

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

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The Honourable Myrna Driedger
Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ADAMS, Danielle	Thompson	NDP
ALTOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GORDON, Audrey	Southdale	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah, Hon.	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg, Hon.	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake-Gimli	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	Assiniboia	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMONT, Dougald	St. Boniface	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya	Notre Dame	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	McPhillips	PC
MOSES, Jamie	St. Vital	NDP
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NAYLOR, Lisa	Wolseley	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

Thursday, October 15, 2020

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Just for information of the House, I would like to just point out, I'm sure you've probably noticed we have our original mace here in the House today. And the reason we have that is because the actual mace we use every day is locked in the cabinet and we can't get in the cabinet to get it out. So, a typical 2020 technology problem.

So we will address that when we can, but thankfully we have another mace that we could bring in here so we can do our business.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 202—The Health Services Insurance Amendment Act (Personal Care Home Staffing Guidelines)

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, today I'm proud to introduce—oh, I'm sorry.

Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Notre Dame (Ms. Marcelino)—oh my gosh, I'm sorry. Thank you.

I move, seconded by the member for Notre Dame, that Bill 202, The Health Services Insurance Amendment Act (Personal Care Home Staffing Guidelines), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

MLA Asagwara: Today, I'm proud to introduce Bill 202, the health insurance amendment act, personal-care home staffing guidelines. This bill enshrines in law the requirement to have at least 3.6 hours of care per resident per day. COVID-19 has shown just how vulnerable seniors and residents of

personal-care homes are, and we need to act to help and support them and protect them.

This bill ensures that there's a minimum standard of care for our seniors and calls on the government to improve this care. Seniors and residents of long-term-care homes need our support and they need it urgently. I hope this House can work together and that we can collectively pass this bill in a quick and timely manner, Madam Speaker.

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

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Public Accounts First Report

Mr. Jim Maloway (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the first report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Public Accounts presents the following as its first report: Meetings—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Public Accounts presents the following as its First Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on Wednesday, October 14 at 6:00 p.m.

Matters under Consideration

- Auditor General's Report – Operations of the Office for the year ended March 31, 2017
- Auditor General's Report – Operations of the Office for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2018
- Auditor General's Report – Operations of the Office for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2019
- Auditor General's Report – Operations of the Office for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020
- Auditor General's Report – Operations of the Office – Strategic Priorities Plan for 2019/20 and 2021/22

- Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations – dated May 2014
- Section 17 – Personal Injury Protection Plan
- Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations – dated May 2015
- Section 4 – Appointment Process to Agencies, Boards and Commissions
- Section 7 – Personal Injury Protection Plan
- Section 15 – Manitoba eHealth Procurement of Contractor
- Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Recommendations – dated May 2016
- Personal Injury Protection Plan
- Appointment Process to Agencies, Boards and Commissions

Committee Membership

Committee Membership for the October 14, 2020 meeting:

- Ms. LAMOUREUX
- Mr. LINDSEY
- Mr. JOHNSTON
- Mr. MALOWAY (Chairperson)
- Mr. MICHALESKI
- Ms. MORLEY-LECOMTE
- Ms. NAYLOR
- Mr. SMITH (Lagimodière) (Vice-Chairperson)
- Mr. TEITSMA
- Mr. WASYLIW
- Mr. WISHART

Substitutions agreed to by leave of the House

- Ms. LAMOUREUX for Mr. LAMONT

Officials Speaking on Record

- Tyson Shtykalo, Auditor General

Motions

Your Committee agreed to the following motion:

THAT the Standing Committee on Public Accounts adopt the following protocols, which shall remain in effect until the end of the 42nd Legislature:

1. Within 48 hours of a new report by the Office of the Auditor General being tabled by the Speaker, whether during session or intersessionally, the

Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson are to send a joint letter requesting an Action Plan regarding the implementation of the Auditor's recommendations to the Department, Crown Corporation or Other Entity which is the subject of the Report. A deadline of 90 days from the date of the letter will be allowed for a response.

2. Progress Reports, seeking information regarding the status of the implementation of the Auditor's recommendations, may be requested from any Department, Crown Corporation or Other Entity which is the subject of a report by the Office of the Auditor General, by either of the following means:
 - a. The Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson may request a Progress Report by joint letter, or
 - b. With unanimous consent, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts may ask the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson to request a Progress Report by joint letter.

A deadline of 28 days from the date of the letter will be allowed for a response.

Agreements:

Your Committee agreed to conclude consideration of Section 17 – Personal Injury Protection Plan of the Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations – dated May 2014.

Your Committee agreed to conclude consideration of Section 4 – Appointment Process to Agencies, Boards and Commissions of the Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations – dated May 2015.

Your Committee agreed to conclude consideration of Section 7 – Personal Injury Protection Plan of the Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations – dated May 2015.

Your Committee agreed to conclude consideration of Section 15 – Manitoba eHealth Procurement of Contractor of the Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations – dated May 2015.

Your Committee agreed to conclude consideration of Personal Injury Protection Plan of the Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Recommendations – dated May 2016.

Your Committee agreed to conclude consideration of Appointment Process to Agencies, Boards and

Commissions of the Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Recommendations – dated May 2016.

Reports Considered and Passed

Your Committee considered and passed the following reports as presented:

- *Auditor General's Report – Operations of the Office for the year ended March 31, 2017*
- *Auditor General's Report – Operations of the Office for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2018*
- *Auditor General's Report – Operations of the Office for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2019*
- *Auditor General's Report – Operations of the Office for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020*
- *Auditor General's Report – Operations of the Office – Strategic Priorities Plan for 2019/20 and 2021/22*

Reports Considered but not Passed

Your Committee considered the following reports but did not pass them:

- *Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations – dated May 2014 (Section 17 – Personal Injury Protection Plan – concluded consideration of)*
- *Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations – dated May 2015 (Section 4 – Appointment Process to Agencies, Boards and Commissions - Section 7 – Personal Injury Protection Plan - Section 15 – Manitoba eHealth Procurement of Contractor – concluded consideration of)*
- *Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Recommendations – dated May 2016 (Personal Injury Protection Plan - Appointment Process to Agencies, Boards and Commissions – concluded consideration of)*

Mr. Maloway: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I'm pleased to table, pursuant to The Statutes and Regulations Act, a copy of each regulation registered under the—that act after the

last regulation tabled in this House and more than 14 days before the commencement of this session.

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): It's my pleasure to rise today in the Assembly to table the report of the amounts paid or payable to members of the Assembly for the year ending March 31st, 2020.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: And the honourable Minister of Finance.

Mr. Fielding: Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today in the Assembly to table the Automobile Injury Compensation Appeal Commission 2019-20 annual report.

Hon. Ralph Eichler (Minister of Economic Development and Training): I'm pleased to table the Red River College 2019-2020 annual report.

Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to table the University of Winnipeg 2019-2020 annual report.

Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to table Brandon University 2019-2020 annual report.

Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to table University of St. Boniface 2019-2020 annual report.

Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to table University College of the North 2019-2020 Annual Report.

Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to table University of Manitoba 2019-2020 annual report.

Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to table Research Manitoba 2019-2020 Annual Report.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Minimum Wage Increase

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): No one should be forced to live in poverty, especially if they are working full-time. However, that's precisely what's happening to many Fort Garry constituents.

Manitoba's minimum wage increased 25 cents on October 1st and it's currently \$11.90 an hour. When this government came into power, Manitoba was tied for fourth highest minimum wage in the country, but has dropped dramatically to the third lowest in Canada.

This government's current strategy of indexing minimum wage to inflation does not meet the rising

costs of living in our province. Many Fort Garry constituents are students and newcomers who are often forced to work multiple minimum wage jobs to make ends meet.

Make Poverty History estimates that a living wage in Manitoba for a single parent family is \$15.53 an hour. It's been proven that living wages improve health, employee retention and investments in education. Raising the minimum wage also reduces the need for government expenditures on income support programs, health care and justice. This saves the Province money, which is one of the government's top priorities.

* (13:40)

Unfortunately, we have a Premier (Mr. Pallister) who believes that raising the minimum wage doesn't help to eliminate poverty, which is just untrue. When people have enough, they rely on government services less and stimulate the economy more. Keeping the minimum wage perpetually at poverty levels, as this government has done, that, Madam Speaker, is what doesn't help eliminate poverty.

During this pandemic, the economic inequality in our province has become abundantly clear. Raising the minimum wage to at least \$15 an hour is a concrete way to lift people out of poverty and support the over 38,000 Manitobans who rely on minimum wage jobs. Madam Speaker, I urge this government to practise what it preaches and save this Province money by giving all Manitobans a living wage.

Brady Bobrowich

Mr. Alan Lagimodiere (Selkirk): Madam Speaker, heroes can be found in all ages. They display courage and are admired by their achievements and perseverance. They overcome obstacles and use their experiences to assist others.

Brady Bobrowich of St. Andrews displays all these qualities.

Brady is a typical 13-year-old boy who attends grade 8. He loves to play sports, hunt with his dad, ride his bike and camp with his family.

At the age of five months, Brady was diagnosed with neurofibromatosis; at age six: scoliosis, a tumour that spanned the left side of his chest cavity and a tumour behind his left eye. Today, he has many tumours growing throughout his body, including one massive, invasive tumour on his spine. He has been through four surgeries since 2016. Specialists at the

Children's Hospital and MRIs every six months continue to be part of his regular routine.

Madam Speaker, Brady, at the age of 13, has been through more than many adults have experienced or can even imagine. Has NF slowed him down? Not a chance.

Brady has—chosen to be the Children's Hospital Foundation Champion Child for 2020. In the role of Champion Child, he raises awareness and funds for the Children's Hospital Foundation by attending events and hosting Zoom meetings with key sponsors. The goal is to ensure that other children receive excellence in care, needed research for their conditions and advocacy.

I have tremendous respect for Brady and his family. It is through the support of his family that Brady has learned to accept and overcome the adversity that he faces each day and to appreciate the care he receives.

As a family, Bobrowiches host a run each year in September known as the Lockport River's Edge Run for NF. To date, the run has raised \$60,000 for NF.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to please acknowledge Mr. Brady Bobrowich, a Selkirk and Manitoba hero.

Fisher River Cree Nation Solar Farm

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): Known for its hunting, rich culture and history, now Fisher River Cree Nation will be known for something else as well: sustainable energy.

Fisher River made Manitoban and Canadian history in August by opening a 3,000-panel solar farm, the largest of its kind in Manitoba and the first Indigenous-owned solar farm in all of Canada.

The project was built entirely by local Indigenous employees, 11 of which were trained in solar installation. The workers were actually so efficient that they finished the installation in less than one week—three weeks ahead of schedule.

For at least the next 30 years, Fisher River will be selling the power generated to Manitoba Hydro, who partnered with the project. Our partners include RBC; W Dusk Energy, an Indigenous-owned energy firm; Bullfrog Power; Solvest and Western Economic Diversification Canada, who generously donated \$1 million towards the \$2.4-million project.

Eventually, the community's long-term goal is to be able to generate enough power to be energy

self-sufficient, a move that would make life more affordable for its residents. This project is a perfect example of how a community that has an innovative plan, financial backing and a community-focused objective can create a whole lot of good.

This project is also a good step for Manitoba Hydro, who, in recent years, has begun to attempt to address their historically fraught relationship with Indigenous people.

As the MLA for The Pas-Kameesak, I wanted to take this opportunity to extend my congratulations to the folks at Fisher River Cree Nation for their monumental achievement, and to encourage other communities, particularly Indigenous communities, to follow in their footsteps.

Thank you.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): Madam Speaker, this past weekend, constituents of Borderland—

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Borderland, we can't hear you.

Mr. Guenter: Can you hear me now?

Madam Speaker: Now we can.

Mr. Guenter: Okay, perfect. Sorry for that.

Borderland Constituency

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): This past weekend, constituents of Borderland gathered in their homes with their families and celebrated Thanksgiving. Certainly, this year has presented its challenges, but the irrepressible spirit of the people I represent is unbowed. This past weekend, we gave thanks for our God-given rights and for our individual freedom that those who came before us sacrificed so much to secure.

We understand that the challenges of the pandemic mean that our lives have changed somewhat, and that to get through the current public health challenge and protect the health and well-being of those we love, we must practise the fundamentals of good hygiene, staying home when sick and keeping our distance physically. But we know that we will get through this together, and I know many constituents are grateful for the leadership our government and public health officials have shown.

We gave thanks for our families, for the spiritual and material blessings we enjoy and for the beautiful area in which we live.

This rural Manitoba spirit of hope and optimism will carry us through, and it's evident across our area in various ways.

Building permits, both residential and commercial, are up significantly over the last year in the municipalities I represent. New businesses have established themselves in our communities, others have expanded and our local economy has held up quite well. Our farmers have been hard at work bringing in a great harvest, and our communities are busy with those fabulous fall suppers, albeit in a different form this year.

Madam Speaker, I know many constituents of Borderland were pleased to see that recently released Public Accounts show that this government delivered Manitoba's first balanced budget in over a decade. I've also heard from many constituents who are pleased to hear that this government will be phasing out the education tax on property beginning next year.

So, Madam Speaker, amid the challenges, we've found many things to be thankful for this Thanksgiving season, and it's with hope and determination in our hearts that we look forward to the next.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Childhood Screening for Lead Exposure

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): It arrives silently like a thief in the night, with no visible symptoms, or with symptoms which are easily confused with other conditions.

It robs children of their potential. It damages children's brains. It reduces their IQ. They're more likely to drop out of school. They're more vulnerable to impulsive and aggressive actions because their self-control is poor. They become vulnerable to developing a mental illness or an addiction and to engaging in juvenile delinquency or crime.

This all-too-silent destroyer is lead. It is toxic and poisonous to children at very low levels. Because it is hard to detect, children need to be screened with blood lead tests early in their lives, between the ages of one and three.

Forty-five years ago the Centers for Disease Control in the US recommended screening children in areas with high lead exposure; 30 years ago the CDC included universal screening in its strategic plan.

Today, many states in the US have universal screening, and yet in Manitoba, where high lead

exposure was identified 40 to 50 years ago, we are still not screening children.

Screening and intervention can remarkably improve a child's life. Interventions for children screened early and found to have a high blood-lead level have reduced school absences by 30 per cent, have reduced school suspensions by 40 per cent, have reduced involvement in crime by 40 per cent and have reduced arrests for violent crime by 66 per cent.

We need to screen all children in Point Douglas, Weston and St. Boniface, which have high lead exposures. Manitoba has already delayed far too long to address lead poisoning. Screening needs to be done as soon as possible. It is urgent. These children can't wait. Their future depends upon it.

Madam Speaker: I would just like to just take a moment—as we've seen with some of these members' statements, we can hear better in here—we can hear the member better when they wear the headsets, so that's why we have asked everybody to please wear their headsets. One has been provided for all members and it's important that they be worn because then there is a much better sound system, and I think you just saw some of that being demonstrated.

* (13:50)

So I would ask everybody—we've sent out another memo, but I would ask everybody to, please, do wear your headsets when you are virtual.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Personal-Care Homes Staff and PPE Investments

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, I'd like to tell you about an elder named Chuck.

