

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALTOMARE, Nello, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon.	Union Station	NDP
BALCAEN, Wayne	Brandon West	PC
BEREZA, Jeff	Portage la Prairie	PC
BLASHKO, Tyler	Lagimodière	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian, Hon.	Keewatinook	NDP
BYRAM, Jodie	Agassiz	PC
CABLE, Renée, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
CHEN, Jennifer	Fort Richmond	NDP
COOK, Kathleen	Roblin	PC
CROSS, Billie	Seine River	NDP
DELA CRUZ, Jelynn	Radisson	NDP
DEVGAN, JD	McPhillips	NDP
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
HIEBERT, Carrie	Morden-Winkler	PC
JACKSON, Grant	Spruce Woods	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake-Gimli	PC
KENNEDY, Nellie	Assiniboia	NDP
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
KING, Trevor	Lakeside	PC
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom, Hon.	Flin Flon	NDP
LOISELLE, Robert	St. Boniface	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya, Hon.	Notre Dame	NDP
MOROZ, Mike	River Heights	NDP
MOSES, Jamie, Hon.	St. Vital	NDP
MOYES, Mike	Riel	NDP
NARTH, Konrad	La Vérendrye	PC
NAYLOR, Lisa, Hon.	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
OXENHAM, Logan	Kirkfield Park	NDP
PANKRATZ, David	Waverley	NDP
PERCHOTTE, Richard	Selkirk	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
SALA, Adrien, Hon.	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHMIDT, Tracy, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
SCHOTT, Rachelle	Kildonan-River East	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SIMARD, Glen, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
SMITH, Bernadette, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STONE, Lauren	Midland	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt, Hon.	Concordia	NDP
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 10, 2024

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

The 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 and 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.

We acknowledge we are gathered on Treaty 1 territory and that Manitoba is located on the treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline and Nehethowuk nations. We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit. We respect the spirit and intent of treaties and treaty making and remain committed to working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in the spirit of truth, reconciliation and collaboration.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Before we get to routine proceedings, I have some special guests seated in the Speaker's Gallery that I would like to introduce.

Like to draw attention of all the honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today students from the North in the city for the Skills Manitoba Competition.

From Frontier Collegiate in Cranberry Portage, we have Kayleen Anderson from Cross Lake, here for outdoor power and recreation equipment; Brianne Morin, Cranberry Portage, automobile technology; Raymond James, Cranberry Portage, carpentry; Leticia Spence, Split Lake, cosmetology; Gideon Trout, God's Lake, cosmetology; JadaLyn Little, Red Sucker Lake, hairstyling; and from the Helen Betty Osborne Ininiw Education Resource Centre at Norway House, we have Leah Moose, hairstyling; Alexis Mowatt-Keeper, hairstyling; Jayla Anderson, workplace health and safety; Kennedy Sanderson, public speaking; Carley Douglas, job skills demonstration; Kearston Ross, fabrication

and design technology; Samantha Muskego-Albert, fashion design and technology; Shaydn Clarke, fashion design and technology.

Also with us today in the public gallery, we have from Frontier Collegiate in Cranberry, Sheldon Yaremchuk, Flin Flon, automotive technology instructor; Glennis Valladares, cosmetology instructor; and from the Helen Betty Osborne Ininiw centre in Norway House, Kathlyn Foley, hairstyling instructor; Crystal Bodfish, fashion design and technology instructor.

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here today and wish you all great success in the competition.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

The Speaker: Introduction of bills?

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development Third Report

MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Vice-Chairperson): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the third report of the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

Deputy Clerk (Mr. Tim Abbott): Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development presents—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development presents the following as its Third Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on April 9, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 200) – The Firefighters Recognition Day Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended) / Loi sur la Journée de reconnaissance des pompiers (Loi modifiant la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs)**

Committee Membership

- *Mr. BALCAEN*
- *MLA DELA CRUZ*
- *MLA MOROZ*
- *Mr. NESBITT*
- *Mr. OXENHAM*
- *MLA PANKRATZ*

Your Committee elected Mr. OXENHAM as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected MLA DELA CRUZ as the Vice Chairperson.

Substitutions received during Committee proceedings:

- *MLA CROSS for MLA MOROZ*

Public Presentations

*Your Committee heard the following presentation on **Bill (No. 200) – The Firefighters Recognition Day Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended) / Loi sur la Journée de reconnaissance des pompiers (Loi modifiant la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs):***

Tom Bilous, United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg

Bills Considered and Reported

- ***Bill (No. 200) – The Firefighters Recognition Day Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended) / Loi sur la Journée de reconnaissance des pompiers (Loi modifiant la Loi sur les journées, les semaines et les mois commémoratifs)***

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

MLA Dela Cruz: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Waverley (MLA Pankratz), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion presented.

The Speaker: Is it the will of the House to adopt the report? Agreed and—adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Honourable Speaker, I'm pleased to table the '24-25 supplements of the Estimates of Expenditure, Enabling Appropriations, Tax Credits and Public Debt, for the Department of Finance.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Animal Shelter and Rescue Awareness Day

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): April 10 is Animal Shelter and Rescue Awareness Day in Manitoba, a day first introduced by myself and our NDP team in 2018 recognizing the incredible work done by animal welfare groups across Manitoba.

These organizations feed hungry animals. They offer accessible veterinarian care, including spay-and-neuter clinics, in rural and remote communities with no access to veterinary care. They work in communities and they help find loving homes for hundreds of pets every year.

They give voice to the voiceless.

So many Manitobans share their lives with fur babies thanks to the work of shelters and rescues. This includes my own sweet Chilly Dog, adopted from the Winnipeg Humane Society back in 2013 and who recently went through chemotherapy treatments with Dr. Jonas Watson, who in his spare time offers spay-and-neuter clinics in Canada's North.

Or my dear friend Naline, whose daughter, Talina Nahanni, wore her down to finally adopt a sweet pup named Rio from Spirit of Hope. Talina tragically passed only months later. Rio is Talina's final gift to her mother.

The work of rescue literally transforms families.

I'm so fortunate to work with different rescue agencies across Manitoba for so many years and have seen first-hand their deep commitment and tireless work. Volunteers like Katie Powell, whose mobile clinic has spayed and neutered thousands of dogs and cats across Manitoba. Or Russ and Maureen, St. Johns constituents with Manitoba Doghouse Initiative, who build insulated doghouses for dogs in First Nation communities, or flying into evacuated communities to feed dogs and cats left behind.

Animal rescue and care is these folks' life work, supported by volunteers and donations they collect from generous Manitobans, alongside using their own finances.

We've heard loud and clear more needs to be done. That's why on March 28 of this year, the ministers of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn) and Municipal and Northern Relations (Mr. Bushie) together launched the Northern and Remote Veterinary Care Initiative. This includes the creation of a new provincial veterinarian

position focused on animal welfare. It also includes \$200,000 for Feed the Furbabies Canada and the Humane Society for the expansion of the One Health program.

This new funding will expand spay-and-neuter clinics to communities who would otherwise not have any access to this kind of veterinarian care, and reducing stray dog populations and keeping our communities safe.

* (13:40)

On behalf of our government, miigwech to all of the animal shelter and rescue organizations in Manitoba for all you do, and for those that are in the gallery with us and alongside some adoptable puppies that are with them, please join me in recognizing some of our committed partners in the gallery today.

Winnipeg Humane Society: Jessica Miller, CEO; Carly Peters, director communications; Jasmine Foster. Winnipeg Animal Services: Leland Gordon, general manager. Manitoba Doghouse Initiative: Russ Jackson, Maureen Minter. Save A Dog Network: Katie Powell, president; Ingrid Desmond. Manitoba Animal Alliance: Rachel Leask, rescue co-ordinator. Little Red Barn: Colleen Walker, director. Feed the Fur Babies: Kareena Grywinski, executive director; Meghan Irwin, media director; Melissa Robinson, clinic director. K9 Advocacy Manitoba: Jacquelyn Hanna.

