official in attempt to influence, such as the development of a legislative proposal by the government of Manitoba or by a Member of the Legislative Assembly, an MLA; or the introduction of a bill or resolution in the Legislative Assembly or the amendment, passage or defeat of any bill or resolution that is before the Legislative Assembly; or the making or amendment of a regulation as defined in the regulations act; or the development, amendment or termination of a program or policy of the government of Manitoba or government agency; or the awarding of a grant, contribution or other financial benefit by or on half—or on behalf of the crowned.

And in relation only to a consultant lobbyist, lobbying also includes: arranging a meeting between a public official and any other 'dividual' or communicating with a public official in attempt to influence the awarding of any contract by or on behalf of the Crown.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this does not currently include (1) administering or negotiating a collective agreement with the government or government agency or, (2) representing a unionized employee of the government or a government agency.

The current Lobbyists Registration Act came into force on April 30th, 2012. The attention of this act is to recognize that free and open access to government is an important matter of public interest. It's also

there to recognize that lobbying public officials is a legitimate activity when appropriately conducted. This act also recognizes that it's—that it is desirable that public officials and the public be able to know who is attempting to influence government and it also recognizes that a system for registering paid lobbyists should not impede access to government.

So, when lobbying is conducted ethically, it's a legitimate and a legal activity, and as part of the democratic process, it is an important matter of public interest to be able to know who is attempting to influence government and the details of the lobbying.

And also, the purpose of the registry is to provide transparency about lobbying in Manitoba; and in accordance with the requirements of the act, lobbyists must file returns on their lobbying activity. There is no fee to file. As a lobbyists registry is an online system, lobbyists can file any time and the public can search at any time.

So in reference to interference in labour disputes, I want to put on record that this Premier (Mr. Pallister) has demonstrated time and time again that he doesn't want to negotiate with unions and does not respect the rights of workers. The Premier has no problem sticking his nose in collective bargaining agreements, interfering with our schools, Crown corporations and post-secondary institutions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Premier told the U of M to rip up a bargain—collective agreement proposal which caused a strike with professors at the University of Manitoba in 2016. I'm a proud graduate from University of Manitoba.

The Labour Board ultimately found that the University of Manitoba engaged in unfair labour practices at the Premier's direction. And then he interfered again in 2020, nearly leading to another strike that would have been devastating for all students, professors and staff.

The Premier also interfered in negotiations with the Winnipeg School Division bus drivers, leading to a strike right when our kids went back to school in the fall. He also ordered wage freezes for teachers and MPI workers. And now, he's refusing to let Manitoba Hydro negotiate in good faith.

So, the Premier's unconstitutional wage freeze led to IBEW workers going on strike, the same workers the Premier praised for their heroic efforts during the October 2019 storm. When this government gets involved in labour disputes, things for Manitoba workers get worse, not better.

So what I wanted to talk about was the—in terms of the Saskatchewan, Brad Wall, former—

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

**Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry):** Certainly, it's an honour to put a few words on the record this morning in relation to Bill 222.

You know, the word that comes to mind when you think of this bill is bad faith, and this is another example of this government bringing forward bath—bad faith legislation. And when I say bad faith, I mean legislation that isn't actually brought forward to meet some type of policy objective or goal; it has some other, oftentimes nefarious or questionably ethical purpose.

And it's clear that, you know, much like the balanced budget legislation that they have brought in, it's political theatre—that it isn't actually designed to remedy a problem because there's really no problem here. This is about, you know, if you could distill what the Pallister government is about it's grievance politics. They don't have a positive vision for Manitoba. They don't have some place that they want to take Manitoba or—

\* (11:00)

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

When this matter is before us again in the House, we will—it will be—remains standing in the name of the member from Keewatinook, who will be called first, who will have seven minutes remaining. It will also be in the standing of the name of the honourable member for Fort Garry, who will have nine minutes remaining, who will be called second.

## RESOLUTIONS

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The hour being 11 o'clock, I am now calling the Resolution 20, Keeping the More Money on Manitoba Tables, sponsored by the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart).

## House Business

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):** Just quickly on a matter of House business, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Pursuant to rule 33(7), I'm announcing that the private member's resolution be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be the one

put forward by the honourable member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk). The title of the resolution is called Keeping Manitoba's Parks Accessible.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** It has been announced by the honourable Government House Leader that, pursuant to rule 33-7, I am now announcing that the private member's resolution be considered for the next Tuesday on private members' business will be in the one put forward by the honourable member for Swan River. The title of the resolution is Keeping Manitoba's Parks Accessible.

### **Res. 20—Keeping More Money on Manitoba Tables**

**Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie):** I move, seconded by the member for Lagimodière (Mr. Smith),

*WHEREAS the former Provincial Government loved raising taxes, and making life less affordable for Manitobans each and every year; and*

*WHEREAS during their tenure the previous Provincial Government took money off the kitchen tables of Manitobans, and put it onto its own cabinet table; and*

*WHEREAS the previous Provincial Government raised 15 different taxes in 14 years, resulting in the highest taxes west of Quebec; and*

*WHEREAS under the previous Provincial Government, despite it making promises to the contrary, Manitobans were taxed more on services such as salon and hair care services, wills, and raised the PST; and*

*WHEREAS Manitoba Hydro rates under the previous Provincial Government rose as much as 40% due to mismanagement of major infrastructure projects, placing a massive burden on Manitobans; and*