Now, this is somebody that I've spent some very special moments with on our shared path of faith and walking that beautiful way of life. You know, I can remember standing on the dirt road at our sundance, barefoot, as we exchanged stories, and he told me through tears about how my late father helped him on his road to recovery. And I think back to a lot of the times when he supported me when I was at a turning point in my life and, you know, just marvel at the contributions that Chuck has made to our life, as my family would see it.

Last night, I saw Chuck on national television because his family is worried about him being stuck

in Parkview Place amid what is a terrible outbreak of COVID-19.

We know that Parkview needs more staff, more resources and more communication with families.

What can the Premier tell us today to help elders like Chuck and so many others who are concerned about getting a handle on this outbreak at a personal-care home?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Seniors like Chuck and elderly people who we have had the pleasure to build relationships with, all of us, are our most precious people. And they are our most vulnerable people during this time.

This pandemic has taken the lives of many seniors around the world, and all of us regret that and all of us are focused on making sure we do everything we can to protect these very, very special people.

I thank the member for sharing his personal perspectives with the House today.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, we know what needs to take place to help alleviate the situation. There needs to be more protective equipment. There needs to be more staffing. There needs to be more communication with the families who are worried about their loved ones who are living in these facilities.

We recognize that, today, all the personal-care homes in Winnipeg were put on the code red level. Again, I think there's still a lot of people out there who are struggling to understand, what does that mean in real terms? What does that mean in terms of new investment, new resources, new staff positions that will go to help those vulnerable people who are, in some cases, trapped in their suites as a result of these outbreaks?

So, again, I'm here today to reiterate a very, very important issue to many, many Manitobans.

And I ask the Premier: What specific measures will this government commit to to ensure that we help all these seniors, all these elders, all these loved ones to be able to survive through this pandemic and create so many more special memories with us?

Mr. Pallister: Well, of course, many, many efforts have been undertaken and will continue to be undertaken to protect these very precious and vulnerable people, Madam Speaker.

Of course, initial actions that headed off some of the instances that occurred across the country and around the world in our care homes were taken. Those actions were taken and they were difficult ones to take. Some of those involved restricting access and visitation to seniors at a time when, of course, they were particularly vulnerable and would have benefitted very much from a hand being held or a hug being given. We had to take actions to prevent the possibility of them becoming ill and of losing them.

The—this demonstrates, I think, the sacrifices we've all had to make, by not being able to be together, to say goodbye to someone who's passed or to celebrate a wedding or a birth. But these sacrifices are necessary and they're important because we are in this together and we must do our very, very best to protect one another.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, it is clear that these seniors are making a great sacrifice. It is clear that their families are also sacrificing. But when we see the actions of the government, we don't see this government matching their commitment with an equal investment in protecting these vulnerable people.

In fact, this government actually raised personal-care-home fees, during the pandemic, on these vulnerable people. We look to their response, and what do they say? Oh, they say it's inevitable. They say there was nothing more that they could do.

But I would say directly to this government, there is more that you can do. You could invest in more staff. You could invest in more protective equipment. You can invest the time to ensure that there is better communication with the family members who are worried about their loved ones.

Which of these measures—among many, many more—will the Premier commit to investing in today?

Mr. Pallister: It's unfortunate that the member would try to politicize the care of seniors as he has just done, Madam Speaker.

That being said, we know the NDP record on placing additional burdens on citizens across the province and, in particular, on seniors by raising fees and charges and taxes in so many different categories over so many years. And so seniors understand that as well, and they'll understand what genuine compassion is. It is not partisanship at this point in time. I would

say it is more demonstrated by our willingness to work together to find solutions.

That's what this government is focused on and that's what we'll stay focused on, Madam Speaker.

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

Prairie Mountain Health Region Staff Vacancy Rate

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, seniors and people across Westman and the Parkland know that this government has cut their health care. They know that it's making their quality of life worse and, unfortunately, they also expect there to be more health-care cuts to come.

Now, we have accessed information through freedom of information that shows some very, very disturbing trends when it comes to health care across many settings in Manitoba.

In Prairie Mountain, for instance, last year, for lab techs and health professionals, the vacancy rate was 15 per cent, but now the vacancy rate is 25 per cent. That means one out of every four lab tech and health-care professional positions is sitting empty across the Prairie Mountain Health region, during a pandemic, I would add.

There is no plan to hire more workers, but what is the Premier going to do about it? How is he going to assure the people of Roblin, of Brandon, of Dauphin and many, many other communities that they are going to have the health care that they need, especially during COVID-19?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, again, the unfortunate approach the member chooses to take is to politicize an issue during the time of a pandemic, which he need not do.

The reality of the record of this government is that we are investing over \$600 million more, this year alone, in health care than the previous NDP government ever did in its history. The reality of this government's performance is that, in partnership and in working with front-line people, administrators and leaders in the health-care field, we are the only province that has held the line on increased wait times. Every other province's wait times have grown. Ours have gone down.

Madam Speaker, this is the reality of our record, and so while the member may choose to criticize, as

he has done, he simply is adding to fear at a time when fears are real. Why add phony fears to the mix?

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, what this government has done has been to create a whole new health-care bureaucracy in Shared Health that takes decision making further and further away from the bedside.

What has been the impact at the bedside for people across Prairie Mountain Health region? Well, in addition to having one quarter of the lab tech positions unfilled, it's even worse when we look at health-care aides and pharmacists and LPNs across the region. Over the past year, in each of these categories the vacancy rate has increased time and time again.

Again, these documents show us the track record over the Pallister government's time in office. There are fewer health-care aides working at the bedside; even fewer people working in personal-care homes. I think we all understand why that's so very, very concerning.

The Premier needs to tell the House today: Why has he refused to invest in health-care workers across western Manitoba?

Mr. Pallister: The member is entitled to his view, Madam Speaker. He's not entitled to his own facts. The facts are that we have added at the front line across the spectrum. We have over 1,100 more nurses than we had a year ago employed in this province. The facts are not as the member attests. Quite frankly, what he has said is not a fact.

The reality is that we are achieving better results. We have trimmed at the top of our health-care structures throughout the administrative sections and the managerial sections of our delivery system and moved those resources to the front line. That's what we'll continue to focus on.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, the facts that I'm referring to were produced by this member's government.

* (14:00)

The situation is bad in Dauphin as well. We know that there's a vacancy rate at the Dauphin health centre of 31 per cent, Madam Speaker. At the personal-care home in Dauphin, the vacancy rate is 60 per cent.

During the pandemic that is hitting personal-care homes so hard, in one of our very important communities there's less than half of the amount of people working at the bedside as there should be.

This is not an aberration. This is not an outlier. This is a clear trend documented in the evidence of this government cutting health-care services that results in fewer people working at the bedside and helping our seniors.

The question is simple and deserves to be answered: During this pandemic, why is the Premier cutting health care in Manitoba?

Mr. Pallister: Why is the member stoking fear in a province that already has legitimate fears and adding to them with phony facts? They aren't facts at all, Madam Speaker.

The NDP record is clear and everyone knows it. We inherited a mess from the NDP. We inherited the longest wait times in Canada, bar none. We inherited family physician shortages. We inherited wait times to get into care homes, Madam Speaker, that we have addressed. And we have addressed each of the other areas of mess that we had to clean up.

The member comes in and claims that he has the solutions, but the NDP government created the problems in the first place. They closed more than a dozen rural emergency rooms. I could read off the list, and if the member would like to carry on with this line of questioning, I'm happy to do so.

Parkview Place Personal-Care Home Managing COVID-19 Outbreak

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, I rise again today to press this government for answers about the COVID outbreak at Parkview Place.

Residents and their families deserve answers and they deserve a plan as to how they're going to keep residents safe. Nine deaths, 89 people. That's 67 residents and 27—sorry, rather, 22 staff have confirmed to have contracted COVID-19 at Parkview Place. Those are the facts, Madam Speaker, and those facts demand an answer.

Will the minister tell this House today what his plan is to keep the residents at Parkview Place safe?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): This same member tried to enter as evidence, only days ago in this House, that somehow a widespread failure by Shaw

Communications was the fault in a COVID-19 situation of this province and chose to foment fear for very personal reasons, for reasons to expand her party's fortunes. And I think that's regrettable and I would call on that member to retract those wrong statements. Let's be about putting facts on the record.

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

MLA Asagwara: Just a reminder for the minister that my pronouns are neutral: they/them.

And I would ask that the minister answer the question directly instead of trying to distract. There are constituents right here in Union Station that are paying attention and would really like to know what this minister's plans are, if the minister is planning on giving the residents, the staff, folks at Parkview Place the tools they need to mitigate the harms of this pandemic.

We've heard from folks who are living at Parkview Place, from their families, in their words, that whatever measures were taken to quarantine and isolate known cases were clearly inadequate or put into place too late. Every day we learn about new cases. Unfortunately, we hear about deaths.

Will the minister address the overcrowding and these issues that have been brought forward by community members who are worried about their loved ones in Parkview Place?

Mr. Friesen: To all the Manitobans who are listening this afternoon: this same member tried to say yesterday that COVID-19 cases getting into long-term-care facilities is avoidable.

Madam Speaker, there have been 220 long-term-care outbreaks in BC, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec alone; 7,000 deaths in Ontario and Quebec.

An Honourable Member: Not much comfort to the families—

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Friesen: If the Leader of the Opposition would like to have more time, he can request it of the Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, it's regrettable that anyone is contracting COVID-19, Madam Speaker, but for the opposition to somehow say that the front-line staff, that Revera, that Parkview Place, that the WRHA and that public health are

not responding and are not concerned is not just regrettable, it is just—it's unacceptable.

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

Staffing at Personal-Care Homes Request for Support for Bill 202

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, we know the staff at Parkview Place are doing their absolute best. We also know that our personal-care homes and long-term-care homes need more staff, they need more support.

That staff is key to providing people with the care that they need—dignified and clinical care that they deserve. That staff is key to helping families communicate with their loved ones. But at this point—to this point, there has been no commitment from the Premier (Mr. Pallister) or this minister to hire more staff for our personal-care homes during this pandemic.

It's been seven months; it's long past time to act. We have a bill before this House to help strengthen staffing in long-term-care homes.

Will the minister act? Will he support our bill today?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I think it's regrettable that the member's trying to use the situation at Parkview to foment support for a private member's bill, Madam Speaker.

The facts are these—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: The facts are these: that there are continuing efforts to keep all the residents at that facility safe. The facts are these: that the government has made to clear to personal-care homes that any expenses that they incur in their pursuit of better care in COVID-19 will be refunded. The facts are these: that even today, new staff are arriving to assist the efforts to keep residents safe.

Madam Speaker, we are all concerned, but the opposition could do much better to be much less partisan and much more focused on the real concerns of Manitobans.

Correctional Facilities COVID-19 Prevention Plan

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Madam Speaker, with an outbreak at Headingley Correctional Centre

and cases at Milner and Remand we still haven't heard a plan coming from the Minister of Justice.

Headingley Correctional Centre is overcrowded. It doesn't have space at the best of times to isolate folks who are currently incarcerated there, and we certainly don't have enough space during a pandemic.

I am getting so many calls and emails and social media messages from folks that are concerned for their family members and from staff, Madam Speaker. They are deeply concerned at what's going on in our correctional facilities.

Can the Minister of Justice tell us today, what is the plan to keep people and staff safe at Headingley correctional facility?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Certainly, we are all concerned about the inmates there and, certainly, the safety of our staff at all our corrections facilities across the province. That is why, since day one of the pandemic, our Manitoba Justice and our corrections officials have been working hand in hand with the officials at public health.

Through this whole process over the last several months, we've developed protocols to deal with exactly situations that we're experiencing today in places like Headingley and Milner Ridge. There's programs in place. Actions are being taken.

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

Ms. Fontaine: That's simply not true.

The minister told the House that transfers between institutions like Headingley have been stopped. But we actually know that that's not true, Madam Speaker. Workers have reached out to me personally and told us that that's not true; transfers continue.

We're learning that transfers are continuing from Headingley into other facilities like Milner Ridge and Brandon. I've also been told that folks coming into facilities are not being quarantined but rather, Madam Speaker, are being put into general population. We know that this puts increased risks in communities when folks are released from correctional facilities.

Madam Speaker, again, it's seven months at the start of this pandemic.

When will the Minister of Justice have a comprehensive plan to keep staff and citizens safe at correctional facilities here in Manitoba?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker, the member's information is factually incorrect.

We have plans in place to deal with our inmate population. We've revised the way we're dealing with inmates when they come into the facilities for several months now. The individuals will come into the Remand Centre, they will be isolated for 14 days before they're moved anywhere else. And certainly that is the case now in Headingley. We have identified seven individuals that have tested positive. We have 150 individuals isolated in that facility as well. Once they get through their 14 days, they may be moved to other facilities as well.

But certainly there is plans in place, extra protective equipment, extra cleaning, and all kinds of precautions are in place.

*(14:10)

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

Ms. Fontaine: Clearly, the Minister of Justice isn't getting the facts from staff and those people that are on the front line, because I just spoke with two staff members this morning, Madam Speaker, before coming here, who said that what the Justice Minister is putting on the record is not factual.

Staff don't have access to information. They don't know what's going on in their correctional facility.

It's seven months after the start of this pandemic, and we still do not have a comprehensive plan from the Justice Minister. It really does beg the question, Madam Speaker, whether or not the Justice Minister cares about the staff that work there and the people that are currently housed there. And I would submit to the House that he does not.

What will the minister do to keep staff and people that are currently housed there safe right now, today?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker, the—I don't know where the member's getting her information from.

Since day one, public safety has been our paramount concern when it comes to this pandemic. We want to make sure that we're keeping the inmates safe—a population of about 1,900. We do have over 2,500 beds capacity. Certainly, there's capacity.

We have close to 2,000 staff working in corrections in Manitoba. We want to make sure each and every one of those staff stays safe. That's why we're—provided personal protective equipment. We've enhanced that equipment over the last couple of

weeks. We're maintaining our cleaning. We've enhanced cleaning operations, sanitizing and certainly in terms of moving patients around.

We're making sure everything is being done according to public health officials.

COVID-19 Testing Capacity Northern Manitoba

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): Madam Speaker, an outbreak has been declared at the YWCA in Thompson. This is of great concern to us and deeply concerning to northern residents. We need a plan for testing, tracing and tracking the virus in the North, and one—enough to actually hire enough staff to be able to handle the load.

Why does the minister not already have a plan in place to improve COVID-19 response in northern Manitoba?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): The preamble is false, Madam Speaker.

I thank the member for the question, but there is a plan in place and officials are already responding to the outbreak at the Thompson YWCA.

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

Ms. Adams: Madam Speaker, I previously brought to the minister's attention my concern for the lack of testing in the city of Thompson. I wrote to tell him that the current testing site is a shared space with the walk-in clinic and only has one nurse being tested—doing testing. I table a copy of that letter.

I urged the minister to properly prepare for an outbreak in Thompson. I explained that it takes time to secure a testing site, to put staff in place and that action should be taken before an outbreak occurs. Unfortunately, an outbreak has occurred.