The Speaker: The honourable Minister of Families.

MLA Fontaine: I ask leave to include the names of my guests in Hansard, right after my ministerial statement, please.

The Speaker: Does the member have leave? *[Agreed]*

The honourable member for Portage la—no. Yes—the honourable member for Portage la Prairie.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): I can't tell you how honoured I am today to talk about Animal Shelter and Rescue Awareness Day. And I want to dedicate this to the honour of my daughter's cat, Wilson, that just passed away last week, and to my special listener, Archie, my English bulldog, who responds to me with love every day, never questions what I say, and I know he's listening, because he's either passing wind or he's slobbering all over me.

Honourable Speaker, as an animal lover, today I rise to speak on the awareness day that's close to my heart: Animal Shelter and Rescue Awareness Day.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of the volunteers and organizations who take in and look after the animals that need loving homes, like PAWS in Portage la Prairie.

Organizations like the Winnipeg Humane Society and the Winnipeg Boxer Rescue do incredible work caring for vulnerable animals. These organizations often have fundraisers that bring community members together for important initiatives like spay and neuter programs to help low-income Manitobans with pet ownership and care.

Programs like these are especially important, given the recent rise in our unsheltered animal population and the negative impacts that these populations can have to the safety of our communities. I encourage all Manitoba's to spay and neuter their pets to keep the animal population under control.

I'd like to also take this opportunity to highlight an important bill that was passed while we were still in government. My colleague, the PC MLA for Fort Whyte, had introduced bill 213, The Animal Care Amendment Act, in 2022, which received royal assent on December 1, '22.

This bill makes it illegal for companion animals, such as dogs, to be left unattended in vehicles if it's too hot or cold outside, to avoid endangering the health and safety of animals. This bill authorizes officers to enter a locked vehicle using the necessary force needed to rescue the animals. The passing the bill was monumental for the safety and well-being of animals.

In closing, I'd like to reiterate my immense gratitude to the animal shelters within Manitoba and to all of the volunteers and employees who staff them. The work that you all do is incredible, important and necessary for the benefit of our communities and the well-being of our animals.

If any Manitobans are looking for a companion, I know there's still plenty of animals in these shelters who are looking for their forever homes, so I encourage you to look at these shelters first. Even if you are hesitant or unable to adopt, I know that there's always—in need of fosters as well.

I'd like to also introduce Jessica Miller and her team that is here today. Jessica is the CEO of the—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

The Speaker: Does the member have leave to finish? *[Agreed]*

MLA Bereza: Thank you so much for all the work you do, Jessica, and your team and everybody else that's here. I appreciate it so much, and we all do.

Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

New Directions' Honouring Our Journey Program

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): Today, I honour the remarkable women, two-spirit and gender-diverse individuals participating in New Directions' Honouring Our Journey program—a transformative initiative dedicated to the transition, healing and education of those who have faced exploitation or trafficking.

The program encompasses both Biingiden high school and an adult centre, where participants receive instruction in employable skills, engage in land-based learning, absorb the wisdom from Indigenous knowledge keepers and practise ceremony. They learn practical subjects such as fractions and other mathematical concepts while crafting their beautiful ribbon skirts.

Folks learn how trauma has shaped their lives and those around them. And in doing so, serves as a space where folks reclaim joy and purpose, rejecting labels often affixed to those who have endured exploitation or addiction.

I visited honouring our program a couple of months ago, and I felt so much pride and immense love for all of the folks that I met on that day.

I need the folks to know this: You are sacred. You are powerful. You are beautiful. Each of you descends from a lineage of resilient matriarchs who persevered so that you could thrive and lead your best lives.

Your strength, bravery and leadership inspires others to follow in your footsteps. You deserve everything that is good and kind and gentle and loving in this world. I am so proud of each and every one of you, and I love you.

Please join me in acknowledging and honouring our guests in the gallery from the Honouring our Journey program.

The Speaker: The honourable Opposition House Leader—the member for Interlake-Gimli. The honourable member for Interlake-Gimli.

Gimli Art Club

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): I rise today to recognize the efforts of scores of artists that have enriched the Interlake over 50 years.

In 1969, Rosalie Dixon, June Valgardson and Ann Rudd of Gimli united to establish a local artists' group, aiming to foster a supportive environment for artistic exploration and skill development. Their vision materialized as the Gimli Art Club on April 14, 1969, with 32 initial members enrolling at the inaugural meeting.

By 1972, the group, supported by Gimli, secured a waterfront billing—building for weekly gatherings. As membership swelled, the need for a larger space arose, leading to the construction of a new building in 1983.

The Gimli Art Club has since been dedicated to enriching local lives through visual arts, hosting annual art shows and actively contributing to community events.

Likely the most well-known contribution of the club to Gimli and Manitoba as a whole is the iconic Seawall Gallery. In 1997, members embarked on beautifying the harbour with murals that reflect the history, culture and community of Gimli, along with the Interlake.

Just this past June I was lucky enough to have had a conversation with a member as he touched up one of those amazing murals. I could almost feel our shared history flowing through the tip of his brush.

Celebrating its 55th anniversary in just a few days, the club continues to leave a lasting artistic legacy, reflecting on over five decades of community dedication and contribution.

Colleagues, please join me in recognizing the Gimli Art Club, who are joining us virtually today, for enriching all our lives and wishing them the very best luck in their artistic endeavours.

* (13:50)

Glenn Komus and Sheryl Umphress

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Honourable Speaker, today I would like to acknowledge two very creative and inspiring members of the St. James community, Glenn Komus and Sheryl Umphress. Their house is right behind my constituency office, and for the past 20 years, they've become well known for decorative displays in their yard.

The decorations began with a simple pumpkin on their railing and have grown into elaborate displays, from a skeleton pirate ship to a skeleton fair with a 12-foot-tall Ferris wheel. The displays have become

increasingly popular, not only in the St. James neighbourhood, but people from across the city have come to see the wonderful displays that the couple put on.

Last year, their next door neighbour's security camera counted over 1,000 people coming to view the Olympic-themed skeleton display. Glenn and Sheryl often see people video calling their friends and family from across the world to see their work.

The displays take the pair about two weeks to prepare and even more time to plan. Many of their displays, such as the merry-go-round and ticket booth they made for the skeleton fair, are all made from repurposed materials.

The neighbourhood knows and loves the displays. It is a true gift to the community. There are so many unique ways we can promote connection in our neighbourhoods, this being one of them.

Glenn and Sheryl realize that it's becoming increasingly less common to chat with your neighbours. They appreciate that their decorations create a reason for folks to come together and get to know one another.

Everyone in our neighbourhood looks forward to what displays they come up with every year. Their creativity brings joy, brings laughter and celebration to our community in St. James.

Please join me in thanking Glenn, Sheryl and their family for joining us here today and for their creative dedication to the St. James community.

Thank you.

Dawson Trail Community Festivals

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Thank you for the—allowing me the time to speak today and recognizing the wonderful constituency of Dawson Trail.

With the cold weather behind us and the snow melted away, it has me excited for what is to come this spring and summer.

Honourable Speaker, all of the communities in Dawson Trail have such great community spirit. There are incredible amounts of community-run festivals and celebrations that have me excited for summer all winter long.

Community festivals and celebrations are threads that we weave our—that weave our social fabric. It's time to celebrate diversity, to foster connections, to celebrate history and to honour traditions, contribute

to our local economies and support our businesses, and it is time to bring us all together.