*WHEREAS the previous Provincial Government drained its "rainy-day" fund as a personal piggy bank, forcing the current Provincial Government to clean up its mess after 17 years of financial mismanagement; and*

*WHEREAS the current Provincial Government is focused on fixing the finances, repairing services, and rebuilding the economy; and*

*WHEREAS the current Provincial Government balanced the budget in just four years back in 2020; and*

*WHEREAS the current Provincial Government is delivering in full on its 2020 Tax Rollback Guarantee one year earlier than planned through initiatives such*

*as indexing the Basic Personal Amount and personal income tax bracket with the rate of inflation; and*

*WHEREAS the current Provincial Government will continue to lift Manitobans out of poverty by ensuring safe and affordable housing and strengthening social services; and*

*WHEREAS the current Provincial Government is eliminating education property taxes by 50% in just two years, and maintaining its goal to eliminate them within ten years; and*

*WHEREAS the current Provincial Government will grow its way out of the deficit caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and not put the burden on the backs of Manitobans.*

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba commend and recognize Budget 2021, Protecting Manitobans, Advancing Manitoba, for keeping more hard-earned dollars on the tables of Manitobans while improving and modernizing services for the future recovery from COVID-19 pandemic.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** It has been moved by the honourable member for Portage la Prairie, seconded by the honourable member for Lagimodière, that

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba commend and recognize the Budget 2021, Protecting Manitobans, Advancing Manitoba, and keeping the—more hard-earned dollars on the tables of Manitobans while also improving and modernizing services for the future recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

And I just want to give—as—to have leave from the House to have—be—there was the—consider of this matter to be printed—as printed on the order page.

Is there leave? [Agreed]

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba commend and recognize "Budget 2021: Protecting Manitobans, Advancing Manitoba," for keeping more hard-earned dollars on the tables of Manitobans while also improving and modernizing services for the future recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Mr. Wishart:** I appreciate the opportunity to bring forward this resolution and to talk about our budget that we have brought forward for 2021. We think this is a good forward-looking budget doing two things, in many ways: protecting Manitobans with the programs we have put in place and future programs, but also

thinking down the road as to the recovery which we're all looking forward to and hoping that things improve in terms of the pandemic and that progress is made.

Good governments make the difficult decisions necessary to ensure the protection and the sustainability of quality services for their citizens. We have lived through a decade of debt, decay and decline when the NDP were in charge of our government. Our government has begun the hard work required to repair this damage, correct the course and move toward balance in a sustainable way.

We are focused on fixing our finances, repairing our services and rebuilding the economy. The NDP made politically motivated quick fixes, papering over the problems and—that often resulted in unsustainable spending growth and massive debt and poor results.

During their tenure, the NDP no doubt took money off the kitchen table, not only with taxes but in other ways, and put it on the Cabinet table.

Now, we know that the NDP, when they were in government, never met a tax that they didn't love. During 14 years, they made 15 tax increases. They raised taxes on Manitobans for years, creating the highest tax regime west of Quebec.

We all know about their gross mismanagement of Manitoba Hydro resulting in huge debt for one of our more important—our most important Crown corporations, costing Manitobans large tax increases now and into the future.

After promising Manitobans they would not raise the PST, they did it anyway, something that we campaigned on and we're proud to be able to reverse and I think this is something that Manitobans will not forget.

The NDP also don't seem to believe in balanced budgets, as evident of their massive spending problems during their 17 years in problem—in power, plunging our province into debt, doubling our debt in six years. During this time, our services—both physical, social—deteriorated while the NDP plunged Manitoba further into debt.

*Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Speaker, in the Chair*

Our government has worked extremely hard to right this—their wrongs and clean up the massive mess left behind by the former NDP government. We have improved services all the while balancing the budget by 2020, just four years after we had formed government.

Now, we all know the NDP had a spending problem. It was that simple. They would spend money without gaining results, sometimes our—something our government has focused on: getting results for the dollars that we've spent.

Last five years of their government, the NDP overspent their deficit targets by an average of 68 per cent per year. Not only could they not budget, they couldn't meet the budget that they had.

The NDP, in the end, were responsible for Manitoba's first credit downgrade in 30 years. The NDP emptied the fiscal stabilization or the rainy day fund during times of increases in revenue transfers by the federal government. So during the good times, they ran it down.

Over their time in power, the NDP made hundreds of millions of withdrawals. Our government was proud to be able to return funds to this important buffer, which is able to use these funds to help during our COVID-19 recovery and during the biggest crisis we have seen in some time.

Not only did they raise the PST to fund their overspending after promising Manitobans that they would not do so during the 2011 election, but they began to charge it on additional goods and services. They made—they added things like property insurance, which was a real blow to Manitobans; personal services; wills and probate fees. The list goes on, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So, in fact, we were being taxed not only during our lives but beyond our lives by the NDP.

The NDP also spent taxpayer dollars on their friends. Former Cabinet minister Steve Ashton told his department to hand a \$5-million untendered contract to purchase Tiger Dams from a company that was run by NDP friends and donors. And then there was the \$15 million spent on a company to custom-design a system for student bursaries and loans that never ended up processing any claims.

The NDP rushed announcements of massive amounts of debt they owned—rushed—sorry, the NDP rushed announcements on the massive amount of debt they owed on Investors Group Field right before the 2011 election, and then—they then announced later that they were on the hook for \$200 million in construction costs.