I ask the minister: Will he now at least establish more testing capacity in Thompson and northern Manitoba?

Mr. Friesen: The member's words don't seem to be supported by the evidence that has been gained from the region and from officials in Thompson, who indicate that current capacity is adequate at the testing facility—only running at 50 per cent—and there is a well-tested contingency plan in place for surge capacity in Thompson, should it be needed.

I can say this, though, that the positive cases to which the member is referring are self-isolating currently in appropriate locations, including at the YWCA. Several of the positive cases have been reallocated to the spruce house to self-isolate there. The region and other officials continue to respond.

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

Ms. Adams: Madam Speaker, resources should have been put in place months ago to enhance capacity in northern Manitoba to deal with this crisis. The Province should not have waited for a large increase in cases.

As I wrote the minister, I serially—sincerely hope we can address and contain the spread of COVID-19, but we need—proactive, we need more testing, more capacity to contain this illness.

Will the minister commit today to providing Thompson with the resources needed?

Mr. Friesen: So, Madam Speaker, to be clear, capacity was put in place months ago to prepare for exactly this type of event with community partners. Even now, YWCA, City of Thompson, First Nations partners, other federal and provincial resources, all being marshalled now exactly—accordance with the contingency plan that was drawn up, keeping people safe, partitioning places, moving people into isolation effectively.

We will continue to monitor. We will continue to appropriately respond.

COVID-19 Testing Capacity Federal Funds Used

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): Yesterday, I attempted to get a straightforward answer from our Finance Minister as to how many federal dollars have been spent on COVID-19 testing and tracing. Of course, he dodged and he ducked.

Manitobans are sacrificing during this pandemic, and I'm getting letters from constituents telling me they're waiting seven hours to get tested. They're going through an excruciating five-day period waiting for test results. They deserve accountable, open government. They deserve a respectful answer from this minister.

So I'm going to ask him again: How much federal funding has been spent for COVID-19 testing and contact tracing?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Our government is very proud of the fact that we've made important investments for people and businesses during the pandemic.

In fact, the Parliamentary Budget Office has recently said that we are amongst the top three provinces in terms of supports for Manitobans.

We've recently entered into the agreement with the federal government to provide some additional supports. That's an agreement that all provinces made. Thanks to the good work of our Premier (Mr. Pallister), we're going to continue to support individuals and businesses during this pandemic.

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

Mr. Wasyliw: Well, you heard it yourself, Madam Speaker. He refuses to answer the question. And I think the reason's pretty clear: because they're not spending this federal government money on contact tracing.

We were told that this money would help boost testing capacity over 3,000 tests per day. We know that's not happening. I think it's only happened a couple times. At some point, our Prime Minister has even commented on this.

So I'll ask the minister: Why has federal funds for testing and tracing—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —not been spent, and why, after almost seven months, testing capacity is still this inadequate?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the member for that, because, yes, our testing capacity does continue to ramp up significantly. If Manitobans remember, the numbers for testing right now on average are up more than four times what they were just in the first week of July. They are up significantly even from the first week of September to now.

To the other question the member poses: yes, we are happy for offers of support that the federal government continues to make. We would be happier to know that the federal government was putting enough importance on giving that now.

Manitobans need only reflect on the fact that it was only in March and April when they told us that PPE and gloves and masks and gowns would be arriving, but it never arrived, and Manitoba had to

solve its own problems on PPE, 95 per cent of all of it—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Fort Garry, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Wasyliw: Madam Speaker, this is not the time for cheap partisan politics and petty fights with the federal government.

What Manitobans want to know, and in fact what they deserve to know, is where \$109 million of federal government has gone, which was earmarked for contact tracing and testing, and why this government won't even tell them whether a dollar of it has actually been spent on what it was intended.

This is not the government's money. This is the—Manitobans' money.

So I'll ask the minister again why his government has been so slow to use this money for its intended purpose to ramp up testing and contact tracing?

Mr. Friesen: Remember, this is the same opposition party who criticized this government when they—when we went out, even weeks ago, and 'solicited'—solicited for more RFPs to increase our public health contact tracing.

I can inform all Manitobans that that request for services is now being filled. We will have more to say in the coming days about how that capacity will come online.

We thank the federal government for their offers as well. We would ask them to put more urgency in the resources they say they can make available through Stats Canada. We would like to see that come online as quickly as possible. The feds are saying by November. We would prefer that to be in October.

We will continue to work with our federal partners to do all we can to keep Manitobans safe.

* (14:20)

Travel Manitoba Northern Tourism Ad

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): There's been plenty of confusion and mixed messages from this government during this pandemic. We had concerns about the direction this government was in when they announced phase 4 and that attracting large events to the province would be one of the key pillars of economic recovery.

Now a Crown corporation, Travel Manitoba, is spending money on full-page, front-page ads in the Regina Leader-Post, which I table.

While today's COVID cases broke another record, there's been a northern travel ban in place for months, and Manitobans are waiting for hours for tests and days to get results, why, in midst of all this, is the Pallister government inviting people from Saskatchewan to fly to Churchill through Winnipeg in the middle of a pandemic?

Hon. Ralph Eichler (Minister of Economic Development and Training): Actually, the member raises an interesting question in regards to tourism. Manitobans have always been open for business. We want to ensure that Manitobans have a 'chance'—chance to showcase their products.

In regards to the Churchill ad, this ad was placed prior to our numbers being in place. Advertising is in place for periods and periods of time, and we'll stand by Manitoba Tourism, bringing in Manitobans to show Manitobans what Manitoba has to offer.

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

Provincial Parks Privatization Plan

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): That's not the only thing Travel Manitoba has been up to in this crisis. This—the Crown corporation has now also been tasked in privatizing Manitoba's parks.

I table an RFP released two days ago on October 13th, where the government admits that Manitoba's parks haven't seen an upgrade in 50 years, but rather than, say, invest Manitoba 150 funds in park improvements for the benefit of everyone, the PCs are asking for a plan to sell them off and privatize.

Now, earlier this year the government gave a contract to a Texas corporation for online park permits, which has been an expensive hassle. Madam Speaker, it is not radical to say that some things just shouldn't be for sale.

Does this government recognize what is wrong with having private companies charge Manitobans for access to property and parks we all own?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate): I'm happy to speak about Manitoba parks that were—remained open through all of the restrictions that came into place when COVID showed up, and that showed a very direct benefit to all

Manitobans in their mental health so that they could help—or, visit all our beautiful parks.

To the member's specific question in terms of the RFP: I believe he's referring specifically to a park that was destroyed in 2011 and neglected and was never invested in by the previous government, and we are looking to get it up and running so Manitobans have more parks to visit, explore and enjoy.

Thank you.

Personal-Care Homes Investments Needed

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): The Long Term & Continuing Care Association of Manitoba, also known as LTCAM, have been extremely active through the pandemic in doing everything they can to ensure Manitobans who have loved ones in care homes can connect with their loved ones.

Unfortunately, all of their pleas were ignored in last week's Throne Speech, as well as a letter sent to the Premier (Mr. Pallister) regarding health transfers.

Madam Speaker, long-term care needs resources, funding and staff, now more than ever, to keep seniors safe and COVID out.

So when is this government going to respond to LTCAM and open up ways of communication for seniors?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I thank the member for the question and indicate that we are way ahead of her, and that I had a meeting that was very positive with the long-term-care association of Manitoba—well, ongoing, but most recently, just two weeks ago.

COVID-19 Testing Capacity Red River College Training Program

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): Yesterday, Red River College announced a new tuition-free course to train nursing students and medical students, as well as paramedics, pharmacists, lab techs and health-care aides, to work at COVID-19 screening sites.

Can the Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living inform the House of how this is helping to increase Manitoba's COVID-19 testing capacity?

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

Red River is, indeed, providing tuition-free, one-day training for those groups to allow us to expand the

workforce and allow highly qualified medical-medically trained people to work at COVID-19 screening sites. It's part of our overall strategy to increase capacity and hours of operation. We just added another screening site in Winnipeg and there's another on the way just this weekend.

Madam Speaker, I would say this, though. We just heard back from the president of Red River College. In the first day of signalling that there would be 90 spaces open, he indicates that the phones are ringing off the hook and that there are already 80 applications in.

Changes to Crown Land Leasing Impact on Agricultural Producers

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Madam Speaker, many times in this House we have raised our concerns regarding the Pallister government's radical changes to agricultural Crown lands. I would like to share the human toll.

One producer tells me that their lease has doubled and two years of bills have come due close together due to changes the Pallister government has made. It's tens of thousands of dollars. They can't pay it and they risk losing their farm.

Why is the minister putting so much stress on our producers?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development): I thank the member for the question.

I won't speak directly to that particular producer, because that's an ongoing discussion between the producer and our department. And we are certainly doing everything we can to make sure that that producer remains in business, that they can catch up on their past-due bills. And we will do everything we can to make sure that that producer remains viable.

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

Mr. Brar: As I know, her letter to this minister has not been replied yet. I talked to her yesterday.

This producer tells me, and I quote: I'm not trained in anything else. My livelihood and my children's lives depend on this ranch. It's all I have. I—it means everything to us. End quote.

Yet everything they have is at risk. The minister has more than doubled their lease costs and changed the timing of lease payments so that much more is due in a short period. It's tens of thousands of dollars. They

tell me, and I quote: You truly have no idea, nor can you even fathom the stress and worry I carry every day.

I ask the minister: Will he show compassion to producers who have been caught short due to his—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Speaker, I'd just remind the member that that letter just came across my desk this morning, and it's already been actioned into the department.

We are getting background information to make sure that we have all the information. We're reaching out to that producer to make sure that they have—that we can work together on a solution for them. And I would just ask them for a little bit of patience in here that we will work with the producer to do everything possible.

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

Mr. Brar: And just so everybody knows, tomorrow is the payment deadline for her.

The story I hear is hardly unique, and the changes the Pallister government has made to Crown lands will fundamentally impact the future of cattle producers. But the human toll is immense.

We have generational producers that are being forced out, broken by the stress. They tell me, and I quote: Please try and put yourself in my shoes or imagine it is one of your children and grandchildren going through this.

I ask the minister: Will he show compassion and help these producers?

Mr. Pedersen: In case the member's not aware, the consultation process is open, right now, on legacy leases. When that consultation is done, the regulation will be written for legacy leases in order to be able to have that generational change between ranches.

And I'd also just invite the member, stay tuned—there will be announcement coming tomorrow on Crown land leases.

* (14:30)

Essential Services Privatization Inquiry

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Infrastructure funding in this province has been cut by hundreds of millions of dollars by this government. Their agenda

here, Madam Speaker, is clear: defund, cut and then privatize.

After slashing capital infrastructure spending with the biggest cuts in Canada, they now have their eyes set on privatizing more public services. Whether it be water bombers or Lifeflight or our Amphibexes, this government has done it before and we know they will do it again.

Will the minister come clean with Manitobans and tell this House, what essential services is he planning on privatizing next?

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure): Well, Madam Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government that has increased infrastructure spending—unparalleled in the history of this province. This year alone: more than \$500 million. Next year: more than \$500 million.

But let's go back and look at the lean, dark years of the NDP, back into 2000-2001. How much money was spent in that year? Ninety-eight million dollars. Better yet, 2001-2002: \$93 million spent in that year.

Madam Speaker, we're never going to recover from the dark, lean years of the NDP, but our government is spending more than \$500 million this year, more than \$500 million next year. Stay posted. The story only keeps getting better.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Vivian Sand Facility Project—Clean Environment Commission Review

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

A major concern of the proposed mine and plant is that, if developed, it could contaminate the

Sandilands aquifer, including both the carbonate and the sandstone aquifers, which covers much of southeastern Manitoba. It has excellent water quality and is the water source for tens of thousands of Manitobans, including many municipal water systems, agriculture, industry, private wells and an abundance of wildlife and ecosystems. Further, people in the Indigenous communities that are potentially affected by this were not afforded the required Indigenous consultation from either federal or provincial government officials.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This project should not proceed, as no licensing conditions and mitigation measures will alleviate the risk to all Manitobans and the environment since CanWhite Sands Corporation plans to use an unprecedented mining technique with no established safe outcome. The corporation has gone on record indicating that it does not know how to mine for the silica in the water supply and need to develop a new extraction methodology that has never been done before.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

Signed by Milla Hamlick [*phonetic*], Cal Brinka [*phonetic*], John Popeia [*phonetic*] and many, many others.

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

Dauphin Correctional Centre

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, the background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Does the honourable member for Burrows have a petition?

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Yes.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows.

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

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, the background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Does the honourable member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie) have a petition? The honourable member for Keewatinook?

* (14:40)

We've got a technological problem, here. We're not being able to hear it. In the meantime, if we could

move on, and if something gets fixed here, we'll come back—with everybody's leave—to the honourable member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie).

So we'll move now to the honourable member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont). Oh. The honourable member for St. Boniface?

I will move on, then, to the honourable member for Tyndall Park.

Cochlear Implant Program

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Dauphin Correctional Centre

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, the background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Does the honourable member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey) have a petition? I'm seeing a no.

The honourable member for Elmwood, on his petition.

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Does the honourable member for Notre Dame (Ms. Marcelino) have a petition? Honourable member for Notre Dame?

If not, we'll move on to the honourable member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses).

We will then move on to the honourable member for Wolseley.

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): I wish to present the following petition in the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

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

The background to the petition is as follows:

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

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

* (14:50)

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this is signed by Lionel Chartrand, Janice Mckay, Charlene Desjarlais and many, many other Manitobans.

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this has been signed by many Manitobans.

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Just for everybody's information, headpieces are available in room 237, which is the Clerk's office, and I would urge everybody to pick one up. We did order enough for everybody in case something comes up. You never know, we may all have to be using a headpiece one day. So you're all encouraged to please pick one up and take some lessons that are being offered, too, if you feel the need for that.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Pursuant to rule 33(8), I am announcing that the private members' resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara). The title of the resolution is, and I quote: Increased Staffing and Support for Personal Care Homes and for Seniors. End Quote.

Miigwech, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that, pursuant to rule 33(8), the private members' resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Union Station. The title of the resolution is: Increased Staffing and Support for Personal Care Homes and for Seniors.

* * *

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Interrupting Throne Speech debate, could you please call for debate Bill 2, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, for second reading.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider second reading of Bill 2 this afternoon.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 2—The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

Madam Speaker: So I will now call second reading of Bill 2, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2020.

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Families (Mrs. Stefanson), that Bill 2, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, now be read a second time and be referred to the committee of the House.

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

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance, seconded by the honourable Minister of Families, that Bill 2, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of the House.

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

Mr. Fielding: It's my pleasure to speak to Bill 2, the budget implementation and tax amendment act, 2020.

The bill implements tax and other measures announced in the 2020 Manitoba budget. Additional amendments implement and support some rebudgeting and make various amendments to tax legislation. In terms of tax measures, this bill implements tax measures to lower taxes for Manitobans and businesses, which makes our economy stronger and more resilient, Madam Speaker.