This year, there will be the Lorette Family Fun Days, the Landmark Friendship Festival, Richer Rodeo, Springfield Agricultural Fair, Dawson Trail Days in Ste. Anne, the summer markets, not to mention the many other celebrations, gatherings put on by volunteer groups in all these communities, as well as St. Genevieve and Anola and many others.

I must say, Dawson Trail is a fantastic place to live. Everywhere you go, you are greeted with a welcoming wave and smile.

I am proud of what Dawson Trail accomplishes and the time the volunteers put in to make these things happen. It's a great investment in time, and with the past help from the ACSC Fund, they truly have thrived.

I stand here today and want to give a heart-filled thank you to everyone, and I cannot wait to celebrate with you this summer.

Meadows West School

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I rise this afternoon on behalf of the grade 4s and 5s from Meadows West School.

Thirty-seven students have joined us here at the Manitoba Legislature today. We had pizza for lunch and, together, wrote some thoughts and questions for this government.

The students are very interested in the Legislative Building. For example, they had lots of questions about the historical background, the Golden Boy, the levels of government and the timeline and architecture of the building.

Furthermore, they're interested in what it's like to be an MLA. They want to know what the hard parts and the easy parts are, and they're curious about what the job entails.

Together for the environment, the students from Meadows West are working hard to always turn off lights and appliances. They have been reusing materials, not littering and celebrating Earth Day. And on the policy side of things, they want to know what this government is doing to help our environment.

They are also concerned about health care. One student wants to know why it's taking so long to get his health card. Another wanted to know what their family should do when health cards expire. The students believe that those working in health care

deserve more money, and that the wait times are too long, and they suggested an idea of allowing a free hospital access for those who do not have health-care coverage.

Now, Honourable Speaker, over the years I've had students visit from various schools in Tyndall Park, but this group is a little extra special for me because my nephew Benjamin—that's right, a third generation of Lamoureuxs here at the Leg.—has joined us in the gallery.

Now, I promised I wouldn't embarrass him, so all I'm going to say is how smart and clever he is, how his jokes are the absolute best and how I am a very lucky auntie.

In closing, Honourable Speaker, I want to thank the students and teachers from Meadows West School, and I look forward to asking their questions to our Premier later this afternoon.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Before proceeding to oral questions, I'd like to draw members' attention to the loge on my right, where we have joining us today Gerry McAlpine from the former constituency of Sturgeon Creek.

ORAL QUESTIONS

City of Brandon Operating Funding

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): Eid mubarak. [*Have a blessed Eid.*]

Over two hundred and—over 25,000 Manitobans, Muslims in Manitoba celebrate Eid, celebrating family, friends and food together, marking the end of Ramadan. So congratulations to everyone celebrating the end of Ramadan.

So here we go, question period, Honourable Speaker.

The Premier's selective reading of reactions to his budget might have missed this, so I table an interesting story from the Brandon Sun last week. It's about an unbelievable increase in funding to the City of Brandon.

In this story, the Finance Minister's office announced that the City of Brandon's share of the increase to municipal funding will be around \$8.6 million.

But that wasn't true, Honourable Speaker. The Finance Minister walked that back on Monday and

clarified the real increase is \$8.4 million less than what his office originally posted.

The Speaker: Member's time has expired. [*interjection*]
The member's time has expired.

Stop the clock, please. I would remind the Honourable Leader of the Official Opposition that when the Speaker stands up and says his time has expired, it's time for him to stop talking. And his mic gets shut off when I say time has expired, so it doesn't get recorded anyway.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Eid mubarak [*Have a blessed Eid*] to the ummah [*community*] right around the world, including right here in Manitoba.

Colleagues and myself were pleased to take in an iftar the other evening at the Abu Bakr Al-Siddique mosque and community centre not too far from the Legislature here today. And certainly our government wishes a joyous occasion today to everybody in Manitoba and around the world celebrating Eid al-Fitr.

The members opposite froze municipal funding for years. We're fixing the damage. We're fixing the potholes.

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

Mr. Ewasko: So then why is the government clawing back \$8.4 million, Honourable Speaker?

The Premier's budget funding promises are as full of holes as the roads in Brandon, Honourable Speaker, which the Infrastructure Minister claimed that she has fixed; roads that could be fixed if Brandon had the funding they briefly thought they did.

* (14:00)

Again, the Finance Minister's office communicated a \$8.6-million increase, but it's actually \$8.4 million less than that. That's quite the difference, even for NDP math.

Is the Premier planning on reinstating some of the funding that has been clawed back from the City of Brandon?

Mr. Kinew: You know, I'm very happy to have an excellent relationship with Mayor Fawcett out of Brandon, Mayor Gillingham out of Winnipeg, Mayor Siemens out of Winkler and municipal leaders right across this great province.

Now, one of the important things that we've committed to in this budget is to end the funding freeze handed down to municipalities by the PCs. We're

committed to a 2 per cent increase this year, another 2 per cent the year after, 2 per cent the year after that, 2 per cent in the fourth year.

Now, we hope to be able to increase municipal funding beyond that, but the bottom line is that we're going to be there for municipalities with predictable funding. We'll never have a funding freeze like they did over their entire time in office.

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

Municipal Funding Government Plan

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): Honourable Speaker, \$8.6-million promise, then in reality becomes \$200,000; quite the difference.

So, but clear communication is key. I guess that's why the Premier and his Finance Minister have, immediately after that news release came out, put out an OIC for the issues manager position in the Finance Department. Obviously, they are having a bit of a difficulty.

The Premier's cavalier attitude is that he can just say anything and he can get away with it. The attitude trickles down to his ministers and is a problem for this government and for Manitobans. In an age of increased disinformation, people want to be able to trust what they're hearing through official government channels. Municipalities deserve clear communication, Honourable Speaker.

Are there any other municipalities, child-care centres, schools paused or cancelled, care homes or other groups that should expect funding clawback from this NDP leader?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): I'm very happy that our government has an excellent relationship with municipal leaders across this great province.

And part of the commitment that we made to them is that we're going to increase funding for municipalities 2 per cent a year. That's an increase every year, whereas there was a freeze every year under the PCs. That's going to allow municipalities to build, to repair roads, to invest in long-term infrastructure.

The difference between their team and our is this: Under them, the building crane was an endangered species and the positive relationships with municipal leaders had gone completely extinct. Under their watch, hope had been confined to the history books.

But good news, Honourable Speaker: it's a new day. The building 'crades' are—the building cranes are back at work. The relationship with municipal leaders are back on a positive footing and hope is here again.

City of Brandon Operating Funding

Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods): Manitobans are deeply concerned when ministers don't know their own budgets. We saw it with the Infrastructure Minister, who said in this place that there was no cut to her funding, only to have to walk that back a couple of days later and in the paper yesterday.

And now we see it again when the minister says Brandon will be receiving an \$8.6-million increase, only to have officials walk it back to \$200,000 increase just a few days later.

Did the minister not know how much Brandon was getting for an increase, or is this another Kinew government flip-flop?

An Honourable Member: Kinew government.

The Speaker: The honourable First Minister.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Get used to saying that. The Stefanson government caused untold damage over their limited time in office. They froze municipal funding, they cut health care. It was an absolute disaster in the health-care system during their time in office. And yet, the member opposite still thought it was a good idea to run under the Stefanson government banner.

The good news is, there's a new administration in Manitoba. And I can say with a high degree of confidence that municipal leaders in his constituency are very happy about the 2 per cent guarantee that we're delivering to municipalities; 2 per cent this year, 2 per cent next year, 2 per cent for each and every year that we have been given a mandate by the people of Manitoba.