Now, we think that all this over—you would think that all this overspending on budgets might result in some of the best services in Canada, well, to soften the

blow of the crippling debt the NDP left behind. Sadly, we know that's not to be the case.

Sadly, we know that not to be the case. We had the longest emergency department waits in Canada. We have had the highest ambulance fees in history. We had the highest level of child poverty in Canada. We had record numbers of children in care.

We had the worst results in education in the country. We had a public safety system that was crumbling and we were buying pieces on the Internet to try and keep it running. We had billions in terms of housing maintenance—public housing maintenance that needed to be done, and also billions in terms of deferred road maintenance.

Worst of all, our economy was crumbling through numerous measures available: we had the highest PST in Canada, we had the highest payroll taxes, we had the lowest basic personal exemption for income tax, and the lowest GDP per capita—that is probably the scariest measure.

This is the NDP record. They really can't hide from it. I know they don't want to own it, but it's a reality and—that Manitobans will remember moving forward.

\* (11:10)

Our government is proud of the work that we have done in improving our services while also reducing the provincial debt. We have lots of work to do to continue to clean up the mess by the—left by the NDP.

Our government is proud to be a government that makes life more affordable for Manitobans, unlike the NDP was. We've delivering on our 2020 tax rollback guarantee one year earlier than planned, including keeping our promise to phase out education property taxes.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in my previous life, I had the pleasure of representing farmers in the province of Manitoba, and one of our lobby efforts involved the removal of education property taxes from farmland.

And I recall that—some measure of success when the NDP did a half measure, as they often do. They came up with a deferral of education property, limited in nature, but it did take a little of the pressure off for a short period of time.

And I recall receiving—and we had to apply for it and there was a fair bit of paperwork involved, of course—and I recall receiving the first cheque back, accompanied by a letter from then-minister of

Agriculture, Rosann Wowchuk, taking credit, of course, for having done this and taking a lot of credit for improving that—the situation for Manitoba farmers.

And this did help take the pressure off for a few years, but then, with increased assessments and inflationary factors, they didn't deal with the problem. In fact, they just deferred the problem.

We can grow our way out of deficits and back to balance by investing in more jobs, tax relief and economic growth.

Now, we'll reduce the education property tax by 50 per cent over the next two years for residential and farm properties. That's 25 per cent per year. And on other properties we will reduce it by 10 per cent. Homeowners across Manitoba can expect an average rebate of around to \$800 over the two years.

We're also removing the retail sales tax on personal services as well as reducing vehicle registrations by an additional 10 per cent.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are many other areas that I would like to talk about, but I know that time is very limited, so I appreciate the opportunity to put this resolution forward and look forward to further discussion.

### Questions

**The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson):** A question period of up to 10 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed in the following sequence: the first question may be asked by a member from another party, any subsequent questions must follow a rotation between parties, each independent member may ask one question. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

**Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns):** I would ask the member if he can explain why he and his government decreased the budget for acute-care emergency services by \$13 million during a pandemic.

**Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie):** Our government has been very, very conscious of the fact that we need to spend dollars on providing the services that are necessary to deal with COVID-19 during the pandemic. And I think our budget shows, repeated, many places where we've made additional expenditures to help deal with the stress that COVID has put on Manitobans.

**Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River):** I'd like to congratulate the member from Portage for bringing forward this great resolution.

Can the member explain some of the key features from Budget 2021 that will protect Manitobans through this extremely challenging time?

**Mr. Wishart:** Thank you to the member for the question.

Certainly, we have made many investments in making sure Manitoba can recover from COVID-19 pandemic, which includes additional resources and expenditures in the area of health, in the area of education. And all of this, I think, will help Manitobans come out of the pandemic in a very strong position so that we can continue to grow forward.

**Ms. Fontaine:** Well, miigwech to the member. I know he attempted to, in some fashion, answer my question. He didn't, unfortunately. And he notes that they have—the Pallister government has apparently attempted to have additional dollars to support folks during the pandemic, but we know that he hasn't. And a good example, again, is \$13 million that was decreased from acute-care emergency services.

Manitobans want to know why he and his caucus did so.

**Mr. Wishart:** I appreciate the member asking the question. Certainly, we are doing our best to make sure that Manitobans have the service that is necessary during the COVID pandemic. Make sure that those—service is available across Manitoba and that all types of health services have been increased and funding for that has been increased as well.

I know that we're working very hard, and I know there is more to do in terms of making sure that Manitobans have all of the services closer to home.

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** I mean, one of the—I'm a little taken back by the claim that things—that the health system has been working well when we had the single worst second wave in Canada and where—and Manitoba has spent 100 times as much on PPE and we spent \$15 million on masks that can't be used.

So, where—how exactly does that result in any kind of benefit for Manitobans?

**Mr. Wishart:** I certainly appreciate the member's question around PPE. It was a challenge at the start to make sure that we had adequate PPE, and many sources were tried, and some of which, in all honesty, didn't turn out to produce a product that we could use here in Manitoba. But we made sure that supplies were in place, and we are now in a situation where we

have approximately one year's worth of PPE available to our health-care workers here in Manitoba.

Moving forward, we will make sure that they have enough PPE now and into the future.

**Ms. Fontaine:** I think that we see time and time again in this House members of the PC caucus just excuse the sheer failures, the colossal failures, at attending to a global pandemic, and we just saw that in the answer from the member. They are blaming, now, companies for apparently not producing stuff—PPE to be used. That was 12 years old.