BITSA amends The Health and Post Secondary Education Tax Levy Act by raising the exemption threshold for \$1.25 million to \$1.5 million of annual remuneration and raises the threshold between which employees pay a reduced rate of 2.5 to 3 million dollars for as what's commonly referred to as the payroll tax. These threshold increases will benefit approximately 1,000 Manitoba businesses, including exempting approximately 220 employers from paying the levy.

The health and post-secondary education tax levy is further amended, along with The Fuel Tax Act, the insurance corporation act, the tax administrative and miscellaneous taxes act, and The Tobacco Tax Act, to require electronic filings, paying and remitting the

taxes. This is a red tape—this will reduce red tape and administration of these taxes.

* (15:00)

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

The bill also amends The Income Tax Act by adding the seniors economic recovery tax credit to enable eligible seniors who do not have received the advanced cheques in 2020 to be able to claim it when filing their 2020 personal income taxes, Madam Speaker; extending the deadline for applying for the Primary Caregiver Tax Credit from December 31st of this year to April 30th tax filing deadline; making the Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit permanent; enhancing the Film and Video Production Tax Credit by adding a new 8 per cent Manitoba production company bonus, which is so important to Manitoba businesses; increasing the number of eligible child-care spaces to 474 spaces from the development—from the child-care tax credit and that goes from 208 to 684 spaces under the Child Care Centre Development Tax Credit; enabling co-op work placements to be eight weeks instead of 10 weeks to assist these placements impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It also extends the Community Enterprise Development Tax Credit to one year, to December 2021.

It also extends the Mineral Exploration Tax Credit to three years, to December 2023.

BITSA also amends The Law Fees and Probate Charge Act to eliminate probate fees that are payable on the person's estate.

The elimination of the probate fees is part of our government's 2020 tax rollback guarantee and Manitobans will be the first western province to eliminate probate fees, Madam—Mr. Deputy Chair.

The retail sales tax act is also amended by adding a refund for all-terrain vehicles using—or, used in farming; enabling businesses owned by a spouse to transfer taxes-paid assets without a tax—paying taxes on—a second time; adding a formula for valuing used property brought into the province for commercial usages; providing an exemption for gold, platinum and silver purchases for investment purposes; expanding the exemption for the sales and used manufacturing plant to include processing plants.

Bill 2 also repeals The Credit Unions and Caisses Populaires Profits Tax Act as the tax was eliminated in 2019.

In terms of the provisions, BITSA implements important measures to support summary budgeting by amending some acts, such as The Crown Corporation Governance and Accountability Act. This act provides for government oversight over certain Crown corporations. It's being amended for consistency with the changes made in The Financial Administration Act. These changes provide for greater governance oversight over the financial administration of reporting organizations, including agencies governed by the act.

In terms of municipal financing reporting, Mr. Chair, The Municipal Act and The City of Winnipeg Charter are amended to enable regulations establishing financial reporting requirements and specifying accounting policies and practices that must follow the local governments, such as public sector accounting standards used provincially.

In terms of public sector executive compensation, under The Public Sector Executive Compensation Act frameworks for government compensation for executives of public sector employees may be established by regulation.

This captures health organizations, Crown corporations, post-secondary institutions, school divisions and other public sector employees that are prescribed. It also makes exemptions are 'perminet', such as where the position entails specific skills, knowledge that are not generally transferable. So it does provide some flexibility in that respect.

In terms of The Auditor General Act, the BITSA makes amendments to The Auditor General Act and—requests by the office, to verify that the Auditor General can examine the operations or accounts of organizations that receive public money—and that's money from the Manitoba government—even if the money is combined with other money. This is enhancement that provides more accountability. The amendment also expands the scope of special audit requests to include the audits of operation.

In terms of dissolution of Public Schools Finance Board, the Public Schools Finance Board is being dissolved to streamline the government structures for school capital support programs in line with our commitment to reduce government agencies, boards and commissions that do not add added value.

The amendments to The Public Schools Act, as well as other statues, repeal The Public Schools Finance Board Act and assigns the duties of the finance board, which is already comprised of public

servants, to the Minister of Education. Responsibility for administering the capital support program moves from the finance board to the minister.

A new provision enables the minister to utilize the services of staff in other departments to administer the capital supporting program. This enables Central Services staff to continue to provide capital planning, capital project delivery and asset management for the school capital support programs.

An updated oversight scheme for school division borrowing is proposed as part of the amendments to reflect the dissolution of the Public Schools Finance Board and align with modern practices.

In terms of wait times for funding for independent schools, the proposed amendments to The Public Schools Act reduces the wait times for independent schools to be eligible to receive funding from three years to two years.

These proposed amendments reduce the regulatory burden of independent schools and respond to the concerns raised by the Manitoba Federation of Independent Schools. Manitoba has the longest wait times to receive funding of the provinces for future—for independent schools. These changes will better align Manitoba with other provinces such as British Columbia, Alberta, as well as Saskatchewan.

In terms of the Health Services Insurance Fund, we are increasing transparency about how health expenditures flow. The health sure—the Health Services Insurance Plan is a unique way that we flow money to a—to RHAs for health care. However, the Health Services Insurance Fund is an unnecessary extra step that has nothing to do with actual health outcomes, the coverage of universal health care or anything that would be affected by front-line services. So it has no impact on front-line services.

Going forward, the money will be more transparently reported in voted appropriations of the Department of Health, Seniors and Active Living. So, that's an important part. You'll be able to have more eyes on this than we did before, and the Office of the Auditor General has long called for this action, so we're happy to make that a part of this bill.

In terms of fund remediation, the government is remediating funds that are funds in name only. It is misleading to Manitobans to report this money in a fund if the money cannot be spent by increasing the provincial debt. We don't believe in double-counting the money, which is why we've taken efforts to

remediate these funds for their intended use and not simply improve government's bottom line.

And we're making amendments to the following: to fix the Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Fund, our government has contributed \$20 million into a trust fund, being held by the Winnipeg Foundation, that will generate money every year for initiatives that support fish and wildlife enhancement. Not only is the—is this more predictable and stable funding that is normally account balance, we will also contribute 10 per cent of the hunting and fishing licence revenue to add to the trust fund.

Our government is also partnering with the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce to establish the Manitoba Mineral Development Fund to help our province capitalize on potential opportunities for minerals in the North and across Manitoba. We're—we are repealing the legislation for the Mining Community Reserve Fund.

The government has continued to work with British Columbia, Saskatchewan to fund the Western College of Veterinary Medicine with a \$134-million interprovincial agreement to allow Manitobans who wish to become veterinarians to get access to a degree. We're maintaining veterinarian science scholarships, which are funded from appropriations in, now, the Department of Education, in their print and resource development under the veterinarian science scholarship fund is very much needed.

An amendment to the Waste Reduction and Recycling Support Fund: the waste reduction and recycling levy will be collected and will be actually spent—we'll actually spend the money that we are collecting.

The Community Revitalization Tax Increment Financing Act will be replaced—will replace a fund with grants made by the Minister of Education and Training.

The housing rehabilitation corporation act will have money held in the Consolidated Fund rather than the Housing Development and Rehabilitation Fund.

We're eliminating the transportation infrastructure fund to eliminate the trucking productivity fund. Monies collected from the oversize and oversize vehicles should be spent on highways preservation, not accumulating, unused, in this nominal fund.

The Insurance Corporations Tax Act is amended to eliminate the Fire Prevention Fund, and the levy will still be collected with the Office of the Fire

Commissioner, funded through the Department of Municipal Relations' budget.

* (15:10)

The borrowing financial literacy fund in The Consumer Protection Act is likewise being replaced. The same high-cost creditors and payday lenders will be charged licensing fees, and those licensing fees will be set to provide financial literacy education to Manitobans and will be reviewed for what is appropriate licence fees should be for these particular lenders.

Fine surcharges for people convicted of criminal offences will continue, and the money will be used to fund services and activities that support victims of crime. Amendments to The Victims' Bill of Rights and other statutes will replace the Victims Assistance Fund with the annual expenditures from the budget of Manitoba Justice.

In terms of Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation, our government has partnered—or will be—or, is partnering with The Winnipeg Foundation and the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation to establish two endowment funds: the Conservation Trust and the GROW Trust. Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation is responsible for the administration of the granting program for these particular funds.

Workers Compensation Act: the 'governance' of the Workers Compensation Board is updated in order to address the qualified opinion of the Auditor General regarding control of the Workers Compensation Board, which exists for the benefit of employers and employees.

Currently, Cabinet appointees—appoints every member of the board of the directors of workers compensation, including three worker representatives, three employer representatives and three public interest representatives. Under the new schedule or scheme, Cabinet will appoint the board members, but the worker and employer represents are selected from nominees of a specific—specified workers and employer organizations, and the chairs nominated by consensus by the other board members.

Cabinet longer—no longer has the authority to disallow regulations made by the board. A new benefit program may be established if the minister is consulted. Cabinet approval is no longer required. The board is required to appoint an independent auditor for its annual report.

These are important—there is—these are important changes, as it allows us to get—and these are advice with consultation with the Auditor General.

In terms of the Legislative Building restoration preservation: Government House—which is at, course, 10 Kennedy St.—will be included in The Legislative Building Centennial Restoration and Preservation Act, as it's integral part of the Legislative Precinct and requires restoration and preservation under the 15-year, \$150-million restoration plan of the Legislative grounds.

In terms of areas for the Department of Families portion: repeal The Healthy Child Manitoba Act. Government is committed to finding solutions to social issues by promoting social innovation and, as such, is establishing a Social Innovation Office to serve as a cross-department hub for social innovation. The amendments to The Healthy Child Manitoba Act reflects that health—the Healthy Child office is being repurposed. These resources are being reallocated to support the establishment of the new Social Innovation Office.

The office is responsible for initiating projects with socially responsible entities outside of government to develop creative solutions to social concerns. Programs that—formerly supported by the Healthy Child Manitoba office are transferred to the departments of Families, Health and Seniors and Active Living, Education and other departments that may be involved.

Key information-sharing provisions found in The Healthy Child Manitoba Act will be moved to The Protecting Children (Information Sharing) Act to ensure that Manitobans continue to have authority to collect, to use, to disclose information as part of the research and evaluation efforts to improve services for Manitoba families.

Government will be able to continue to conduct internal and cross-sectorial analysis for major social projects, such as reforms related to child welfare, youth justice and mental health. Preserving information-sharing provisions will promote social innovation by continuing to—by continuing cross-department and cross-sectorial information sharing to achieve best possible outcomes for all Manitoba families.

In terms of 800 Adele lease termination, BITSA will terminate the lease agreement between 5185603 Manitoba Ltd. and the First Nations of Southern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority,

also known as the Southern Network, regarding the premises located 800 Adele Ave. in Winnipeg, an usual–unusually long, 20-year lease and its terms were never in the public interest.

In terms of transition provisions for CFS funding, the children's special allowance is the equivalent of the federal child tax benefit and is provided to CFS agencies by Canada for child–children in care.

The previous administration's funding policy required that CFS agencies remit the CSA received by them to all children deemed to be in provincial care. Amendments to the legislation are required to deem the past collections of the CSA as being part of the rates for services set by the minister and to address any issues associated with the collection of the CSA in previous years.

Manitoba continues to work on reform in the child-welfare system with the goal of reducing the number of children in care and the amounts of time which are spent in care, and I'm pleased to note that my colleague, the Minister of Families (Mrs. Stefanson), has announced that there are fewer children requiring provincial care as of October 1st, announcing a 4 per cent reduction. I believe this is the third year in a row.

The government has implemented the single-envelope funding model designed to empower transformational change by giving CFS authorities and agencies the flexibility to allocate more funding to prevention and earlier intervention, and that's exactly where this money should go to make sure that children aren't in care, can stay with their parents, and if you're able to support prevention–early intervention, that's going to help the situation.

In terms of the Helen Betty Osborne Memorial Foundation, BITSA 2020 introduces amendments to protect the intention of having scholarships in memory of Ms. Helen Betty Osborne. To begin, I'd like to share some context and background on the Helen Betty Osborne Memorial Foundation and its legislation.

Ms. Helen Betty Osborne was a Cree woman from Norway House First Nation who was tragically murdered in The Pas in 1971 while studying to become a teacher. November 13th, 2020, will mark the 49th anniversary of this horrific event.

It has not been–or it was not until 16 years later that the four men were charged in her murder, with only one ever being convicted. The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission that investigated found

that the main factors in the cause were racism, sexism and indifference.

In December 2000–or rather, in December of 2000, the Helen Betty Osborne Memorial Fund Act was established as a scholarship foundation to provide financial supports to Indigenous post-secondary students in Manitoba. The scholarship foundation was structured to be governed and administered by a volunteer board of trustees, without government support.

However, this did not work as intended, and the board was unable to keep the foundation active, as was legislatively envisioned. The result in the–of the foundation's charitable status was revoked by the Canada health agency, and no scholarships had been distributed since 2016.

In 2019, a board of trustees was appointed for the foundation with the mandate of setting things right and ensuring that we have appropriate honour to–for the memory of Ms. Osborne.

In order to provide for the sustainability of the scholarship fund, and to avoid similar situations in the future, amendments are proposed to The Helen Betty Osborne Memorial Foundation Act. The amendments will continue the scholarship through a fund administered by the Minister of Education (Mr. Goertzen)–sorry, by the Minister of Economic Development and Training (Mr. Eichler), and may involve entering into agreements with a third party, such as The Winnipeg Foundation, to ensure that these scholarships will continue for future Indigenous post-secondary students.

In terms of hydro rates, BITSA implements a 2.9 per cent increase in certain electric and natural gas rates, effective December 1st, 2020. This measure is–strikes a balance between the ability of ratepayers to pay during the pandemic times while also meeting the long-term capital project needs of Manitoba Hydro to pay off massive debts incurred through Keeyask and Bipole III.

In terms of Labour Relations Amendment Act, amendments to the Labour Relations Act will facilitate the transfer of 'conciliation' and grievance mediation services to the private sector. Under the new model, these services will be delivered by skilled 'consultators' and grievance mediators recognized by the Manitoba Labour Board.

The board will be required to consult with representatives of employers and employees before 'conciliation' and mediation–mediators are selected.

This change will save government approximately \$700,000 to \$800,000 annually.

* (15:20)

The changes also give the Lieutenant Governor of—Lieutenant Governor-in-Council regulation-making authority to establish fees for services retained by the Manitoba Labour Board, including processing of applications and complaints filed by the board. Before any such fees are established, advice and recommendations will be needed to be sought from employer-employee respectively.

In terms of optometrists, The Optometry Act will be amended to allow optometrists to practice through professional corporations. Optometrists will join many other health-care professionals, such as chiropractors, physicians and surgeons, dentists, registered nurses who can practice through a corporation.

This schedule, or scheme, being brought into The Optometry Act will closely mirror professional corporation provisions and The Regulated Health Professionals Act, which allows corporate practices of several other health professions.

Madam Speaker, that concludes my comments on the budget implementation tax amendment act, 2020, Mr. Deputy Chair.

Thank you.