What this is going to mean for the average person out there is more investments in road, more investments in increasing the local economy and more investments across this great province.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Spruce Woods, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Jackson: Well, the Premier's back at it again, Honourable Speaker, flipping and flopping on the carbon tax, new school construction, freezing hydro rates, privatizing MPI, and now on municipal operating funding. After telling the media the City of Brandon

was getting an \$8-million increase on budget day, the Finance Minister said the city will only receive a \$200,000 increase instead. That's a big difference.

Why the flip-flop, or did the minister actually believe Brandon was getting an \$8-million increase until he read his own budget?

Mr. Kinew: You know, the City of Brandon is an important part of our vision for the future of Manitoba. That's why we have guaranteed to Brandon and to cities and municipalities right across the province that they're going to be able to count on a 2 per cent increase to their operating funding each and every year.

That's why 18th Street is looking better today than it was under their time in office.

Of course, there's plenty more work to do, but the absolute worst thing that Manitobans could do right now is to go back to the cuts and operating freezes that persisted for years under the PC government.

We're showing early signs of progress, but it's going to take many years of consistent investment to be able to repair the damage caused by the PCs' two terms. But the good news is, your government is hard at work for you, the people of Manitoba.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Spruce Woods, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Jackson: There's nothing new for Brandon in this budget. Expanded paramedic positions and new ambulance, announced in October. Western CancerCare expansion, previously funded. Expanded Brandon hospital, previously funded. Honourable Speaker, 24-7 Sobering Centre, previously funded. Medical school at BU planning has been well under way for over a year. Nothing for 18th Street. Nothing for downtown safety. Nothing for the Keystone Centre. Nothing for the Centennial Auditorium. Nothing for the Sportsplex. Cut two new schools and the Maryland Park expansion, and a cut to their municipal operating.

Clearly the member for Brandon East doesn't get much say at the Cabinet table, but why won't the rest of this NDP government support the City of Brandon?

Mr. Kinew: The first announcement that we did as part of our budget rollout was in Brandon, where we committed to a brand new minor injury and illness clinic. Not only is this going to help improve health care, folks in the community who I'd really encourage the members opposite to start talking to at some point, said that this is really going to make a difference. It's going to help people be seen more quickly; it's going

to give folks in Brandon an alternative to going to the emergency room.

Now, when we talk about what municipal leaders are saying, however, why don't we turn to the voice of municipalities in Manitoba themselves—the AMM. President Kam Blight said, and I quote: Many of Manitoba's 137 municipalities to face challenges since the previous PC government froze municipal funding between 2016 and 2023, and I'm happy to see that changing under the NDP. End quote.

City of Brandon Operating Funding

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Honourable Speaker, this has been a pretty terrible budget for Brandon. First, the Minister of Infrastructure called the potholes on 18th Street a completed project, and with her cuts, who knows when this work will be completed?

Then they found out our post-secondary institutions will have to make cuts to international programs so the minister can give those slots to the University of Winnipeg.

Now we find out the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) was wrong about municipal funding.

So I ask the member for Brandon East, what is going on at the Cabinet table and why is this government abandoning our city?

Hon. Glen Simard (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): Hey, nothing can be further from the truth. When we look back at this historical election, we returned this NDP government to charge. The adults are in charge.

To suggest that my—to suggest that Brandon is not at the forefront of this Cabinet, where is the Minister of Municipal Relations? Where is the Minister for Homelessness? Brandon.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. Order. Order.

* (14:10)

I would remind the member indicating whether members are not here is not allowed.

Mr. Balcaen: Last week, the minister's office reported \$8.6 million in additional funding for Brandon. He actually meant \$200,000. That's right, the second largest city's share of \$52 million is \$200,000.

For those following, that's just 0.38 per cent, not 2 per cent. Doesn't go very far.

It's shameful that this minister misled our local media.

Why is the member for Brandon East representing his government to his constituents instead of his constituents to his government?

Mr. Simard: One of the most frequent questions asked of me on the campaign trail, who is my MLA anyway? Well, so they clearly thought that there should be a voice for their city in the Legislature.

Now, they can make all the noise they want, but we will stand with Manitoba, we will stand with Brandon. Life more affordable for everyone, gas tax for everyone, health care for everyone. And when we talk about investments in education, asked if Brandon School Division—who got the highest increase? Brandon.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Brandon West, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Balcaen: For the NDP math, two thirds of the representative for Brandon are on this side of the House.

Cancelled schools, broken roads, broken promises, this entire Cabinet has a lot to answer for. That is essential services that they have cut out of Brandon, and I'm sure there are plenty of other municipalities that are calling and ringing through to get the answer of when their cuts are coming.

I have a simple question for the member for Brandon East: Does he still read the local paper, and if so, why did he not correct the record immediately when they were told \$8.6 million instead of letting it sit and fester for almost a week? Is this government so desperate for good news that they have to make it up?

Mr. Simard: I read the paper every single day, and I read good news for the farming industry, good news for agriculture, good news for health care in Brandon, good news for post-secondary institutions for Brandon.

And when the member feels like writing letters makes a difference, the old minister of Infrastructure and Transportation said it was the member for Brandon East that brought up the issue to talk about the potholes that they let be created. So at the end of the day—at the end of the day—I know the streets in my community. Can the member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Jackson) say the same?

Zebra Mussel Inspection Stations for Clear Lake Funding for Parkland Region in Budget 2024

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): As the MLA for Riding Mountain, I understand this government's concern about boating access to Clear Lake, but this minister needs to commit to keeping all Manitoba waterways safe.

Last fall, I called on this government to open two new aquatic invasive species inspection stations in Dauphin and Russell.

Will the minister confirm that the funding for these two Parkland area inspection stations are in Budget 2024?

Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Economic Development, Investment, Trade and Natural Resources): Honourable Speaker, I'm glad to hear that members opposite are getting on our side in our work to advocate for the people of Clear Lake and surrounding area; it's a very important body of water. Families go visit that body of water. Tourism, it's an economic hub, and we want to make sure that we're advocating for those—for that region.

When it comes to dealing with aquatic invasive species, our government takes that very seriously. That's why in this budget we have an additional \$500,000 committed to protecting our waterways from aquatic invasive species. That's a 40 per cent increase over what the previous government spent.

We're proud of that work, and we'll continue to do it every day of the week.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Riding Mountain, on a supplementary question.

Zebra Mussels in Assiniboine River Basin Release of Water Sample Results

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): While Parks Canada deals with the zebra mussels concerning Clear Lake, Manitobans are extremely concerned about the water flowing out of the lake, into the Assiniboine River basin.

Last fall, I called on the Minister of Environment and Climate Change (MLA Schmidt) to ensure water samples were taken downstream, and the results shared with the public. To date, Manitobans have seen or heard nothing.

Will the minister make the results of water sampling public today?

Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Economic Development, Investment, Trade and Natural Resources): Our government takes dealing with aquatic invasive species very seriously, Honourable Speaker. I want all Manitobans to know that we're dealing with this in a very responsible way. That's why we are investing an additional \$500,000 in aquatic invasive species prevention in this year's budget. That's a 40 per cent increase over what they spent.

And the reason we want to do this is to ensure that all Manitobans are doing their part to prevent the spread of aquatic 'ovspaceive' species. That's why I want Manitobans to know that if they're out on the waterways this year, I encourage them to clean, drain and dry all watercraft to prevent the spread of zebra mussels and aquatic invasive species across Manitoba.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Riding Mountain, on a final supplementary question.

Aquatic Invasive Species Request for Protective Plan

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Well, it took the NDP five years to act when zebra mussels were discovered in Manitoba in 2009 under their watch. If today's NDP are truly committed to battling aquatic invasive species in Manitoba, why are they refusing to lead by example?