And so again, I ask the member: Why has the member and his caucus and his government not invested in protecting Manitobans during a global pandemic?

**Mr. Wishart:** Our government has increased funding to health care during the pandemic and made, also, special arrangements to make sure that needs are dealt with, including PPE, from whatever source.

We certainly have worked very hard to make sure that personal care—personal protection equipment is available across a range of front-line workers here in Manitoba. It's been a challenge, without a doubt. I think you'll find that many other provinces found it very similar.

**Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière):** I appreciate the member for bringing forward this resolution.

Can the member opposite please explain how the former NDP government made life less affordable for Manitobans during their 17 disastrous years in power?

**Mr. Wishart:** Thank the member for the question. During their 17 years, they had 15 tax increases during that time. Every one of those took money off the kitchen table, made it difficult for Manitobans, and, in particular, things like increasing the PST was a particular burden on those with low and limited incomes. And it's certainly a challenge and it made it difficult not only for all Manitobans, but, in particular, for that group.

**Ms. Fontaine:** Can the member explain to the House and to Manitobans that are watching this morning how increasing post-secondary tuition helps students and helps Manitobans just making their way to recovery from COVID-19?

\* (11:20)



**Mr. Wishart:** I know it's been a particularly challenging time for students. I have two family members who are attending post-secondaries at this particular time.

I think we should remind the member that when we came into government, the student bursaries available from the previous government came to about \$4 million a year. After this budget I think—if I remember the number correctly—we're now at \$24 million a year, a significant improvement in terms of helping those who are in need to get into post-secondary education.

**Mr. Dennis Smook (La Vérendrye):** I thank the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart) for bringing this great resolution forward.

Can the member please explain some of the ways our government has fixed the finances and repaired our services that fell into disarray under the former NDP government and their 17 disastrous years in government?

**Mr. Wishart:** I thank the member for the question.

Certainly, we have made a very conscious effort to get better health care sooner and closer to home. I think everyone was very much aware we had the highest ambulance fees in Canada, and we've certainly made significant progress on reducing them.

We have made the difficult decisions and balanced budget in '19 and '20, and that's also improved things for Manitobans.

We also had made significant progress in terms of infrastructure spending. I look forward to the post-COVID initiatives on infrastructure construction to improve the services that had been ignored so badly during the NDP years—

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

**Ms. Fontaine:** Can the member share with Manitobans how freezing child-care funding for a fifth row in a year is actually helping Manitoba families recover from COVID-19?

**Mr. Wishart:** I know the member is aware that we have increased the number of spaces for child care in Manitoba and also encouraged people to get—to open private child-care spaces across the province.

I would encourage her to look at what some other provinces have done in terms of encouraging private, licensed child care and what a portion—what portion that represents of their capacity. In Manitoba, it runs

at under 5 per cent. In Quebec—which is one that many people like to model—it's over 30 per cent.

**The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson):** The time for questions has expired.

### Debate

**The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson):** The floor is now open: debate.

**Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns):** Miigwech, Assistant Deputy Speaker, and miigwech to my colleague, the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey), who has been championing my questions this morning in a very, very empty Chamber, because I would like to share with Manitobans that we have just reduced our complement in the House.

I think it's important for Manitobans to recognize and know that we in the Chamber are also adhering to public health measures. And it is a very, very empty Chamber this morning but, however, everybody is on virtual. So we do have all of our members—or many, many members virtual this morning.

Well, you know, I guess I'm pleased to get up this morning, put a little bit of facts on the record in respect of this morning's private member's resolution from the member.

The PC caucus, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and every single one of his Cabinet and every single one of his backbenchers have—are obsessed with this imaginary kitchen table that apparently they are putting money on for Manitobans.

But Manitobans are smart and they know that that's not true, because they see how, in the last five years, life has actually gotten worse for them financially, and have seen, you know, every month in their bank account that they are paying more for services or paying more in bills and getting less services.

So, you know, for the member to—and again, in the midst of a global pandemic—you know, come forward in the morning with a resolution that we're expected to debate, which is completely wrong and erroneous: the Pallister government and his, you know, whole crew have actually done nothing but actually take money away from Manitoba families and simultaneously, you know, while making things more expensive, have—has decimated services and programs here in Manitoba that offer protections and a safety—a social safety net to Manitobans who are struggling. That's been going on for five years now.

And so what we see, what—you know, when you have Conservative governments who, you know—across the country—you know, stay within this austerity ideology and this austerity agenda, you know, over the years what you end up seeing when there is a crisis like a global pandemic—a crisis that we haven't seen, obviously, in our lifetimes, but is, you know, not only an economic crisis but a social crisis. a mental crisis. We know that folks' mental health is—it is taxing on people's mental health.

And so to imagine that, you know, the member would come forward, supported by every single one of his caucus members, to talk about the money that they're keeping on the kitchen tables, it's just not—it's just wrong. It's just a waste of our time in this House to be debating this nonsense, and yet here we are.

So, I want to remind the member, I want to remind every single member of the PC caucus and the Premier, I want to remind them of some of the things that they've done, because they may have forgotten what they've done in these last five years, particularly in the last 14 months.

But Manitobans have not forgotten. And if members opposite would spend some time in, you know, going on people's social media, you know, just average Manitobans—Manitobans that are working so hard and struggling to just keep it together during this pandemic—if they would take the time to go and see those comments, they would know that Manitobans know exactly and have seen exactly what they've done, and they've taken notes or, you know, they've got the receipts from what this Pallister government has done.