Questions

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

The honourable member for Fort Garry, on a question.

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): I'm wondering if the minister can explain why the BITSA bill is being used to bring in a hydro increase and why this wasn't put through a democratically accountable process like the Public Utilities Board.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister for—Minister of Finance. You have to stand, yes.

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Fielding: Sorry? Deputy Speaker. Thank you very much.

You know, it was an unfortunate fact never in Manitoba's history, in fact, I would suggest in all democracies, have you had an opposition party 'filibust' during a pandemic—100-year pandemic. Hundred-year pandemic and you have an opposition—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fielding: —their No. 1 goal—their No. 1 goal—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fielding: —in the Legislature, instead of providing supports and services, is to block legislation, is to block items that Manitobans need, and that is going to be remembered for a long period of time.

So that's the reason why this bill is—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fielding: —bigger than normal. It's—incorporates a number of policies practical that are here that is because of the opposition and their blocking, 'filibusting' tactics that Manitobans will not forget any time soon.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My question for the minister relates to the clause which doesn't allow the lapsing of expenditures within the fiscal year. That's expenditures that are set out in the main Estimates of Expenditures.

And I would ask: What is the plan for the minister if money is not spent? Is the money all required to be spent, or what happens if money is not spent?

Mr. Fielding: Well, we, as a government, have taken great pride in the fact that four years in a row we've expended money. We've spent the money. In fact, we've, in a lot of ways, increased the amount of expenditures that we're putting towards key important areas like health care, education, social services. In fact, this year alone, we're spending up to \$1.3 million in terms of the approach. We want to make sure supports are in place for Manitobans.

We're also very proud of the fact that we're beating estimates every year and the fact that we committed to the three big things that we committed to when we first came to office: No. 1, balance the

budget, which we did that four years in advance; cutting taxes and giving \$700 million—[*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fielding: —back to Manitobans; and replenishing the rainy day fund that the NDP government drained before we came to office.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister can explain why—[*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —he has eliminated the Public Schools Finance Board and why this wasn't put into a separate bill.

Mr. Fielding: Well, that was incorporated in the budget documents. I'm not sure if the member had a chance to read the budget or not, but if he did he would have read that it was incorporated in the budget document. All the same processes that happen which, by the way, the Public Schools Finance Board is administratively—it's deputy ministers that are part of it.

So all the same processes that would happen to evaluate where investments are made will be done through the Department of Education where it should have been done to begin with. So it's an area to reduce red tape but the same process of evaluations of where we invest our monies.

One thing this government is very proud of is the fact that we committed to building over 20 new schools—20 new schools—and we're also committed in the Throne Speech to invest \$1.6 billion—

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

Mr. Gerrard: Deputy Speaker, I notice that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) is taking the ability to transfer items or expenditures from one area to another within departments. I'm just asking for clarification on the process; that's to say, the department can't do it, but you as the Minister of Finance can do it.

How broad is that power to switch expenditures from one area to another within a department's mandate?

Mr. Fielding: It's a very good question, and so, a lot of other governments have an ability to move dollars within a window. I'll give you an example.

When I was the Minister of Families about two, three years ago, the department, overall, the

expenditures, we had a lot of savings because we didn't use as much people on EIA types of payments, yet one of the parts of the department was overspent. It was in the CFS at that point. The department came in actually on budget, but what happened is we had to ask for additional appropriations to spend the money even though the department was underbudget.

So this an ability for the government to move within that budget line for that department.

Mr. Wasyliw: Why is the minister giving himself unfettered power to direct the actions of schools, hospitals, post-secondary institutions? Why isn't he able to work things out collaboratively with these organizations, and why does he need exceptional powers?

Mr. Fielding: Well, thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—that's right, Deputy Speaker. A part of our process and what the Auditor General's talked about is moving to summary budgeting. That's something that the NDP did not do for way too long. They should've moved to summary budget in 2018.

That means that all departments—there's not individual islands of different departments and have you that are here—what has an impact on things like Hydro and other Crown corporations; has an impact for taxpayers' bottom line.

So we have an ability to make policy changes. By the way, policy change is something that the NDP introduced, a part of this, where they could give directives to school divisions and other things before we came to office.

So this just changes that same direction that we would have to the FAA, The Financial Administration Act.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I note that the minister is enhancing the Treasury Board's supervisory role in relationship to the financial administration of—I believe it's agencies which report, in a broad sense.

I wonder if the minister could detail more—or, provide more detail on what agencies are covered and in precisely what the minister is looking for in terms of the increased supervision.

Mr. Fielding: Madam—Mr. Deputy Chair—Mr. Deputy Speaker, the government is important to what—what the Auditor General's talked about is moving to summary budgeting. That means anything that's affiliated, what we commonly refer to as other reporting entities. That could be things like the school

divisions. That could be things like the Crown corporations' entities. That's a part of it.

Their bottom line has an impact on the government's bottom line, and so when we go to places like the credit rating agencies, what they do is they look at the bottom line of Manitobans as a summary budgeting.

So what this does, it allows us to copy what the NDP did in terms of the initial part of things, giving directives to things like Crown corporations and school divisions in terms of The Financial Administration Act because—

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

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm asking the minister why these provisions can't be included in standalone bills so we can properly hear from the institutions that are affected, including post-secondary institution and our school leadership.

Why is there a need to ram this through a BITSA bill?

* (15:30)

Mr. Fielding: Well, I don't think anyone in Manitoba would have assumed that you would have opposition that would be filibustering during a hundred-year pandemic when people need supports and services—businesses and individuals.

Who would have thought that the NDP would filibuster these tips, initiatives. There's other initiatives in here with the seniors economic credit—that's the \$200 cheque that came. This gives the parameters to allow us to do this. These are measures that are important and, as we said, there is the pandemic that was in place to make sure we incorporated all these things.

We—the NDP shouldn't have blocked a lot of these bills, and a lot of these bills have been introduced yesterday and will continue to be introduced with BITSA.

Mr. Wasyliw: What does this government plan to do with the health data that they want to compel—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —non-profit organizations to collect and to release to them, and what's the rationale behind this?

Mr. Fielding: I'm not really sure what this has—it relates to the budget bill.

If the member would like to point out the clause that he's referred to, I'd be more than happy to answer. I just—collectively, I guess, I could say, as the government we want to provide as much information as we can to Manitobans on the virus and making sure that Manitobans are protected, not just in terms of health protection but also the supports that are in place.

I think the minister—our government officials have indicated that there will be more data being provided for the breakdown.

Mr. Wasyliw: What is going to happen to the parent-child coalitions that are part of the Healthy Child Manitoba? Are they now going to be cut off from funding?

Mr. Fielding: Well, this is related to the Healthy Child Manitoba. And, as mentioned, we've repurposed the office into a Social Innovation Office. We think it makes sense to have not only the private sector and others come together to find some solutions.

The first project, of course, was in terms of Indigenous women and doula program that was supported. The programming will go to each of the departments in that cross-sectoral piece that has been involved, will continue to be involved. The information-sharing component of that is transferred into the bill.

Mr. Wasyliw: What is going to happen to the staff who were previously at Healthy Child Manitoba?

Mr. Fielding: The programming and staff, obviously, would be associated with the programming would be transferred to each of the individual departments where there's more of a fit or the—where it generally would come from.

There is also the Social Innovation Office, which we think will work well to do things like social impact bonds, which we think will help progress and help—progress and offer some creative solutions to some social problem issues here in Manitoba.

Mr. Wasyliw: Can the minister explain the rationale behind pushing child care in to the private sector instead of supporting non-profit centres who have strict rules and standards of care?

Mr. Fielding: Well, we don't believe in an ideological approach to child care like the member, as well as the

NDP, where they have an ideological approach.
[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fielding: We believe in a balanced approach to child care. We created a child care development tax credit—that's a new and innovative way to do it, where we've enhanced that. Instead of having 208 spaces funded by this, it's going to increase it up to about—over 600 spots.

We think that's really important to make sure that working parents have the supports in place. There's three businesses that have taken us up on that tax credit, and we think it's important to have working parents supported in the business.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses)—oh, no, sorry, the honourable member for St. Boniface is asking a question on Zoom.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Yes, I had a question.

The budget expands the investigative powers of the Auditor General, but I also understand that the auditor has asked for an increase in his budget. And, clearly, we're asking—we're offering him greater scope and greater requirements. There have also been delays in reports.

I'm wondering why there wasn't any additional financial assistance for the Auditor General when he's asked for—when they've asked for increased funding for—three times and been denied.

Mr. Fielding: Well, what this does, it provides some accountability as well as some of the things that the Auditor General has talked about in terms of things like the Workers Compensation Board.

There's obviously been a disagreement with government of control factors. We took the Auditor General's—his position on these types of things and drafted legislation that's a part of this. We've also made it possible for the Auditor General to use his or her powers—it is a him in this respect—to look into monies that may be appropriated to nongovernment agencies; it's a part of it.

So we think that has answered that. If the Auditor General does need different appropriations, that's something that we review in the Estimates process.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I'd like to ask the minister about his government's logic behind removing parent fee caps on new child-care spaces.

Mr. Fielding: Sorry, could you repeat the question. I didn't—

Mr. Sala: I'd like to ask the minister to explain his government's logic behind removing parent fee caps on new child-care spaces.

Mr. Fielding: Well, we as a government have committed millions and millions of dollars to vulnerable Manitobans. And I when I talk about vulnerable Manitobans, I'm talking the Families budget in the tune of about \$214 million annually to these areas.

So, we have been putting the supports in place. We've got agreements with the federal government. We don't believe in one approach to all the child-care approach, like the former NDP government where you—we came to office and there was hundreds—in fact, thousands, of kids on a child-care waiting list.

We think that there's a variety of sources, a way that you can deliver child care, and that's exactly what our legislative agenda does.

Mr. Lamont: I was wondering, there's another issue here that came up in the context of the Auditor General, especially with the—or, understanding how the Workers Compensation Board would be accounted for.

And there's the longest—basically, the government has argued that, because they don't have control of the Workers Compensation Board or other funds, that it should not be included, when, in fact, the government has arguably been running a surplus for a number of years, but denying it.

In the last few months, the government has claimed that—repeatedly that when they announced the amount of funds that have been allocated to supposedly help Manitobans, it includes workers compensation and MPI, and this budget—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time is up. Time is up. The honourable member for St. Vital—St. Boniface, time is up.

Mr. Fielding: Well, No. 1, in terms of the qualification, which I believe the member is referring to, we have a difference—a professional difference of opinion with the Auditor General on that.

With that being said, we want to get out of the situation where we have a qualification, so we worked with the Auditor General on both of the qualifications, one being in the Workers Compensation Board. We took advice from the Auditor General of how we

would get ourselves out of that qualification. They suggested a legislative fix to this; that's exactly what this does in—it addresses the Auditor General's condition of control.

Like to say that we've made a priority of hitting our budgets on a yearly basis, and we're very proud of the fact that we've balanced the budget four years ahead of schedule.

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

Before I—we go into debate, the information for the House is, due to the medical circumstance, the honourable minister of Indigenous relations and northern relations will be substituted in the Chamber by the honourable member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma). This will be the—this will be for the rest of the—today and for tomorrow, okay?

So, it's—that's been announced, and so we'll debate on second reading.

But first, the Speaker has been informed that the second reading debate on Bill 2, the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) has designated his unlimited speaking time to the honourable member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine).

Debate

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I just want to begin by saying this bill is terrible, that the minister should be ashamed of putting his name on this bill, and I'm sure, before too long, he's going to be coming before the House asking for leave to have his name taken off this bill and socially distanced from any proximity to this very terrible, undemocratic piece of legislation—and I do use the term piece of legislation very loosely, at that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

* (15:40)

So, this bill is undemocratic, but it's also going to be very expensive to the people of Manitoba. Buried within the provisions of this BITSA bill, which the government, of course, introduced late on a Friday, when we know that you do not do your best work—we know that the press releases that come out late on a Friday afternoon are typically designed to be hidden from public view—well, buried in the back of this bill are provisions that will make Manitoba Hydro bills more expensive for everybody across Manitoba.

So you've got 1.3 million people who are going to have to pay a higher hydro bill, whether that's at home,

whether that's at their business or whether it's purchasing goods for whom the input costs are only now going to increase.

I would note for the House that, as we stand here today, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has still not faced the media or the public and answered questions about why he believes this hydro rate increase is necessary. It's now been seven days and the Premier has still not answered any questions as to why he believes this hydro rate increase is necessary.

I want to point out that, because of the diligent work of us on the NDP side of the House, there shouldn't be a hydro rate increase this year. Again, Manitoba Hydro did not apply for a rate increase and, as a result, if things were just left as they were, if the government didn't introduce this terrible piece of legislation, everyone's hydro bills would stay the same over the next year.

Instead—and only because this bill was introduced—now all of a sudden everyone's hydro bills are going to be going up starting on December 1st. That's a happy holidays and merry Christmas from the PC caucus to Manitobans: making life more expensive during the pandemic.

We've heard from many, many people who say, you know, we're having a tough time, as it is, making ends meet. The pandemic has certainly stretched a lot of people's, you know, bank accounts very thin, and it's within that context that this government is trying to make one of the most important utility bills—especially during the cold winter months—more expensive.

So, again, there shouldn't be an increase to people's Manitoba Hydro rates, but the government didn't like that so they rushed in this undemocratic piece of legislation to, you know, address that issue that they saw, because they believe that people's hydro bills should be more expensive.

Now, do they answer these questions? Do they face Manitobans? Do they explain to the people? Do they try and make their case as to why they believe that people's hydro bills should go up? No, they do not. That's why they buried this in the back of a piece of omnibus legislation.

And I just want to pause here for a second to just underline to what extraordinary lengths this government went to, to raise people's hydro bills. I think I've already made the case that they had to legislate a hydro rate increase. They didn't have an application come from Manitoba Hydro. They didn't

have a Public Utilities Board hearing. They didn't have any sort of process, nor will there be, I expect, any sort of opportunity for the public to weigh in on this bill. Rather, they just put it into a piece of legislation.

But that's not all. We were previously in a different sitting—a different session of the Manitoba Legislature. Did this government see fit to introduce that hydro rate increase during that session? No, because they didn't want to debate it. They didn't want to talk to the public about it. They didn't want to face the people of Manitoba about it.

Instead, they went to the extraordinary lengths of proroguing the House—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: They went to the extraordinary lengths of proroguing the House and bringing forward a whole new Throne Speech—which was very, very boring, I would add. They prorogued the House. They brought a whole new Throne Speech and then they drafted a massive piece of omnibus legislation.

You know how much work that takes, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Even to write a very boring Throne Speech, that takes hundreds and hundreds of hours. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: To prorogue the House, that takes an extraordinary amount of brainpower for normal people, but when we're talking about the PC caucus, we're talking about, like, an extraordinary effort for them to come up with the legislative strategy to execute these things.

Again, this is an unprecedented effort on the part of this government to make life more expensive for people in Manitoba. This thing didn't happen by accident. The hydro rate increase didn't happen by accident. They prorogued the House, they drafted legislation, they brought in a Throne Speech and now they're ramming this bill through using obscure provisions within legislative rules to make life more expensive. That takes commitment. That takes passion. That takes countless hours of work to execute.