Our PC government had a plan: inspection and decontamination of watercraft, along with regular water testing were essential elements.

Why won't these ministers get on board with protecting Manitoba's lakes and rivers?

Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Economic Development, Investment, Trade and Natural Resources): Let's be clear, Honourable Speaker, that we care deeply about our waterways and our bodies of water in Manitoba. That's why we've been listening and working with regions across Manitoba who are concerned about the waterways.

That's also why we're making increased investments in preventing aquatic invasive species. A 40 per cent increase in this year's budget: \$500,000 additional to prevent the spread of zebra mussels. We are proud of that work; we'll continue to do that work to protect all the waterways in Manitoba so that we can enjoy them together.

International Peace Gardens Funding Concerns in Budget 2024

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain): Honourable Speaker, nestled in the heart of my constituency, it was my honour to sit on the International Peace Garden board of directors. The Garden is a—unique globally and is a reason it's a tourism destination for both sides of the border, internationally.

Now that the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage has been named on the board, and has the same honour, I have one question for him: With all the cuts that this budget—can he confirm that the government isn't also going to cut grants and funding to the jewel of the heart of Turtle Mountain, the International Peace Garden?

Hon. Glen Simard (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): I would like to thank the member opposite for that question.

I had the privilege in the last few weeks to drive down to Peace Garden and meet with the great people who are doing the work there. In addition to that, I'm looking forward to going to the AGM in two weeks and making sure that the great work that happens there at the International Peace Garden's an example for everyone to follow.

Two constituencies coming together continues to go forward without the rhetoric coming from the other side, to make sure that peace, the reason that garden is there, continues, and we get the work done at the Turtle Mountain's precious jewel.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Turtle Mountain, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Piwniuk: Honourable Speaker, he hasn't answered my question here, and we understand that nothing seems to be safe from the NDP scissors. Cuts to parks, cuts to roads, cuts to natural resources. Let's not have a reputation of our partners and neighbours to the south also be cut.

Our PC team worked with North Dakota to introduce record funding and address deferred maintenance. So will the minister confirm that there will be no budget reduction to granting or funding for the International Peace Garden?

Mr. Simard: What I can assure the member opposite is that we will continue to work with our partners in North Dakota and with the Peace Garden board to make sure that what they need, we can deliver on. And the thing is, is that this government, we talk to each

other. This government, we involve everyone in the conversation.

* (14:20)

And we are going, like I mentioned before, to the annual general meeting where we can get a good sense of exactly what it is that they need, and that we will continue to invest in not only the Turtle Mountains, but also in Adam Lake just north of that, William Lake just north of that, and also in Asessippi and the member from Riding Mountain's constituency.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Turtle Mountain, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Piwniuk: Honourable Speaker, I'm wondering if the Premier (Mr. Kinew) has even talked to Governor Burgum about the commitment of continuing to put funding into the International Peace Garden. The natural spaces—and I encourage all members opposite to come out to our great constituency of Turtle Mountain, instead of just going to Birds Hill.

That is why we need to ensure that this government doesn't cut them like they have that—so many other services. The minister refuses to make a firm commitment to allow our lead in funding of IPG.

Can I—can he—can this minister—be able to tell us that he is not cutting the budget for the International Peace Garden? Will he answer my question for a change?

Mr. Simard: Well, it just gives me another opportunity to speak a little bit about Brandon and its connection to the International Peace Garden. All of the students in grade 7 and 8 in the Brandon School Division, we have the opportunity to go down there and learn from the—at the International Music Camp.

It's a beautiful facility, it's a jewel of our province. It is a perfect example of cross-governmental work together. And the question was answered, and the answer was given: we will continue to work to make sure that this beautiful jewel at the southern end of the province, near the North Dakota border, continues to thrive.

I don't know 'whach' more that they need. And—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

Health-Care System's Surgical Capacity Inquiry into Number of Cancellations

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): Can the Minister of Health please confirm for the House and share with

Manitobans how many surgeries have been cancelled in Manitoba since October?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Honourable Speaker, since October, our government has done what the previous government refused to do. We've invested millions of dollars in improving capacity for surgeries right here in Manitoba.

The previous government spent almost \$40 million in the United States, Cleveland, San Francisco, out of jurisdiction, and they sent Manitobans along with that money, so they couldn't get care here in their own province.

Our government is repairing the relationships with health-care workers, working with them to strengthen health care. And we've got incredible investments in surgical capacity in our 2024 budget.

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

Mrs. Cook: Since the minister doesn't want to share this information with Manitobans, I will. I'll table documents obtained through FIPPA that reveal in the months of October through December alone, over 1,300 surgeries were cancelled in Manitoba. And that doesn't even include facilities outside Winnipeg or those whose out-of-province procedures were cancelled by the NDP.

One of the first things the NDP did when they took office was cut surgical capacity through the task force. It looks like this short-sighted decision had an immediate impact on the number of surgical cancellations in Manitoba.

Will the minister release the number of cancelled surgeries from January through March today?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, I was shocked when I was sworn in to find out that the previous PC government didn't bother to do basic things like plan to have additional capacity during respiratory illness season. They didn't bother to invest in improving capacity in critical care here in Manitoba.

Honourable Speaker, we've all learned lessons during COVID. We've all—I shouldn't say that; we all have, except for members opposite. And our government has taken steps to invest in capacity here in Manitoba to mitigate surges, which unfortunately do result, at times, in elective surgeries being cancelled.

Our government is working every day to improve capacity in ways the previous government didn't bother to address.

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

The honourable member for Roblin, on a final supplementary question.

Mrs. Cook: In a three-month period, over 1,300 Manitobans were forced to wait longer for care under this NDP government's watch. They cut the surgical task force, they prohibited Manitobans from going out of province for care when the wait-lists here were too long. Now they're allowing contracts with clinics to just lapse, and they provided no funding for short-term capacity in Budget 2024.

So these wait-lists are likely to keep going up. Patients should not be forced to go out of pocket to be out of pain. They should not be forced to wait longer and longer for care due to NDP negligence.

Will the minister stand up to the Premier, put patients over politics for once and start doing something about the patients that are waiting for care today?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, I will take no lessons on improving capacity from that member opposite.

For over seven and a half years, they sent millions of dollars out of province. They sent patients out of province. They didn't actually address the wait times she's standing up and talking about today.

Wait times persisted under the previous government. Why? Because they didn't invest in health care in Manitoba.

Budget 2024, just like, since October, includes millions of dollars to improve capacity right in here in Manitoban—Manitoba. And that's why Manitobans are getting surgeries close to home.

But since I have the floor right now, will she apologize to trans kids—she's wearing a pink shirt—for attacking trans kids and affecting their health during the election?

The Speaker: The honourable member for Tyndall Park. *[interjection]*

Order.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Stop the clock, please. Order. Order.

How many times should I warn people that when the Speaker's standing, they should be being quiet before something else has to happen; that members wake up and realize that a certain amount of respect for the position is required. I would advise the member to pay attention and to remain quiet while the Speaker is speaking.

So, I don't want to have to remind people again. When the Speaker stands, they need to stop, and I shouldn't have to remind us to be respectful of each other.

Meadows West School Questions from Students

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): The students at Meadows West School have been studying the Manitoba Legislature and believe that there are many interesting features in the building, including the big doors, the number of stairs, the Golden Boy and the architecture overall.

Can the Premier share with the students what makes our Legislature so unique and what his favourite part of the building is?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Well, I want to thank the member for Tyndall Park for bringing the question on behalf of the students today, and I want to thank the students at Meadows West for the amazing question. It's great to see a positive interjection in question period and to have a chance to talk a bit about this amazing place that each of us have the great honour of being able to come to work in each and every day.