I know the member spoke about PPEs, and again, I think if you listen to the way that he answered his question, what he attempted to do was say, well, we tried to get PPE, but unfortunately the company that we bought PPE from didn't give us a good product.

That's absolutely not true. What happened was the Pallister government, in an attempt to save money, because—I have said this repeatedly—the Pallister government has tried to, and has done, this global pandemic on the cheap.

When the pandemic—when COVID-19 started, we didn't see a Premier who said, hey, I'm going to take care of Manitobans, this—none of us brought on COVID-19 to ourselves, it is my responsibility as the Premier, it's my job as the Premier to take care of Manitobans.

We didn't see that at all. In fact, what we saw was a Premier (Mr. Pallister) that was so gung-ho on doing the pandemic cheap, that they went into the warehouse and they said, oh, let me try and find which PPEs we can find, haphazardly, so that we can send off PPEs to school divisions, to schools, to daycares, to correctional facilities, to nurses, to front-line health-care workers; let me see where we can save money and get expired—get PPE out.

Nobody bothered to check whether or not that PPE, which was in our stock warehouses, whether or not they were actually viable, whether or not they were actually safe, whether or not they could actually do the job of protecting Manitobans.

Because they care more about money, they just sent those PPEs out.

Luckily—luckily—a Manitoban sent the company an email and said, hey, this box of PPEs with this lot number, can you please check if these are still good protective masks.

\* (11:30)

And what do we find out? We find out that, in fact, they're not good masks. They're expired masks. And to the shock—to my shock and to many, many Manitobans' shock, the government was still—the Pallister government, the Premier, the former disastrous Health minister who got fired up—I don't understand how he's the Minister of Justice (Mr. Friesen) because he gets fired up and maintains a Cabinet position—but instead of saying, holy heck, how did we send out expired PPE, they double down. They double down.

We know that the current Minister of Health was asking for proof from child care: prove that you got these expired masks. Who does that? Who does that in a global pandemic? Who doesn't take the time to make sure that their citizens are protected in a global pandemic?

Again, I want to just stress to the House and to Manitobans that are watching: the last pandemic we had was 100 years ago—over 100 years ago. It's not like we go into a global pandemic every five years and people—and you have governments that are like, oh, how am I going to cut my costs on this? Literally a once-in-a-lifetime crisis emergency, and you have a government that doesn't care enough about its citizens to maintain their protection, to ensure they're protected while these citizens are doing critical front-line service on behalf of all of us.

So, you know, to sit up here this morning in the midst of a pandemic to try and debate this ridiculous resolution is—it is—it's just insulting. It's insulting to the Manitobans that put their lives at risk day in and day out. It's insulting to small businesses that we've seen in the last 13, 14 months have gotten the bare minimum of support from this government, from this Premier, despite the Premier getting up every opportunity he can and saying how good they've done during this pandemic.

It's simply not true. Manitobans don't believe them. Manitobans have kept the receipts on what this government has done, every single member of the PC caucus, as they sit there, day in and day—up, clapping for themselves, congratulating themselves on a job horribly done in a pandemic.

Again, Manitobans will remember that and they'll certainly remember it at the next election.

Miigwech.

**Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River):** Thank you for the opportunity to put a few words on record.

The private member's resolution being put forward by my colleague from Portage la Prairie highlights some of the many ways our government has been supporting Manitobans. Unlike the previous government, which continually raised taxes on Manitobans, our government has been working on stopping the continual outpour of hard-earned money from our taxpayers.

Under the previous government, Manitobans were one of the highest taxed citizens in Canada. With the increased PST and high taxes, it was easy to understand the challenges faced by those who considered Manitoba as a place to start or possibly grow a business. Our government wanted to encourage business and families to stay and not look beyond our borders.

We spoke with people. We listened to what they had to say. I am proud to say—or, sorry, to speak to some of the many changes that have happened the last few years.

Manitoba has seen an increase in interest in business and investment. Centrally located, Manitoba offers any business a great opportunity to be easily accessible to all parts of Canada and a direct route south into the United States. The location, resources and the availability to trained professionals, combined with lowering the PST and upgrading the Province's

rating, worked, and businesses soon wanted to invest and build their economy alongside Manitoba's.

We see the growth in investment in businesses in Portage la Prairie because of the great opportunity in Manitoba.

Manitoba is blessed with a wide range of individuals employed in many sectors in our province. Many people have established businesses which have been passed down through generations. I think of some of the many local businesses in my own constituency. I often drive by the many greenhouses which have provided families with the bedding plants for their gardens and vegetables that they have been planting in their backyards.

The greenhouses are a remarkably diverse industry. The industry is not limited to planting but also includes landscaping for both private and commercial sites. Can anyone imagine an area that has not been beautified by the addition of trees, planters and the many landscape aggregates that are utilized in landscaping? I know I can't.

Trees beautify an area, provide shade for hot summer days, contribute to the environment as the leaves convert carbon dioxide into a much-needed carbohydrate that ensures the long life of a tree. Greenhouses are considered an essential service, which has created jobs while putting back into our economy.

Our government supports local businesses and the many employees who depend on the work they are provided. Our government continues to support the many not-for-profit groups; the availability of grants with—help with the cost of maintaining a not-for-profit has many benefits.

Our government has increased the number of grants that a local group can apply for. The availability of funding has helped with the employment of many summer students, who work to help cover the cost of their education. Green Team funding, building sustainable communities, heritage grants and agriculture grants support the economy while creating job opportunities.