Imagine what this government could do if they devoted that time, that energy and those resources to doing something productive that would actually help people get through the pandemic. Imagine if they

would've, you know, devoted that brain power, those resources, that time towards addressing the issues confronting personal-care homes. Imagine if they would've devoted that innovation, that creative thinking, that outside-of-the-box problem solving to addressing the lineups at COVID testing sites.

Imagine if they would've devoted all that, you know, stick-to-itiveness and gumption and, you know, whatever it is that they're rallying around this week on that side of the House, to actually helping small businesses and the average Manitoba family survive through the most brutal recession that any of us have seen in our lifetimes. It's really, really bizarre that the area where they choose to devote so much of their time and effort is a measure to make life more expensive for the people of Manitoba.

Again, I would turn it over to the members opposite to explain why that is, but we've asked about this several times and we still have not heard a single answer. And, of course, we're on day seven of waiting for the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to address this issue, and he has refused to comment. And so, again, you know, I think, on this side of the House, we recognize that true leadership means going out to the people of Manitoba and making your case for why your vision for this province is the right one, and yet this government abjectly refuses to do so.

There was no mention of ramming through hydro rate increases at any point over the past four years. There was no mention of legislating hydro rate increases at any point in the last four years. There was no mention on the part of this government that they were going to take away the ability of Manitobans to weigh in in a public hearing or forum before they were forced to pay more to a utility that they, in fact, own.

So it's very, very problematic. And, again, I would just call out the fact that the government devoted so much time and energy to try and make this thing happen. And so I suppose they're proud of it because, you know, they talked themselves into it. But I think we're all familiar with how you can kick ideas around in a meeting for so long that you actually lose sight of what really matters to people outside of that board room, and that's clearly what happened here. Clearly, they talked themselves into believing that, you know, by just repeating ad nauseam a few of their tired catchphrases, that maybe the people of Manitoba won't realize that it was the Premier, the member from Steinbach, the member from St. Paul, the member for Fort Richmond (Mrs. Guillemard), the member for

Kirkfield Park (Mr. Fielding) that made people's lives more expensive.

But I have a higher estimation of the people of Manitoba than that. I know that the people of Manitoba are growing sick of the tired catchphrases and ad hominem attacks that are practised on the other side of the Chamber, and they're in fact hungry for a vision that would keep life affordable while also offering economic opportunity and a true vision to build a knowledge economy here in the province of Manitoba.

So, you know, I'm having a bit of fun here because, again, it's just remarkable how bad this piece of legislation is and the process that led to it—the whole prorogation, Throne Speech, that whole, like, gambit of legislative manoeuvres, all done so that you could make people's bills more expensive, right before the holidays, right during winter when everybody needs to rely on hydro to—and natural gas to keep their homes warm.

But there's also a very serious—I would pause to note there's no heckling on that: consent that they all accept that the premise is true. So, point taken.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: I want to also move on—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —and point out that there is a very undemocratic tenor, not just to the BITSAs provisions as a whole, which is undemocratic in the Stephen Harper sense of undemocratic, in which, you know, they would pass provisions that would change, you know, the environment and change people's rights and change, you know, the social safety net in Canada without people ever hearing it by burying those provisions in the back of an omnibus bill. Of course, that is one of the concerns we have about the lack of democratic process in this bill.

* (15:50)

But specifically as it relates to increasing people's hydro bills, it's very undemocratic because here in Manitoba we have a Public Utilities Board, right? And the Public Utilities Board save—serves the same function as, you know, regulators do for energy companies right across North America. Essentially, it helps to ensure that there's a fair process, so that the people who have to pay the bills get an opportunity to ensure that any increase that they may have to contend

with is actually merited, is actually fair and is actually being foisted upon them out of necessity.

Now, again, a Public Utilities Board hearing is the norm in Manitoba. Any time Manitoba Hydro wants a rate increase, any time any of the Crowns want to make a big change like that—MPI for instance—if they want to change rates, they make a general rate application. Manitoba Hydro made no such rate application this year.

So, again, there should be no increase. And yet, without having the opportunity for people to weigh in on this, this is being rammed through by this government. And I can hear the chattering of backbenchers and ministers on the other side, and it seems as though they're surprised, too. They're outraged that their Premier (Mr. Pallister) and this Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) would bring forward this piece of legislation with such terrible provisions within it.

But I would just encourage them to read the legislation before they support it and, of course, invite them, that if they every want to stand on the side of a strong, public Manitoba Hydro with affordable bills, come to our side, cross the floor, join the team. They can vote with their feet—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —and they refuse. Therefore—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: They must therefore believe in higher utility bills and a privatized Manitoba Hydro. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: To have—Zoom crashed because I'm spitting so much fire here today, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But on a serious level—I broke the Internet with this speech, as they said a few years back on the social media machine.

But on a more realistic level, let's be honest: everyone knows there should be a Public Utilities Board hearing before you raise Manitoba Hydro rates on people. People in Manitoba, whether as individuals or whether as recommended by—or as represented by the Consumers' Association, they should have the right to weigh in first. Again, Manitoba Hydro has a responsibility to try and make the case and present the evidence if they believe that they want to raise Hydro rates.

So, again, this is a very, very difficult thing to understand. And, again, it's a very, very, challenging position for the government members to try and defend. You know, why would they want to raise hydro rates at a time like this, you know? I can't think of a good reason.

Beyond that, there are further provisions within BITSA that will cause more damage to Manitoba Hydro and, indeed, to any Crown corporation in Manitoba.

So, we know that there are important duties being conducted by all of these Crown corporations, whether it's MBLL or MPI or Manitoba Hydro. And all of these Crown corps are owned by the people of Manitoba, and as such, should be subject to governance by the people of Manitoba. Yet, one of the many provisions buried within BITSA that the minister, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and their government has not spoken about publicly, or refuses to comment on, is the fact that they are changing the governance structures of Crown corporations here in Manitoba.

Essentially, they're taking away the fiduciary responsibility of board directors from these Crown corporations, and they are going to assign that to the Cabinet table. So, whereas previously we may have had some confidence in the expertise and acumen and independence of board directors at Crown corporations like Manitoba Hydro or MPI and we could count on them to make the right decisions for the future of those corporations based on that expertise and that acumen and that independence, today, if BITSA passes, essentially that will be no more in Manitoba. And it will be the Premier and his Cabinet governing these Crown corporations by a stroke of the pen. And I would submit to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that that is a bad move.

Gone are the days when you could have a Sandy Riley, well respected in the business community, somebody with a lot of expertise, somebody who I may not agree with at all times, but who was independent and who was willing to walk out on the Premier when the Premier refused to do his job and do simple things like, you know, pick up the phone and talk to the board chair of the most important Crown in Manitoba.

So, after realizing that, you know, the Premier was not treating his job like a full-time job, Mr. Riley decided to walk out and he led an unprecedented revolt at the most important Crown corporation during

a very critical, very crucial time in the history of that utility.

Now, of course, you know, there's been many other problematic issues with that Crown, but nowadays, you know, you're—even if you were to name somebody to the board with that sort of independence and that sort of mindset to call out the Premier when he makes up excuses for his failures of leadership and tries to blame it on the MMF—when in fact we all know that it was his refusal to actually put in the time to build a relationship with his own board of directors—you know, that's not going to happen anymore.

Even if you were to name somebody like that, it would effectively be overridden by any decision made at the Cabinet table, and that's a significant concern. Because again, to remind the House of what this government's been up to when it comes to Manitoba Hydro, it's been a gong show of a fall. I think we can all agree on that.

You know, after we have raised alarms and concerns that privatizing in whole or in part Manitoba Hydro, and that such actions of privatization would lead to more expensive hydro bills, what have we seen this far? We've seen the privatization of profitable subsidiaries of Manitoba Hydro, and we are now, in Bill 2, seeing higher Manitoba Hydro rates, higher utility bills.

So again, to recap: at the end of September Manitoba Hydro released their annual report, and it was right there in black and white, Manitoba Hydro owns Teshmont. Now, Teshmont is an engineering firm that, you know, does a lot of big projects around the world. It generates millions of dollars in revenue and, like I said, right there in the annual report, the end of September, Manitoba Hydro owned Teshmont.

Two days later, a private company announced that they had acquired Teshmont. Again, what at the start of the week was in public hands, by the end of the week was in private hands. Now again, for the ministers on the opposite side of the House who don't properly contemplate the import and impact of these things, I'm sure this was explained to them as nothing to worry about.

But we're talking about high-paying, highly technical, highly skilled jobs here in Manitoba. We're talking about a global competitor who had the ability to land major contracts internationally and bring that revenue back, not just to Manitoba, but bring it back to Manitoba Hydro, where it would serve to offset any

costs of operation and thereby make it more affordable for the people of Manitoba when it came to paying their bills.

Now, again. With Keeyask winding down, with the Bipole construction and MMTP already having wound down, I don't think it's going to be very long before those positions and that operation leaves Manitoba for the other offices in Alberta. So, again, those are our highly skilled knowledge-economy jobs that we should be fighting to protect here in Manitoba. This government sold them out.

We also announced this week we released the contract that shows that this government is in the process of selling off Manitoba Hydro Telecom's business activities, their revenue streams, their existing contracts.

Again, this is going to put upward pressure on people's Manitoba Hydro bills because less money coming in from those operating subsidiaries means that Hydro will have to turn to the people of Manitoba to make up the difference.

Now, there are a whole slew of conflict of interest questions, which the Premier (Mr. Pallister) himself confirmed in a committee of this House just a few short years ago. And I am absolutely certain that these things will be brought out into light and that there will be some very, very damning findings here.

*(16:00)

However, I would add that Manitoba Hydro Telecom—already the subject of this privatization agenda, as I have just explained—is also housed within Manitoba Hydro, within another subsidiary called Manitoba Hydro International.

Now, Manitoba Hydro International, in addition to owning the high-speed Internet fiber-optic backbone that MHT controls, it also owns a lot of intellectual property. For instance, there is a computer-aided design software, renowned the world over for designing hydroelectric dams and transmission lines, which was developed right here in Manitoba.

It's a made-in-Manitoba success story. We have this extraordinary piece of intellectual property that generates a ton of revenue. And with this group in charge of Manitoba, we know that that is going to be the next part of Manitoba Hydro that they look to carve off and sell off.

And again, why should you care about that? Well, if you're a young person in Manitoba who, you know,

thinks about staying here in the future, you would hope that we are building a knowledge economy in which we have the skills, the techniques and the intellectual property to be able to compete on the global stage to be able to bring money here rather than to see money leak out.

If they sell that piece of software, if they sell the other assets within Manitoba Hydro International, we are going to be setting our province up to fail, not just in the form of higher Manitoba Hydro bills for now and for many years to come, but also because those competitive advantages that we currently enjoy will be taken out of province, and all the money that goes along with them, all the future revenue that goes along with them, will be leaving the province as well.

Now, again, if you're part of that government and your real priority is to help large corporations make money, then that might suit you just fine. But if you're somebody who wants to fight for the average person, who wants to fight for an equitable future, who wants to support small businesses and local tech innovators, then that is a future that you should absolutely abhor.

Again, Canada as a whole needs to do a better job of securing intellectual property, right? If we look at the global scene and we see what's taking place in our economy today, for sure you have a lot of big-legacy businesses, but a huge amount of the wealth that has been created over the past decade are, you know, knowledge-economy businesses. And whether you agree with their business practices or not, when you look at companies like Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Google, what do they actually produce? They produce intellectual property, right?

And so, again, even if you look at some of our domestic industries, like agriculture, who are the biggest players within that space? You do have large producers, you do have large folks in the transportation arena, but it's—you know, it's the food sciences, the life sciences companies—it's the patent holders that are the ones that generate the hugest amounts of dollars.

And so this government is employing a pawnshop mentality. They want to break these elements off, make a quick buck today at a tremendous future cost, both in the form of higher utility bills and of lost economic opportunity for generations to come. What we should, in fact, be engaging on is a concerted, smart and focused approach to building up our economy to compete for the rest of this century.

Manitoba Hydro, I would submit to you, is in a unique position to be able to help us execute those goals. We know that success in this century is going to require clean energy; it's going to require innovation and the ability not only to develop but also to protect your intellectual property; and it's also going to depend on social capital and social licence—some social capital, social licence.

We know that Manitoba Hydro, although having taken some big steps backwards under this government by fighting with some of their Indigenous partners—both the MMF and also the Keeyask First Nations, some at the behest of the Premier (Mr. Pallister) directly and some, some really mistaken ideas of how to practise business with your partners, especially during the pandemic. But setting those mistakes aside—because, again, this government can be replaced and could be replaced with a better, more future-oriented group of leaders—we would be able to use Manitoba Hydro as the mechanism to reconcile with many Indigenous nations in Manitoba and to help them to create the economic opportunity that they have been so long deprived, so it could help us obtain social capital and social licence to pursue the economic future which we desire.

We all know that Manitoba Hydro is well-positioned to be able to provide clean energy for decades to come, could help us in Manitoba achieve our climate change objectives, could help us achieve net zero not even by 2050, but probably sooner than that. But beyond that, if we were to have a smart strategy, which would include a hydrogen play, an electric vehicle network play, some local green manufacturing plants as well, we would be able to help not just our province and our jurisdiction, but jurisdictions the world over to meet their net zero targets and to help them fight the scourge of climate change.

And, of course, as I have just elucidated, with Manitoba Hydro Telecom, Manitoba Hydro International, formerly Teshmont, there is a ton of innovation which has happened over the years in Manitoba, and if even a sliver of that intellectual property and intellectual capital that's been built up over the years remains within Manitoba Hydro by the end of this government's term in office, then we would be able to use that spark as kindling to ignite a fast-growing knowledge economy here in Manitoba.

And so what does that mean in concrete terms? It means the young person going to university here to study computer science or to study, you know, an

advanced field of research, would be able to stay in Manitoba and get a good, high-paying job while also fulfilling their career goals and serving the broader goals of the public here in Manitoba.

That is vision. And if you could do that at the same time as you keep hydro bills affordable, it's a win-win—it's a win-win. And that's why I think I am so disappointed with this bill above all else because not only is it undemocratic, not only is it going to make life more expensive for the people of Manitoba, but it is part and parcel, it is exhibit A in the argument that this government lacks any and all imagination with respect to the future of this province.

Absolute silence. They all know that they are guilty of these charges. Again, absolutely stunning that you could have a government leading our province at this time without thinking about how are we going to set young Manitobans up to have an economy in which they could succeed for generations to come.

Luckily, you have an opposition that is thinking about how we can build an economy that works for all of us for generations to come, an opposition that is developing a plan that will leave nobody behind, that will ensure that every child in Manitoba has a right to a good education, has a right to a fulfilling career and, yes, has a right to eat breakfast each and every day.

We will build an economy that addresses the terrible impacts—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —of colonization that have been wrought on Indigenous people over the past 150 years and that will undo the absolutely shameful legacy that this Premier's backwards attitude towards reconciliation has done so much damage to in the past four.