Far and away, my favourite part of this building is that it belongs to you. It's the people's building. This is the people's building of the people of Manitoba. There are individual features that I love, details like the buffalo skulls, which are in the moulding during the natural light in the grand staircase; the statues throughout; looking for fossils in the walls.

But each of these physical manifestations of our building pale in comparison to the symbolic weight of this being the seat of our democracy and therefore representative of the power that you, the people, hold.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a supplementary question.

MLA Lamoureux: The students who joined us here today want to know what it's like to be the Premier. They want to know what the job entails. What are the good and the bad parts, and why should they consider a career in politics?

Mr. Kinew: Having the chance to serve as an MLA is a great honour that any of us will experience in our lives. And having the chance to serve the people of Manitoba is a truly awe-inspiring responsibility that I find, personally, inspires a sense of humility in myself.

What I would like to show to the people of Manitoba, the young students in particular, is that the road is open for everyone in this province. The thing that's going to determine whether you have a successful career in politics or business or art or science is how hard you're going to work, how strategic you're going to be about putting the pieces together and how respectful you're going to be of the people around you.

* (14:30)

And so I encourage young people of all backgrounds: if you feel a call to public service, the road is open to you. We are here to serve and we're more than happy to assist you on your journeys.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a final supplementary question.

MLA Lamoureux: Meadows West students have raised two concerns: one about the environment and the importance of reusing materials; and one about health care, specifically for those who don't have adequate health-care coverage or have to wait a long time for health-care services.

Can the Premier share with our students what this government is doing on these fronts?

Mr. Kinew: Well, I really want to thank our young citizens from Meadows West for being such engaged participants in our democracy.

Again, if you were asking me to name some of the top issues, along with health care and the environment, I might add affordability, as well, but they certainly have their fingers on the pulse.

When it comes to health care, we are engaged in investing, increasing capacity for everybody. That's why our new budget has \$1 billion in new investments for health care, so that we can repair the existing services that are on offer and expand it so it can reach more people across this great province.

When it comes to the environment, we know that there are so many things that we have to do to electrify transportation and also to electrify home heating so that our greenhouse gas emissions go down and the safe, clean environment that we all want for future generations can continue to rise.

The good news is that Manitoba is an environmental leader. The better news is I'm inspired by the potential of what young people such as yourselves will be able to do—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Institutional Safety Officers at HSC Government Announcement

Mr. Tyler Blashko (Lagimodière): Honourable Speaker, the previous PC government failed to keep patients and staff safe in our health-care system. Under their watch, safety incidents in our hospitals became far too frequent, but it's a new day in Manitoba.

Last month, the Health Minister announced that our government was following through on our commitment to make health-care spaces safer and that a new cohort of safety officers were beginning their training.

Can the Minister of Health update the House on the progress of implementing those safety officers?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Every health-care worker should be able to do their jobs safely and every person in our province should be guaranteed a safe emergency room or hospital.

Unfortunately, the previous government ignored workers and patients. They promised safety officers, but never delivered on that. Year after year, all they did was cut, cut and cut.

Our government has taken action. On Monday, April 15, the first class of institutional safety officers will be at HSC with an expanded scope to respond to safety concerns in the facility. Ensuring they have the correct tools is a top priority and that is why I've directed they be equipped with pepper gel at HSC. And we're exploring all options to enhance safety, including metal detectors, increased 'amnesty'—amnesty locker use, police presence and community safety hosts. HSC—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

Community and Municipal Organizations Funding Concerns in Budget 2024

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Our PC team was proud to put forward the arts, culture, sport and community fund that benefitted over 800 organizations across the province.

Too bad this NDP government cut it in Budget 2024. Not only did they delay funding already allocated to organizations, they have now decided to completely scrap the program.

People in Manitoba rely on the places they gather, like rinks, soccer fields and community centres. That is why the ACSC funding was built to help out.

Can the minister tell the House which communities will lose out this year thanks to the NDP cuts?

Hon. Glen Simard (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): Our community—or, our government is committed to investing in communities. That's why we've taken an approach where we're going to listen to what the communities need and react to their requests and work in a timely manner.

At the same time, we're going to create a similar fund that'll stabilize the industry. Rather than just throwing stuff at the wall, hoping that it sticks in an election year, we're going to sit down and build things for the long term.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Dawson Trail, on a supplementary question.

MLA Lagassé: The Building Sustainable Communities fund provided hundreds of millions of dollars to much-needed funding for municipal projects across Manitoba; that's parks, rinks, swimming pools, playgrounds and facilities that all of our constituencies rely on.

What did the NDP government do? Cut the program. Shocking. It is clear the NDP have not made communities their priority with this budget.

Can the minister of municipal relations try the same question? Which communities will lose out this year thanks to the NDP cuts?

Mr. Simard: We'll continue to work with communities; that is clear. The minister for municipal relations and I are continuing to work at identifying those projects that come through our desks and the applicants that came through those projects to make sure that they get what they need.

That's why it was our government, when we came to office, that signed those agreements with those organizations, not the PC government. You know, when you look at what happened there, they made this fund and then they were sending out letters and we had MLAs like the MLA for Selkirk, who wasn't even part of the government, taking pictures with these letters. So what was all that about?

So we know what it was about. It wasn't about investing in communities, it was an eleventh-hour attempt to maintain—

The Speaker: Member's time is expired.

The honourable member for Dawson Trail, on a final supplementary question.

MLA Lagassé: Over \$125 million in cuts to community funding, all at the hands of the NDP government. We as MLAs see first-hand the impact that community organizations, municipal facilities and neighbourhood resources have on all our constituents.

Our team made them a priority. The NDP are hacking and slashing their funding. Manitoba communities are worse off, underfunded, thanks to this NDP budget and the chaos it has created.

I ask one more time: Which of the communities will lose out this year thanks to the NDP cuts?

Mr. Simard: Well, we'll just say this: In the lead-up to election, 78 per cent of the projects awarded in the spring of 2023 were in Tory-led ridings, and of the \$25.5 million funding that year, 72 per cent total funds went to communities in 'toral'—Tory-held ridings. And only 10 per cent of the funds went to underserved and vulnerable ridings.

We are here for all of Manitoba. One Manitoba, one future.

Community Supportive Living for Seniors Funding Concerns in Budget 2024

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): This government's budget, they could only commit to lifting their pause on one personal-care home this year. The PC government proudly delivered a seniors strategy for aging with dignity that not only included six personal care homes, but also included other housing options, including a community-supported living program. There is no mention of that program in their budget.

Can the minister tell us why community-supportive living for seniors was cut from this budget?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Honourable Speaker, I am proud to stand in the House and talk about the investments our government is making in our incredible budget to support seniors across the province.

I have to say, I was also proud that our announcement of the Lac du Bonnet personal-care home was so popular that even that member joined us. It was a really exciting day, and there's going to be much more

exciting news as we move ahead in the coming weeks and months, Honourable Speaker.

Budget 2024 also invests in community care for seniors. The safe and healthy at home program is going to help seniors stay safe in their homes and out of emergency rooms, getting the care they need in their neighbourhoods.

The Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

Petitions? Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Can you please call second reading of Bill 30, The Unexplained Wealth Act (Criminal Property Forfeiture Act and Corporations Act Amended); followed by second reading of Bill 29, The Body Armour and Fortified Vehicle Control Amendment Act; followed by second reading of Bill 31, The Captured Carbon Storage Act.