Our government sees the value in sustaining and growing our local businesses. Agriculture is a base to an economy. Supporting our farmers in their industry will ensure we have farms for many generations to come. Unlike the opposition, who took from the industry and left them to their own devices, our government values agriculture and respects farmers.

St. Norbert is a diverse and heritage-rich area located within our city. There are many distinctive groups throughout the area that have benefitted from available grants. The access to this additional funding has assisted in diversification and sustainability of all the unique locals. Visitors come to learn about culture, heritage and visit the sites, which hold historic value. The first settlers lived in St. Norbert, and the ability to maintain and showcase the rich history is possible through the grants that our government has offered.

Assistant Deputy Speaker, our government has taken many steps to ensure that all Manitobans are able to enjoy the benefits of their hard work. Over the past years, our government has implemented changes to the tax system, which has left more money in the pockets of Manitobans.

Indexing the basic personal amount and personal income tax bracket with the rate of inflation has benefited all families. Rather than paying out the money through tax, families are benefiting from the savings, thanks to our government.

Our government is proud of the work they do to support all Manitobans. Families who are living in Manitoba Housing benefit from additional funding that is provided through the Rent Assist program. The program has provided an additional \$22 million to assist with housing costs. The additional funding will help those who need it most while supporting them and their families as they work towards their future goals.

Families benefit when they do not have to worry about bills, rent and basic needs of their household. The increase in the Rent Assist will remove some of the barriers these families are facing and help them not worry about the affordability of securing housing for their family.

Individuals living with a disability have been living on limited budgets. Our government reached out to the sector and held town hall meetings with many stakeholders, family members and clients. We heard the struggles, barriers and challenges many individuals face most often on a daily basis.

The community came together and brought forward ideas, goals and standards that they believe were part of the underlying issues and needing to be reviewed. In response to the feedback and concerns brought forward, our government announced an increase of \$12.5 million to go towards those who receive community living and disability services. The additional funding will offer much-needed support to

help individuals who are living on basic income with daily expenses and living needs.

Child care is a priority for families. If you ask any parent what was or is one of their biggest challenges, they will say child care. Our government looked at what the current status of the child-care system was, the deficits and areas that needed improvement.

\* (11:40)

Consultations and input from many stakeholders identified some of the challenges. Manitoba has a diverse working population, and this diversity was not mirrored in the child-care options available to working families.

Shift workers were met with challenges on who to get for a caregiver when the centres were closed. Not everybody has the luxury of working from 9 to 5 or having weekends off, and this was a huge challenge, especially for those in this sector. Rural locales and limited number of child-care workers also added to the identified challenges.

Our government looked to other jurisdictions to see what was needed and how other parts of the country were addressing child-care concerns. Quebec and BC were two jurisdictions Manitoba looked at. Child-care facilities were mixed in composition in both provinces, with Quebec having 30 per cent of theirs privately owned and BC at 40 per cent privately owned.

Manitoba was second lowest in child fees to Quebec. Families have benefited from the lower rates, but still were challenged with finding a space for their child. Over the next three years our child-care rates will not raise, to further support families that have been struggling throughout the pandemic and to help assist with some of the expenses they would face, or will face, with the child care.

Our government has looked at challenges and offered start-up programs to individuals who meet these requirements and want to open a private child-care space. The number of spaces created will benefit families and care providers both.

Our government continues to support all Manitobans. Removing the education tax portion on our property bill by 25 per cent in the first year and an additional 25 per cent in the second year is part of our government's 2021 budget. I don't know of any one person who would not welcome this rebate on their taxes.

Manitobans have spoken and our government listened. Our government has continued to make lives for Manitobans more affordable. The reduction in taxes, enhanced Rent Assist programs, decrease in ambulance fees, supports available to many local and not-for-profit businesses and incentives for new businesses or to expand a business are only some of the many areas that have benefited from the programs that we have offered.

Local economies in rural and urban communities have benefited from families who move for work and purchase goods and services from the local businesses.

Everyone is doing their part to keep their economy growing. Everyone is benefiting from the supports that have been put in place by our government. Manitoba is a great province to raise a family and own a business, and our government supports individuals in this province.

Thank you.

**Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James):** Appreciate an opportunity to speak to this resolution that was brought forward by the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart). I also appreciate that he's brought this case forward, a case for his government's work in supposedly making life better and more affordable for Manitobans, but I think that case needs to be challenged here.

Any conversation with regular people anywhere would offer clarity that Manitobans are not succeeding in this context and that—are facing serious struggles. And I know that when I speak with folks in the community and when we listen to people who call into our office, we hear the same stories over and over again. And those are stories about people who are struggling to afford the costs of living and they are facing a huge increase in their costs all over the map.

It's important to acknowledge that some costs of living aren't in the government's control, things like groceries. Food costs have gone up significantly for families everywhere, and those costs continue to skyrocket, especially produce and healthier foods.

And that's out of government's control. There's also other things tied to costs of living and just the goods of life that to some degree are outside the government's control. So, important to identify those things that, you know, are not within the government's ability to influence here.

But it's important to also talk about the huge number of things that are in the government's direct control that they can be having an influence on to make sure that Manitobans can afford life here in our province.

One of the biggest things that we can look at is ensuring that our hydro rates stay low in Manitoba. Last December, just in time for the holidays, in the middle of a pandemic, this government raised hydro rates by 3 per cent.