And, of course, we will return to glory this great, powerful Manitoba Hydro that was set onto such a tremendous path 50 years ago by Ed Schreyer and is just begging to be brought forward into this bold new era which demands all of us to step up and show leadership, not just for our own self-interest, not just because of how we feel as individuals, but because we know that we're all in this together.

And then, if we have an environmental solution that coincides with the social solution that makes economic sense and creates good jobs and economic opportunity right here, well then we'll be living up to our full potential as Manitobans.

But BITSA is a step—

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

Any other speakers?

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): I wanted to address this bill. And it's deeply troubling in a number of ways, and I hope to go through them this afternoon.

* (16:10)

This is an undemocratic bill. This is a government that is going down the wrong path, that is doing things for partisan political reasons that will create precedents. It will further coarsen our politics in Manitoba and diminish the significance of our democracy, and I'm going to go through how this bill does that.

But this bill—and you can't put a too fine point on it—is a racist bill. You know, my children, when they ask what does systemic racism look like, I'm going to point to this bill and it's going to be exhibit A. And we need to talk more about this in Manitoba and we need to confront this type of legislation and realize that the impact that it will have on generations of Manitobans to come will be devastating. And we have to give it the seriousness that it deserves, and I will certainly expand on that.

The first thing to point out with this bill is that it's an omnibus bill. It's made up of four different bills prior to this: Bill 18, Bill 21, Bill 16 and the old BITSA bill.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

And this is troubling because I don't think we've done this in Manitoba before, and this is very much—has echoes of Stephen Harper and the 'omnibus' bills that are happening in the federal government. And after the Conservatives were kicked out of office federally, now the Liberal government is doing the same type of omnibus bills and it's forever changed our level of democracy on a federal level. And I fear that this omnibus bill is going to forever change our politics here in Manitoba, not for the better.

The reason why it's so problematic is that instead of having, you know, four different bills which are broken down into, you know, bite-sized chunks, where the public can actually, you know, have a serious debate about—come to the Legislature, make, you know, representations and recommendations on it, and the opposition parties can have a full debate on each and every one of those bills. That's now being taken away and there's absolutely no reason to do it.

This government—we offered to sit throughout the entire summer. We could have done the work and passed each and every one of those bills over the summer months. They refused.

So, they refused to sit. They refused to do the work. They chose to prorogue Parliament and now, in order to make up for lost time, they claim that they're forced to abandon democratic norms and to, you know, abandon the accountability provisions that we do here with debates and to ram through this bill without the serious attention and due concern that it deserves.

So, some of the issues in this bill that are concerning—and I'll deal with some of the undemocratic ones—is we're being told that the Public Schools Finance Board is going to be eliminated.

And if there's one theme that goes through this legislation, Madam Speaker, it's this is a bill of grievance. This is an angry, hostile bill. It's an enemies-list type bill where the government has problems with certain parts of Manitoba society and this is their comeuppance. This is them, you know, giving to them what they think they deserve, which is troubling, because any Manitoba government should govern for all of Manitobans. It shouldn't have enemies lists. It shouldn't have grievances. It should be building relationships.

And so when we look at the Public Schools Finance Board, this was a semi-autonomous body outside the Ministry of Education that would make decisions on school finance, would make decisions on infrastructure spending for schools. And it was a really—had a really important role because it took out of the minister's office those types of decisions.

Now, why is that important? Well, it creates a bit of independence. It's a technical organization with architects and engineers, and they're making these infrastructure decisions for schools based on need and based on priority.

Now, when it goes back into the minister's office, all these decisions become politicized automatically. So these decisions, you know, once were neutral and technical. We've now reintroduced pork barrel politics back to Manitoba. And we saw some shades of this earlier. When I was still a school trustee, Kelvin High School was in line for a second gym. There's about 1,400 students at that high school, and they only have one gym. And there's no school in Manitoba—high school—that size, that only has one gym. You need two gyms for a school that size. And the grades 11 and

12 in that school did not have gym. They would have sort of health classes, they would keep a health log, but they couldn't actually physically have gym class because there was no physical space.

This was a priority for years for the school division, and finally the Public Schools Finance Board approved it. All the funding was in place, the drawings were made; there was even outside fundraising from the community to expand the gym to make it a community gym, and the shovels were just about to go in this ground and the government changes hands and all of a sudden, this decision's politicized and this gym is cancelled.

Instead, where that money went: to Altona, a high school with 400 kids, not 1,400. And the issue there was that the gym, they didn't think the roof was tall enough so they wanted to add three feet to the roof. So that's pork barrel politics. That's politicizing a decision that ended up hurting the quality of education for 1,400 kids. And that's a taste of what's to come. That's a taste of what's now going to happen, because every single decision is going to be political. Every single decision in the minister's office is going to rank these infrastructure issues based on political considerations.

And the problem with that is, is that some of our oldest schools are in the inner city. We have, in Winnipeg School Division, three schools that are older than the Titanic disaster. They're well over 100 years. I think almost the vast majority of schools in the inner city are older than 50 years. They have boilers that are 60 years old and are about to fail.

In fact, the Winnipeg School Division alone has a \$360-million infrastructure deficit that this government has made worse. And will this minister, who is exceptionally political and partisan, prioritize the needs of inner city schools when it comes to infrastructure spending and it comes to resources for children with special needs, children who English may not be their first language. We've seen the track record that they haven't. And this level of independence being eliminated is deeply troubling and hard times are ahead.

We have the second major attack on the independence of our governance system, is that this government wants to take control over the salaries of senior executives at universities, the RHA, school boards, et cetera. And this is deeply troubling for a couple of reasons, because these are independent organizations of government. The school boards are democratically elected and they raise their own money

and make their own decisions. Here, the government is stepping in and saying they know best and they know how much an executive under those circumstances should make.

Now, what's going to happen when the school boards or the RHAs come to the Leg. to speak with their minister and try to advocate for their organization? Well, how can they do that when the person standing across from them is going to be able to decide how much they get paid? That's something deeply troubling about that and affects the independence of those organizations.

The second troubling thing about this is that we need good people running large organizations. You have something like the Winnipeg School Division—that's 5,000 employees, 33,000 students, over 80 buildings; it has a budget of over \$420 million; it's bigger than most of the ministers' ministry budgets—and this government is going to say that the chief executive for an organization of that size and scope should only get paid a pittance.

* (16:20)

Well, how on earth are you going to be able to recruit qualified people? And this is just going to throw more chaos into an already struggling system.

There's no reason for the government to interfere with these boards. The whole point of having democratic governance is that they are not one central power, that there's a number of places that have decision-making in our society, that decision-making is dispersed as widely and as thoroughly as possible throughout our community so as many people have ability to make decisions that affect our collective lives. This is a retrenchment. This is a step backwards from that.

We've also seen a new, deeply troubling change where the Cabinet through the Treasury Board is going to dictate the policies of elected school boards. So your vote at a school board apparently doesn't matter much in Manitoba. Apparently, we don't honour democracy in Manitoba, because if the government doesn't agree with the politicians you've elected, whose values represent your values, they can override by fiat the decisions of elected school boards.

That's shocking. That is shockingly undemocratic. And in this day and age that we have moved to such a place I think speaks to a certain moral decay in the Pallister government. And I'm hoping there's a lot of good people in the backbenches of that government, and I think they need to take a serious look at

themselves and say, you know, do you want to put your signature on this? Do you want to be remembered for doing this? This is not why you got into politics. You're never going into Cabinet; there's no danger of that. Maybe it's time to stand up and to say no to this Premier (Mr. Pallister) and say, listen, this is not Manitoba; this is not our values; this is not who we are; this is not why you got elected and this doesn't represent your community.

So then, let's take a look at the health-imposed secondary social insurance levy. And what's interesting about that is they're moving to self-reporting, and the government is billing this as a red tape measure. So we'll—it'll be very interesting to see, because I suspect that the revenue from this is not going to get collected and that there is going to be further tax avoidance and fraud because of this self-reporting.

Well, the government will say, well, yes, but we have auditors. Well, do you? Because in last year's Estimates, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) had told us that—27 per cent vacancy rate for auditors in Manitoba, and the government does not seem to be in a particular hurry to hire our auditors to protect the revenue of Manitoba. So this is going to be a huge gift to some potentially unscrupulous individuals who are going to take advantage of what's now becoming a new tax loophole for Manitoba.

We've also seen in this legislation that this government is lowering the standards before private schools can receive government money. They used to have to last for three years on their own and sustain themselves for three years before the government would put in their own contributions to that school. They've now reduced that to two years. Well, the problem is, is we have a chronically underfunded education system, and this government has made it worse with their numerous and unrelenting cuts. It is struggling. The level and quality of education now, as opposed to 20 years ago in Manitoba, there's no comparison. And things are getting much, much worse. Funding private schools to over a tune of over \$80 million a year drains resources from the public school system. Making it easier to bring on more private schools is, in fact, the first step of creating two-tiered public education, and this is a very concerning step.

The other concerning step is that we have to be one of the few provinces in Canada that subsidize elite private schools. Some private schools charge

20, 30 thousand dollars a year in tuition fees, and Manitobans, with their tax dollars, pay a chunk of that.

I think most Manitobans would be rightly concerned that that goes on, that if a family can afford to spend 20 or 30 thousand dollars a year in tuition fees, they don't need it to be subsidized by Manitoba taxpayers, especially when we know that that's money that's not going to the public school system.

Certainly, the private schools that are religious-based, that are small, parochial, with tuition fees under \$10,000, really, there's—I don't think anybody would be critical of that. But I think when we talk about elite private schools, we really have to have a serious conversation in Manitoba, why we are subsidizing them.

At the Winnipeg School Division the average student without any special needs or any sort of, you know, issues that they need extra resources, our public school system spends about \$7,000 a year on their education. These elite private schools spend upwards of over \$30,000 per student in their education, and that's great for those families. But should working and middle class Manitobans be spending their hard-earned money to subsidize those students? I think most Manitobans would say no.

We're looking at another PST elimination here that helps the wealthy, that there's no justifiable policy reason for having it. Apparently in Manitoba now, if you trade in gold, silver or platinum, and you make your money doing those trades, we're going to eliminate the PST on your business.

Now, I had a bill briefing this morning with the Finance Department—the Finance Minister unfortunately couldn't join us—and there was no explanation about why we're doing this, why we are subsidizing this industry, why people who engage in this type of speculative economy get a tax break from Manitobans. And I'm not so 'shertain' that the government is aware of why they do these things.

And then, of course, another sort of help that this government is giving is eliminating taxes for wealthy people during a pandemic. And we know that the Province is planning to borrow \$2.9 billion at the time of this pandemic.

But, despite having to borrow money to make things run in Manitoba, they believe that now's the time to get rid of Manitoba's inheritance hack, it's eliminate probate fees. This is the only mechanism we have in Manitoba to prevent unearned transfers of inherited wealth from one generation to other without

having some control over how that can potentially warp an economy and how you potentially can create a group of inherited wealthy people in your province who basically haven't made that money through productive economic activity.

That's going to be \$10 million in lost revenue and to people who, quite frankly, don't need that money. And, in order to pay for that, we're going to borrow money on the international money market and we're going to be paying interest on that money for years to give wealthy Manitobans a tax cut that they never asked for, nor do they need, that will absolutely do nothing to stimulate the Manitoba economy.

And the timing of this could not be worse. Why on earth, if you have to borrow \$2.9 billion, are you cutting any sources of revenue at all? It doesn't get more economically reckless and irresponsible than that. Imagine if Manitobans ran their households like that, because what's going to happen is, what we're seeing with this bill is, we're shifting the tax burden to people who can't afford it from people who can.

* (16:30)

And we see that with the government mandating the 2.9 per cent increase on hydro rates. That is a tax. The Pallister government is raising taxes on working and middle-class people. Manitoba Hydro made \$100 million last year. They're on pace this year to make more money. They're not in deficit. They're not going to be in deficit. They have not asked for this money. They have not gone through the Public Utilities Board and had public hearings and done that.

And the other sort of undemocratic aspect about it: we have a Public Utilities Board so that there isn't a monopoly, so that one powerful actor, be it Hydro and now the government, can't just dictate how much you're going to pay for your bills, that they're going to have to justify it with evidence to an impartial body who will say no when it's not warranted. And what this change does is takes away that accountability, it takes away that democratic sort of screening to ensure that what's happening to Manitobans is fair and that Hydro doesn't take advantage of you, or in this case, the government take advantage of you.

But no, we've now changed the rules and we've made less accountability, and this government now thinks that you're paying too little for hydro. And despite nobody asking them to, they're going to raise your hydro rates. It's a tax. They're raising taxes, and they're raising taxes on people, and they're not

allowing them to have their say, right? This is deeply troubling.

And again, you know, I see the backbenchers squirming in their seats. You need to stand up. This is your province. You don't have to put up with this. This is not what your 'constituences'—constituents voted you for. And I know that a lot of you are good, righteous-thinking people, and this troubles you completely. And you don't like the turn that your government has been taking. And I know you're hearing it from your neighbours, because we're hearing it too. I can't tell you, especially in south Winnipeg, how many emails and calls I'm getting from Fort Richmond and Waverley, from people there who just feel completely abandoned by their MLA and they feel that the government has become so out of touch. And they're turning to us for help.

We have some strange attacks on municipal governments. Now the municipal governments, including the City of Winnipeg, are going to be subject to provincial regulation that's going to dictate how they do their finances. And in the bill briefing today I had one Conservative staffer basically take a huge swing at the City of Winnipeg and council there and say that these guys were, you know, cooking the books, basically, and misrepresenting their finances and hiding things and distorting them. The irony of a Pallister government official saying that.

You know, there's an old expression: what's good for the goose is good for the gander. So I'm wondering out loud whether this government would agree to those same regulations on the Province of Manitoba's books so that they can't create artificial deficits and hide money and pick and choose what government entities are actually going to be in the books or out of the books and whether they're also going to be upfront and honest with Manitobans about what they're doing. So, it's a little disingenuous to be going after the City of Winnipeg when basically this government is doing this stuff its—as well.

Now, getting back to the really deeply troubling aspect of this bill, the CFS bill. This is what is systemically racist about this portion of the bill. You have a population in Manitoba that we know is disproportionately Indigenous. We have this money from the federal government which is meant for them. It's meant to be invested, it's meant to be a nest egg that can grow over the years as their—as they grow, and that when they age out of care, they actually have money, wealth that can at least start them—maybe go to school or get them, you know, stable and a first job:

the stuff that most families that don't go through CFS take for granted, where your families help you with education or school or to set you up when you sort of become too old to live at home. That wealth is generated all the time for other people, and this is what the federal government has done for these people.

In turning around and saying that, no, that's our money, it's not yours, and you can't do anything about it, you have no legal recourse, you cannot sue us, even though everybody knows this is unconstitutional. The effect of this is to basically entrench the systemic inequality and the systemic discrimination, because these rules will entrench poverty into law for a particular class of people, and the government knows that that's the end result here and is still going ahead.