* (14:40)

The Speaker: It has been announced that we will go to second reading of Bill 30, The Unexplained Wealth Act (Criminal Property Forfeiture Act and Corporations Act Amended); followed by second reading of Bill 29, The Body Armour and Fortified Vehicle Control Amendment Act; followed by Bill 31, The Captured Carbon Storage Act.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 30—The Unexplained Wealth Act (Criminal Property Forfeiture Act and Corporations Act Amended)

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala), that Bill 30, The Unexplained Wealth Act (Criminal Property Forfeiture Act and Corporations Act Amended), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

The Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Justice, seconded by the honourable Minister of Finance—*[interjection]*

Order. Order, please.

It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance, seconded by—sorry, the honourable Minister of Justice, seconded by the honourable Minister of Finance, that Bill 30, The Unexplained Wealth Act (Criminal Property Forfeiture Act and Corporations

Act Amended), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Mr. Wiebe: I'm pleased to rise today to—for second reading of Bill 30, The Unexplained Wealth Act, the Criminal Property Forfeiture and Corporations Act Amended.

Manitobans elected a government that was—wanted to—they wanted a government that was going to get serious on keeping our communities safe. They elected a government that was going to listen; listen to community, listen to law enforcement, listen to all those within our communities who are doing important work to keep those communities safe.

But they also understood, as we went door to door and we talked to folks out in community, they understood the complexity of this task, and they understood how important it was to not only talk about being tough on crime, but also the causes of crime.

That's why it was so important when we were first elected as government, Honourable Speaker, that we came in and we worked across government with the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine), with the Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness (Ms. Smith), that we worked with the Minister of Health. We worked together to talk about how we can make our communities safer in a holistic way, in a way that actually made a difference.

But it was also important for us to reach out, as I said, to law enforcement, to community organizations, to those at the community level and those who are working in our law enforcement sector to come together and find this multifaceted approach to dealing with crime.

This is an important step in the right direction with regards to that initiative, Honourable Speaker. That's because The Unexplained Wealth Act will take serious steps to go after drug trafficking and money laundering here in Manitoba. These are major problems. These are problems that organized crime have exploited, have managed to gain a foothold here in this province and have allowed for toxic drugs and harm to our families and communities to spread, because of their ability to go unchecked.

Now, it's important for us to go after, as I said, all facets of crime that affects community. That includes community level crime, that includes violent offenders, that includes repeat offenders. We've taken important steps with regards to bail and bail initiatives that will make a real difference.

We've partnered with law enforcement to fund and support the work that they do. But, every time we did that work, they came to us and said, there's also this more complex issue with regards to organized crime and to drug traffickers.

That's why we took important steps initially to seek out advice, to seek out good advice from those across the country and here within Manitoba, the great work of our civil servants, to put together legislation that is strong, that will put us in a strong position to lead the country once again, and will put Manitoba back on the right track of being tough on crime and specifically tough on organized crime.

Manitobans understand that, under the previous government, we saw crime increase. We saw the impact to communities, and this was because they underfunded and they cut programs. They cut programs that keep our province safe, but they also cut, as I said, departments across government, which had an impact on public safety.

This bill provides and works with law enforcement to give them the tools that they need to go after organized crime in a serious way. The bill will provide law enforcement the tools to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime as they do the important work of cracking down on the big players in drug trafficking operations.

Manitobans remember during the last election, while members opposite were on summer vacation, we were—our leader, now Premier (Mr. Kinew), made a speech, and he made his first election commitment. And that was that we would get tough on crime and specifically that we would take steps and initiatives to bring in an unexplained wealth act.

This is an important step to target the assets and wealth of drug traffickers and other criminals throughout our province. And that commitment that was made on the election trail is now being borne out here by bringing this legislation forward.

Manitobans told us that they see the impacts of the cuts of the previous government. They see the impacts and the rise in crime throughout our province, and they wanted us to not just talk, not just come up with slogans or rhetoric, but to actually get to work and make a difference.

Mrs. Rachele Schott, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Bill 30 fulfills our Premier's commitment to Manitobans.

I'm proud to rise in the House now to give some further context to this important legislation, which was really developed in conjunction with law enforcement and officials within the department, who are leaders throughout the country in this important work.

In assisting with drafting Bill 30, Manitoba Justice worked closely with Jeffrey Simser, one of Canada's leading experts in asset forfeiture and money laundering. He served as a lawyer and legal director with Ontario's Ministry of the Attorney General for over 30 years, and he recently appeared as an expert witness at the Cullen Commission of Inquiry into Money Laundering in British Columbia. His work and his expertise is second to none across the country, and I want to thank him for that work.

Alongside Mr. Simser, our government identified the fact that organized crime is, in fact, in Manitoba. It benefits from the secrecy of the beneficial ownership, and specifically the beneficial ownership that exists behind numbered companies.

This was an important element to the bill which we were able to capture and build upon and really strengthen and become leaders across the country.

Under Bill 30, proposed amendments to The Corporations Act would require Manitoba corporations to disclose their beneficial ownership information to law enforcement, to regulatory bodies and to the director of criminal property forfeiture. If passed, these amendments will help law enforcement across our province to investigate serious criminals and will specifically impact drug traffickers and money launderers.

Our government has also identified areas of improvement in The Criminal Property Forfeiture Act that will provide the director of criminal property forfeiture with more tools to investigate, to seize and to go after those proceeds and instruments of unlawful activity, to forfeit those or to begin the forfeiture process and to really impact the ability to go after organized crime.

The proposed amendments to The Criminal Property Forfeiture Act will establish unexplained wealth orders. These are brand new tools, Honourable Speaker, that will allow law enforcement important new powers to provide—to go after and ask for provision of information about how criminal enterprises acquire property, if it appears that their known sources of income and assets wouldn't be sufficient to acquire the property, or if the person or a closely related person has been involved in unlawful activity.

Honourable Speaker, if a person fails to then provide that information or provides false or misleading information, the property is presumed to be proceeds of unlawful activity—again, unless it can be proven otherwise.

Under Bill 30, these orders will include not just the owner of the property, but importantly, any responsible officer, which may include business partners and directors of corporations. The director of criminal property forfeiture may also require the disclosure of specific—sorry, specified records and documents and require the person to answer questions about their assets prior to a civil forfeiture proceeding. Again, important: front-loading this process will help us in going after these criminal enterprises.

* (14:50)

The act also requires the court to presume, for the purposes of civil forfeiture, that cash is proceeds of unlawful activity if it is mailed or if it is shipped with no information or with false information about the sender, and that a building is an instrument of unlawful activity if a controlled substance is found in the building in a quantity or in circumstances consistent with drug trafficking.

The act also adds crypto assets, including cryptocurrency under the definition of property. Crypto assets are an increasingly common way for organized crime groups to hide unlawful proceeds, and this amendment will allow the director to pursue these assets for civil forfeiture.

Finally, Honourable Speaker, the act makes several minor amendments, including increasing administrative forfeiture threshold to \$125,000 to reflect inflation and the significant wealth generated from crimes.

It also increases the maximum length of interim orders from 30 to 60 days to provide more time to serve defendants and modernizing administrative forfeiture notification requirements so that they're published online rather than in a newspaper.

Now, members opposite across the way have called these changes redundant, but law enforcement disagrees. And we've heard loud and clear from them as they have not only asked for this and worked with our officials closely to develop this legislation, but also since this has been introduced at first reading, we've heard loud and clear from across the spectrum.

This includes the Manitoba Association of Chiefs of Police; the National Police Federation; Dave Dalal, the acting deputy chief of Winnipeg Police Service; Randy Lewis, the acting chief of the Brandon Police

Service; Grand Chief Cathy Merrick of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs; as well as the Association of Manitoba Municipalities. Our government is committed to listening to and collaborating with experts and with people serving on the front lines to keep Manitoba families safe.