Now, we hear the PC party talk a lot about the previous NDP government and, you know, the degree to which we raised hydro rates, but there's an important difference there that they tend to gloss over and conveniently don't discuss when they talk about, you know, our previous government and the differences between what they're doing with Hydro.

And that difference is, is that the hydro rate increase that was brought forward by this PC government was never vetted through an independent process. So Manitobans will actually never know whether or not that hydro rate increase was actually needed to help Hydro actually pay down its debts. We'll never know.

And, of course, now we know that the government is hiding huge amounts of sales to Saskatchewan. They hid a \$5-billion sale, intentionally kept that out of the Wall report, to deceive Manitobans into thinking that Hydro is in worse financial state than it was, all for the purpose of, again, giving them the ability to continue to raise rates.

They also are failing completely to respond to an out-of-control above-guideline increase issue that we have in our province. We know that last fiscal year we did—FIPPA that revealed that over 20,000 housing units in Manitoba received above-guideline rent increases and that every single application that went into the residential tenancies board for an above-guideline rent increase was approved by this government.

So they've got a real crisis there in terms of rapidly rising housing costs that are driven mostly by large property management agencies that have understood or learned how to work with the system, and this government is not responding to it. All they can do is point fingers and talk about what the previous government did or didn't do, without actually taking any ownership for what's happening, really, under their watch.

They also raised tuition fees at our universities by 18 per cent.

So you can see there's a lot of things that they're doing that they've allowed to happen that have significantly increased cost of living for Manitobans, and they just do not seem willing to acknowledge that or take action.

It's also odd to brag about putting money on kitchen tables when they've literally stolen thousands of—millions of dollars off the kitchen tables of Hydro workers, civil servants, health-care workers and educators by forcing a wage freeze that has been deemed illegal by Manitoban courts.

The member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart) talked a bit about fixing the government's finances, but we know that with this government, fixing the finances and their focus on deficit reduction is really about deferring costs to later governments or to future generations.

So one of their tactics is just simply, you know, not investing in infrastructure, not investing in programs and services, not investing in the things that Manitobans need and, ultimately, those costs don't go away. They may not be paying for them now, but a lot of those costs simply create a social deficit that ends up simply needing to be paid further down the road.

You know, one of their biggest tactics, also about—that they use in reducing a deficit seems to be about using huge amounts of federal funds that we receive, and they use those to backfill the costs related to services and programs.

They did it with \$85 million in education funding that we received near the beginning of the pandemic, which we have no idea how that was spent. They did it recently with \$30 million or so that they received to advance energy efficiency in the province that they used again just to backfill government expenditures instead of improving that program for Manitobans.

They did it with \$45 million that was given to the province for child care in 2018. Again, no one in the sector seems to know where those funds went, and there's no clarity that those funds were used to improve child-care services in the province.

So, in terms of, quote, unquote, fixing the finances, we don't really see what there is to celebrate here. We know what the PCs are trying to say we should celebrate, but it's clear that we don't have a lot to celebrate because these costs simply are just being pushed further down the road.

So, you know, we also look at, in terms of pushing costs down the road, what they've been doing in deferring wages for tens of thousands of Manitoban workers, all these workers that have been subject to their unconstitutional wage freeze. You know, this is a government that doesn't respect collective bargaining; they don't respect workers; they're just hoping to delay these indefinitely. But these costs will need to be paid out at some point by a future government.

This government knows that. They'll likely never pay it, because they clearly are willing to violate the law and force this unconstitutional wage freeze right until the end of their time in government, which, I think, will be quite soon, and at some point the piper will need to be paid. We're going to be needing to cover those costs down the road at some point.

Seniors care facilities—the Manitoban 75-plus population will double over the next 15 to 20 years. We're not building any of that housing right now. We're not making those investments. Those costs are just being deferred down the road.

Five years of operating grant freezes for child-care centres. Again, that's creating a huge structural deficit, not only in the infrastructure—our child-care infrastructure—but also in the ECE sector, where we have people leaving the sector because of really low wages. All of that failure to invest in that sector will simply come back to haunt us later when Manitobans will be left holding the bill further down the road.

\* (11:50)

You know, also just quickly, thinking locally, their unwillingness to make investments now to, quote, unquote, fix the finances, has resulted, of course, in huge shorting—staffing shortages in our health-care system, not only in the health-care-aide side, where we saw the huge impacts of that over the pandemic with seniors being left to their own devices for weeks on end because we didn't enough—have enough health-care aides.

We've also seen that in our local emergencies—and I'm thinking here locally, in St. James—at our Grace emergency hospital. We know, as we revealed last week, we learned about some horrifying stories that families have been experiencing at the Grace Hospital emergency.

And a lot of that issue is tied to a lack of staffing, a lack of proper supports there, and it's creating not only huge challenges for people in my community in west Winnipeg and their confidence in being able to

access emergency medical services, it's also making the work of nursing and making those challenges really extreme for a lot of those people who've chosen that career path, and is again creating more issues for us because people are leaving the field. And, again, we're just going to be paying for that down the road.

It's clear that this government really isn't interested in making life more affordable for Manitobans. We've got a huge suite of bills coming down the pipe here that are about, ultimately, making life more expensive.

Bill 71, which is really a Trojan Horse bill that purports to give a tax break to Manitobans, is actually sneaking in a massive tax break for the wealthiest Manitobans, and that's being funded by renters, who are losing their education and property tax credit.