So, this bill will not age well. There will be a reckoning, and at some point I suspect many government MLAs will be absolutely embarrassed to have voted for this. And I imagine at some point you're going to have to have very uncomfortable conversations with your neighbours and your family and friends when they ask you, why did you do this to Manitobans' children. There's just simply no basis for that.

And then finally, of course, we see the repealing of the healthy child act. This was groundbreaking in its day, and this was one of the methods that we had to combat child poverty in Manitoba. And sadly, you know, we are still one of the leaders in Canada for child poverty. And this government hasn't come up with any sort of plan. They won't even table the Poverty Reduction Strategy reports, and we know in the last few years, Manitobans have become sicker, they've become poorer and they've become less equal.

And taking—repealing the healthy child act is just another step towards making Manitoba a province of extremes, where we have a handful of wealthy Manitobans that won't have to pay any money on their inheritance, and then the rest of us who are struggling and paying higher and higher hydro fees and making life much less affordable for all of us. So, this is definitely going in the wrong direction.

Madam Speaker, just for your benefit, the clock has disappeared, I think, on my thing, so I have no idea how much time I have left. Oh, there it is. Okay, it's showing back up. I have two clocks, one says five minutes and one says two minutes.

Madam Speaker: You have two minutes and five seconds.

Mr. Wasyliw: Okay, thank you.

So, I think what we really have to be careful of with legislation like this is that there is unintended consequences. And maybe this government thinks it's clever now to try to, for partisan reasons, do an end run around the opposition and ram through a whole bunch of stuff that they chose not to pass in the summer. But once you sort of uncap the genie from the bottle, you can't put it back in. And this government is becoming deeply unpopular and is losing support by the day, and its days are numbered.

So I would ask the members opposite to think that you're not always going to be in power, in fact, probably not soon. Do you want, in opposition, to face BITSA bills like this year in and year out and have a whole bunch of things that are just rammed through and taken off the agenda for debate? Because that's what you're doing with this bill, and it goes a lot further than just simply some quick and cheap partisan games that you wish to play.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I believe the member for St. Boniface was trying to get through and speak virtually.

Madam Speaker: We have—I'm told that we have not heard that. We haven't received any of that.

Oh, we have now, and then, in the speaking order, it would then be a Liberal member.

So, apologies to the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey), according to the speaking order it would be the honourable member for St. Boniface that would be in line to speak, because we do have a speaking order.

Thank you.

The honourable member, then, for St. Boniface.

* (16:40)

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Madam Speaker, there are some very serious issues with this BITSA bill. It has changed significantly since it was first brought forward in March.

That being said, it has—the changes that have been made largely consist of adding new measures—or, sorry—putting together other bills, adding other clauses, but not actually addressing many of the issues that are required in terms of the desperate state facing many small businesses, assistance to workers who are suffering because of the pandemic, as well as addressing serious concerns around health care and COVID and, generally, this entire crisis.

In fact, two of the elements of the bill—arguably the two worst parts of it—have no business being in a budget at all. They have nothing to do with spending money or allocating money at all. One is the issue around cancelling court cases for children who are in care who received the federal special allowance.

Now I've been very vocal about this. This is truly a terrible piece of legislation in a number of ways. And I would actually ask for anyone who is concerned about these things—or, one of the things I mentioned in the bill briefing today was to say if this is something you'd be uncomfortable with another party doing, is it something that the government should be doing themselves? Because what it does is that there—in the case of children for—in care, from 2005 to about 2019, children in the care of Manitoba who the Province—the government of Manitoba was the parent to these children—decided to take the children's special allowance from those children.

I spoke with Grand Chief Arlen Dumas about this. In 2008 there were—there was about \$50 million sitting in trust which was then claimed by the NDP government of the day. And originally that money was set aside for the purpose of looking after those children and making sure that they would have something once they age out of care.

And when that ended it meant, basically, that those children are expelled from care, that they were children who, at the age of 18, were given a bus ticket and ended up on the street, ended up sleeping under a bridge or being sent to the Salvation Army or Red Road Lodge or Main Street Project because there was no other place for them to go.

So they're going straight from being in the supposed care of CFS with the government of Manitoba as a parent to being homeless.

As the number of children in care increased, the amount of the special allowance that was being seized also went up. I know the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart) was very outspoken about this when he was in opposition. I assume that he—that the rest of his caucus agreed with him. He called it immoral. And what's happening now is that those children are now seeking restitution, and it still is affecting these children, because there were children in care who are still in care, who had that money taken away, and the government is now moving to cancel those court cases to say that those court cases don't—effectively don't exist.

It's been argued that it's for the protection of taxpayers, but ultimately, as I've said before, taxpayers—the word taxpayer does not occur in the constitution. The word citizen does. Our obligation is to citizens and not simply to taxpayers and, above all, we have a special duty of care to these children, that these children are the most—among the most vulnerable children in Manitoba.

And successive Manitoba governments used the money that was intended for their care and put it into general revenue, and the member for Portage la Prairie said this was immoral, and it is immoral, and it's even worse to then take away their right to take it to court.

And a similar situation is happening with 800 Adele, where there was a lease between the southern authority and a landlord. It was a functioning children's home that was taking care of high-risk, high-needs Indigenous children, and the government is now cancelling that lease now, and not just cancelling that lease, but cancelling that lease and saying that no possible claim can be brought.

And I would ask anyone, if you run a business, do you want to be in a position where the government can cancel a contract and say that you have no recourse? Would you want a Liberal government doing that? Would you want an NDP government doing that?

And I think the answer is no. That this is actually a power that government should not have, it should not exercise; that it's an abuse of power; that, essentially, it tends to place those of us who are lawmakers and government above the law or outside of the reach of the law by denying people fundamental rights to access justice and to be—to seek compensation when they have been wronged.

And I don't think anyone can possibly argue that children in care have been well—have been entirely well-treated in Manitoba because there's a pipeline from CFS to prison. The—you hear stories all the time that the second and third most common causes of police calls in Winnipeg is children in care who are fleeing care. And we also know from reports of child trafficking and of the Manitoba children's advocate, that there are hundreds of children involved in CFS who are subjected to exploitation, sexual exploitation, as youth.

So, all of this, while the state of children in care, the number of children in care, was actually greater than—of Indigenous children in care is greater than the number of Indigenous children who were in the care of the state under residential schools. This truly is—

I truly believe a historic wrong was committed and that, unfortunately, this budget—and it should not be in a budget—this budget is doubling down on that historic wrong by trying to deprive those people of justice. That is one of the many—that, to me, is one of the most serious issues about this budget and that is in—purely on moral—on moral and legal grounds it does something terribly wrong. It does a terrible wrong to the most vulnerable people in Manitoba.

Aside from that, there are a number of other issues, one of which is that it continually erodes and undermines a series of checks and balances which are in place to ensure to—which are similar in a sense, to ensure that government cannot abuse its power. Some of those are its oversight mechanisms, like completely ignoring the Public Utilities Board. The Public Utilities Board is in place, in part, to defend Manitobans against Hydro, and it's there to defend Manitobans against its own government.

And one of the biggest problems of Manitoba Hydro over the last 20 years is that it's been terribly abused and interfered with on a—through politics because there's been an expectation, because of its size, because of the role it plays in Manitoba's economy, that—and because it's owned by all Manitobans, that it is a creature of the party in power.

So, when the NDP were in power, that—they were building dams, and I recall after the election when the—the 2007 election, when the decision was made to reroute Bipole, it was said, well—the excuse that the Premier Doer at that time said—well, it's in our platform, so it received democratic support. But the fact is is that there needs to be allowed independence so that Hydro can be run for the purpose of its—of Manitobans and not just for the party in power.

And one of the things that happened is that there's been a common practice under both the NDP and the PCs when it comes to Hydro, which is not just trying to overrule the PUB, because Gary Doer tried to do exactly the same thing in the early 2000s because he was frustrated that they couldn't raise rates enough, but it's because Hydro has been used as a cash cow.

Hydro's financial troubles are often portrayed as being Hydro's fault or Hydro's problem, that it's—Hydro has somehow been wayward and it's in trouble, and we're going to get in trouble—the government or Manitobans are going to be on the hook for it. The fact is is that the Manitoba government benefits enormously and takes hundreds of millions of dollars from Hydro every single year.

So forcing Manitoba Hydro to raise hydro rates allows this government to take more money from Hydro, but it also—instead of raising taxes. So what's happening is that we're forcing—we're increasing the cost of living, the cost of heating, the cost of doing business on every Manitoban by forcing—by literally forcing, by having the government order Hydro to raise rates in order to pay—in part, in order to pay for Hydro's debt.

And Hydro's debt is so colossal, in part, because there's a perverse incentive. The more that Hydro goes into debt, the more the Manitoba government gets from it. The more Hydro overbuilds and—dams, or, the more Hydro overbuilds transmission lines, the more capital taxes that Hydro pays to the Manitoba government.

* (16:50)

So we have a terrible situation and—but it—we have a terrible situation, where the worse things are for Hydro, the better things are for the government of the day. Because they can continue to load debt onto Hydro, and the more debt Hydro takes on, the more that can be taken out of it.

And this is—that is the reason why Sandy Riley and the board of Hydro quit, because the Premier (Mr. Pallister) at the time would not listen to or respond to requests to deal with Manitoba Hydro's absolutely colossal debt.

And if you look at Manitoba—the Province of Manitoba's overall revenues, which are around \$16 billion, and our debt per capita, our debt seems reasonable.

But Hydro's revenues are about \$2 billion or so, but—give or take a few hundred million dollars—but its debt is almost that, or is approaching that of the entire Province. And it is because a debt swap has been taking place.

This is the sort of thing that Wall Street raters do to companies, that they—where they try to extract all the value they possibly can, but—and it's a form of vampire capitalism; it ends up sucking all the value out of the company.

But, the thing is that on Wall Street, they can walk away from these things. We can't. We own this. And the risk—when I spoke with Sandy Riley about it, he said, this is not a question of Hydro, you know, not being able to pay its bills. This is a question of whether Hydro continues to exist or not.

It's an existential question for Hydro. And none of these fundamental issues have been dealt with.

The other, there—and, this is a—it is one of the biggest financial issues that we face. There are a number of other issues where this government has dismantled and removed oversight—independent oversight—and independent oversight is there not just to protect the Hydro, or protect Manitobans; it's actually also there to protect politicians from getting into trouble.

And I recognize that there's lots that can be frustrating and inefficient about government, but those checks and balances are there not just to—not just as obstacles, but as warnings.

So these are—my concern is that we have seen over and over again, in the name of efficiency, dismantling of these—of mechanisms of checks and balances that are essential to a functioning democracy and essential to accountability.

There are a few other very serious concerns about this budget. I would say that—I will say there are at least two things I can agree with, one of which is the changes to the payroll tax act, which is a very unfair tax, which has been very difficult; it was always which Manitoba Liberals have always opposed.

There are some important changes as far as expanding the investigating powers of the Auditor General. This is a major—I do see this as positive because one of the biggest problems in terms of where we go wrong, in terms of corruption or in terms of money and government money, public money being misspent, is when it goes into the hands of private contractors who can't be looked at or investigated by the Auditor General.

I mean, that's one of the things that this summer, when we were talking to—when we had people to committee, whether it was Public Accounts or other committees, we're able to talk to people, deputy ministers and ministers, whether it's Health or climate change or Infrastructure, or—and we were able to talk to Crown corporations and their boards.

But we're not actually able to talk to the private contractors who—or consultants for that matter—who are very often absolutely critical to decision-making, and also to implementation of programs and how money is being spent.

So, I will say that the data is certainly a positive element of this budget, but it's unfortunate that, again, that the Auditor General doesn't seem to be having—

doesn't—also has to have the adequate investigative resources in order for these to take place.

There are a few other major concerns, again, I mean, one of the—the fact that I'm not really certain that it's incredibly important for people who old—'gould'—gold and silver not to pay taxes on their investments. But the other is that the commitment to ongoing tax cuts, which are revenue losses, in the middle of a pandemic, are an extremely serious concern because, ultimately, these cuts are happening—or, these proposed cuts I addressed in my criticism of the streets—speech for the throne, but I think they bear repeating. There's—when you're running a deficit and you start to cut taxes, it increases the deficit. It's not—this is basic math.

The—I talked to the Finance Minister about this. He seemed to have a disagreement about what—how revenue—whether tax cuts count as reducing revenue. And he sort of said, well, this is also Manitobans' money.

And I agree it's Manitobans' money. I think it might just be a question of perspective, that I happen to think that the government of Manitoba belongs to Manitobans.

And that's one of the things that—there's a difference in that it's not necessarily—in—opposed to Manitobans and Manitobans' interests, but when you're talking about permanently reducing revenues during a crisis and reducing revenues—it essentially means that we're borrowing to pay for—to lower the prices of the—of certain customers. That's basically—if we were running a business, it'd be—if we're running a business in deficit that's losing money already, we're going to go out and we're going to borrow more money and we're going to use that money to make sure that some of our customers don't pay as much on a permanent basis. That's what cutting taxes during a deficit does. It actually permanently hampers your ability to reduce revenue and one of the major causes of deficits and debts is not overspending; it's tax cuts. And it's tax cuts under this government.

I know that this government again has said—has committed to taking eight years to balance the budget and they want to pat themselves on their back for allegedly having balanced the budget this year. It was quite clear from the Auditor General that the budget was balanced. But what's been happening is the government is presenting the—is pretending that the size of the deficit and the debt is worse than it is, in order to justify ongoing cuts.

We're actually using our debt and our deficits to finance tax cuts that only affect and benefit a very few while cutting spending and failing to make investments in education, infrastructure and health care. And health care, education and infrastructure are the foundation of an economy. They're not a cost. Very often, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has said, some things don't cost; they pay. And that is true of education, health care and infrastructure but we've seen massive cuts and massive freezes in all of those over the last four years.

And that's the case in rural Manitoba, especially, that I've had people, many people, tell me how frustrating it is because they all know: if they need to be able to move or stay in their community, they need to have access to a doctor; they need to be able to send their kids to a school; and if they're a grain farmer, they need to be able to get their grain to market on roads that they can actually fill their trucks and that won't shake their 'tees'-their teeth loose.

But that's not where we're at now. So, again, the—I think the most serious thing about this budget is that it really is not in any way the kind of change this province needs and it continues under the mistaken assumption, I think, that the more we cut—that if we can—if we just shrink the public sector, the

private sector will grow. That is not what happens. It basically—all you end up with is a smaller private sector and a smaller public sector as well and, therefore, a smaller and poorer economy.

So, with that, Madam Speaker, I thank you very much, I thank the House and I will say we're very much opposed to this budget.

Thank you.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I'm glad I have the opportunity to put a very few words on the record today, but stay tuned because I do have a lot more to say on this subject. I'll just say that, you know, I miss the old days when our colleague, Ted Marcelino, used to stand up and say: where's the BITSA?

Now, unfortunately, we've got the BITSA, which is quite unfortunate when you look at what this BITSA bill actually is, Madam Speaker. It's—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter's again before the House, the honourable member will have 29 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 15, 2020

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