So, the lowest income Manitobans are helping to fund some of the wealthiest in this province to get a big tax break. We don't think that's fair. We know that's the way the PCs approach taxation and approach these types of decisions: they help out their wealthier friends at the expense of lower income Manitobans. We do not think that that is the right path.

Also, a whole suite of bills: Bill 47 will privatize child care and make child care more expensive, Bill 33 will raise the cost of tuition and Bill 12 will steal the retirement plans of rancher families throughout Dauphin, Swan Lake and Interlake areas. They're making life more expensive every single day that they're in government.

This resolution clearly indicates that they are not connected to the realities Manitobans are facing; that is evident. And there's just no way we can support this resolution, as it's clear the government is not doing the important work of actually responding to the affordability challenges in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** In listening to the resolution, it really comes across like an opposition day resolution from five years ago. And even then, I don't think it would've been completely accurate, or accurate much.

The fact is is that when we look at Manitoba's fiscal situation for six years before 2016, the Conservative government froze or reduced total transfers to Manitoba. For six years straight, the federal Conservative government gave no new money at all to the province of Manitoba for six years. So the idea

that these were good times and that was an issue is simply a myth.

The other is the myth that somehow that the NDP were really that different in terms of their actual policies, in terms of their choices.

And, look, I—you don't have to count on my word for it because the Premier (Mr. Pallister) says it and many of his other ministers do, several times a day, each day, that when the NDP says, why are you privatizing, why are you closing a rural hospital; why are you closing this ER; why are you cutting taxes this way; why can't we get doctors and nurses in this particular area; why are we living with child poverty, the answer is always that—from the government side, that the NDP did just the same, and it's true.

So this is part of the frustration, the idea that things were somehow that much worse under the NDP or that they're much better under the PCs, when they both been following exactly the same policies, including policies of tax cuts for the very wealthiest Manitobans, which happened extensively under the NDP, and created deficits while income supports for people who are the very poorest have stayed the same as they are since 1986.

So—but the focus of, you know, on kitchen tables, this is a government—and, again, both parties have voted, at this point, almost 11 times to change the so-called balanced budget law in order to make sure that they don't have to take a pay cut.

And various other automatic payment schemes and benefit schemes all keep rolling over for MLAs, but not for Manitobans, who've been working without contracts, for years sometimes, people on social assistance who would like to work but can't, who have not seen an increase in their—in EIA since 1992, you know, more than a generation.

So—and I was—I had a life before I came into politics, and let me tell you, it was—I was often at the receiving end or the bottom end of a bunch of bad government decisions from various governments.

And it's a struggle that—the idea that people are getting more money on their kitchen tables when, for example, Bill 71 literally gives money—tax cuts to pipelines. It's about money on board room tables; it's not money—about money on kitchen tables.

And there is a huge amount of distress out there, but, overwhelmingly, what's happened—even through-out this pandemic, which has been a complete disaster, an unmitigated disaster in terms of its response—

has been that it's still been political, at a time when the decisions should be made with an absolute eye to fairness, because the government is now in a position to choose whether somebody works or not or whether somebody's business closes or not, that who gets the government's ear should not affect in any way who benefits is that this is actually, at a time like this, a time for crisis, things like fairness are absolutely paramount.

And what this government largely has done, aside from freezing people's wages and freezing—and laying people off or not filling positions, thousands of positions that have gone empty, which means that people—the people left behind have that much more work to do for the same amount of money, or that their wages have been frozen or the benefits have been frozen under incredibly 'diffickend'—difficult circumstances, that they are actually worse off.

And the fact is that just dumping costs onto Manitobans by pulling back on benefits makes it harder for people, and it's pushing people to the brink.

And, honestly, it is very frustrating to have these sorts of canned speeches which have been written, which really are out of touch with the reality of today's economy, of the reality of this government's policies and the fiscal reality of the province.

One of the things this government has done is they choose to run their books as if they're a private company that's pretending to lose money so it doesn't have to pay anything out. That's kind of the way the—for years the Auditor General was saying this is, you know, as far as we're concerned, the budget is balanced.

And because the government has received over \$1 billion a year now in additional transfers from the federal government, which, again, were completely frozen for six years before that, that alone should've been enough to eliminate the deficit, and it was.

The Auditor General said, look, as far as they were concerned, the budget is balanced.

And, you know, we've heard about things like the Investors Group fiasco where it could cost hundreds of millions of dollars, but then why did we bail them out?

Why did the—why were provincial taxpayers and the public on the hook for \$200 million to bail out the Investors Group stadium? Why is it that they get a \$200-million bailout when others don't, when other—when you have Crown land farmers who are in desperate straits who don't get bailouts for deliberate decisions of the government to change the way that they pay for things?

I'll even add there was a change to property taxes, which was supposed to be a property tax cut, that actually completely backfired on many people, especially living in rural Manitoba, who were—live in houses under \$70,000. So, Rossburn is a place that I—my—we have a quarter section near.

Ninety-five per cent of the people saw their property taxes double because this government had made a calculation based on an average that didn't actually work.

There were over 400 people in Portage la Prairie who were in the same spot. All of a sudden you have somebody who's 85 years old living in their own little house, and they have to find an extra \$200 or extra \$400 for taxes which they used to get rebated.

And, overwhelmingly, this government, its focus has been on—

**The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson):** Order. Order.

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

The hour being noon, this House is recessed and stands recessed until 1:30 p.m.



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Tuesday, April 27, 2021**

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