Honourable Speaker, these amendments align with our commitment to ensure that drug traffickers and organized crime have nowhere to hide their profits in Manitoba.

Our message to drug traffickers is clear: You have no place in Manitoba. I encourage all members of this House to support Bill 30, which will help make our province a safer place for all Manitobans.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Questions

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

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): My question on this is reality.

And so my question is, if we're increasing Criminal Property Forfeiture and the workload that they will be doing, obviously The Unexplained Wealth Act is something new, The Corporations Act is something new, why has the Justice Minister cut the funding to the Criminal Property Forfeiture Unit?

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Well, the member's just wrong, and I think we—I thought we cleared this up in question period, but maybe not. The member is wrong about the funding for Criminal Property Forfeiture.

In fact, what we're doing is we are increasing—we called in experts to develop this legislation. We're increasing the ability of the Criminal Property Forfeiture folks to do their work. And, by bringing or passing this legislation, really what we'll be enabling them to do is to use more tools and to be more efficient in the work that they do. I hope that the member will support the work that they do.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Will there be any additional staff needed in the Criminal Property Forfeiture branch for this, and if so, at what cost?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, as I said, Honourable Speaker, we're supporting the work of the staff in the department, in criminal property forfeiture. These tools are expanded but, again, what I think they importantly do is that they streamline the process and they, in fact, make it easier for those people, those folks in the department, to do the work that they're doing.

So while, you know, we want to continue to support the work that they do and make sure the staffing is appropriate, certainly by passing this legislation, by passing this bill, we'll actually be helping them do their work more efficiently. We'll be cutting down on some of the barriers that they have and enabling them to better work with law enforcement to get the job done.

Mr. Balcaen: I would just like to have the minister explain law enforcement's role with The Unexplained Wealth Act. He mentioned in his initial response about police investigating this, but I would like to put on the record the responsibilities of law enforcement, specifically police, when it comes to these acts.

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, it's an important question, and, again, I know the member opposite knows this world very well. And, in fact, when we did have an opportunity to sit down for a bill briefing, I thought it was helpful everybody in the room knew each other, and that's because our department works so closely with law enforcement, understands the role that they play and the important role that they play with regards to criminal property forfeiture.

You know, investigations are still going to be taking place under the confines of law enforcement as well as within the Department of Justice. They have historically worked very well together; we want to continue that work.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): The member will know that the Cullen Commission in British Columbia brought forward a number of recommendations as it comes to criminal property forfeiture.

Can he explain how the recommendations from the Cullen Commission fit into this particular piece of legislation?

Mr. Wiebe: Wow, a blast from the past here in the Chamber today. It's interesting the former member, I guess current member, former minister, now decides he wants to get up and put some words on the record.

You know, it's surprising, during the campaign all we heard was, we don't need this, why are we doing this? And I guess maybe sheepishly the former minister maybe admitted privately, saying, yes, we didn't get this done.

Well, this government is getting the work done. We are taking the good work of the Cullen Commission. We are taking the people of Manitoba's direction, and we're getting to work on the unexplained wealth orders.

Mr. Goertzen: From that I gather the member doesn't know what the Cullen Commission is. But for his edification it was a significant report done under—out of British Columbia; it dealt a lot with money laundering and unexplained wealth. And, in fact, some changes that happened in Manitoba came as a result of the Cullen Commission.

I'm just asking him if he can maybe put aside the partisanship, if that's possible, and just explain how this particular bill fits in with the recommendations from the Cullen Commission.

Mr. Wiebe: You know, I can only imagine how it feels, Honourable Speaker, to, you know, have the opportunity, have the great responsibility and the great honour to serve in Cabinet and, again, not to be able to get the job done, and, you know, go out, use political rhetoric, amp up the discussion, you know, sort of fight back in a political way during an election campaign to say, this isn't needed and I can't believe the NDP would consider doing this.

And now stand up and say, well, you know what? Actually, the Cullen Commission suggested we should do this, and why didn't the last guys get it done?

Honestly, I think there's other members on the other side of the House that are new to the place. They probably have some real legitimate questions; I'm hoping they'll ask them.

Mr. Goertzen: Now I'm certain the member doesn't understand the Cullen Commission.

The Cullen Commission sort of did recommend things around unexplained wealth and money laundering, and, in fact, the government brought in legislation specifically around unexplained wealth. And, in fact, the member might remember because it was before the House a couple of years ago, and I don't remember if he supported it, but he certainly was aware of it.

* (15:00)

So, he's now suggesting that this is a result of the Cullen Commission, yet legislation was passed in this House regarding that.

Why is he doing something that was already done?

Mr. Wiebe: Member opposite missed the boat when he was minister of Justice, now he's missing the boat here in the House again today, which is kind of unfortunate because I'd be happy to walk him through this a little bit more carefully. Maybe he's used to having some more briefings and some more staff to give him the information. Now he's on his own, he's got to do his own research.

That's what this bill is all about, Honourable Speaker. We're doing the important work. We're going after corporations, we're going after that dark money and the money laundering that happens across the country. It happens here in Manitoba; that's why we're getting the job done with the unexplained wealth orders.

Mr. Goertzen: Not sure if the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn) knows a lot people with unexplained wealth in the agriculture industry; he seemed very excited by that.

The member opposite would know, if he would ask for a briefing from his department, that there's already been orders that have been executed by the criminal property forfeiture portion of his department that deal with unexplained wealth. In fact, they've gone before the courts.

Would he like to explain why this is different than those things that have already appeared before the courts?

Mr. Wiebe: Looks like I got to pull out my question period notes here, Honourable Speaker, because we're way off the rails. The Justice minister, former, wants to get into, you know, coulda, woulda, shoulda, I think is the way that his former leader put it.

But reality is, is that if he thinks that things were—the status quo was okay and that crime going up under his watch was just fine, maybe he should go back and look at the results of the last election.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, the member opposite might want to read the newspaper and see what the results are of violent crime these days under his watch, but more specifically to this particular topic.

These are issues that were addressed in legislation that came before the Legislature two or three years ago, when the legislation was actually passed and, in

fact, there's actually been action taken, court orders in the court.

Now, I saw that he got a red folder in, and so maybe staff or perhaps those in the department have provided him an actual, coherent answer.

Could he please explain how this is different than what already exists under criminal property forfeiture?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, it's just embarrassing, Honourable Speaker. We've got a critic who, you know, I think is doing an admirable job, former law enforcement personnel. Somebody who came into this—*[interjection]* Yes, applaud. Yes. That's right.

And yet, apparently his agenda is being hijacked because the minister wants to say, I did everything right, I did everything perfectly, and thinks that the status quo was okay.

Well, the public spoke. The Stefanson government failed when it came to crime. They failed when it came to going after organized crime. We're getting the job done, and the former minister should get on board.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, I'm not trying to embarrass the new minister. I know that it's a big file and it's a lot to digest. And, you know, I actually have some sympathy for him because it's difficult when you're a new minister sort of learning the file. Sometimes it's better just to take the questions as notice and move on.

But I'll try again for him. There's already been before the Court orders under The Criminal Property Forfeiture Act that deal with unexplained wealth. If he wants the Legislature to pass legislation quickly, he needs to explain why this is different than the powers that already exist within that branch.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, again, I—it's embarrassing that the minister didn't listen to the initial—he wasn't at the bill briefing. He didn't listen to the 'initial' speak—speech, obviously. He doesn't understand the legislation. That's okay. I'm sure that the critic opposite does, and that's why he wants to pass this legislation.

So, I know that they're trying to get sort of the—you know, sweep out the old—spring cleaning right now—they're trying to sweep out the old and clean up the caucus over there. It's time for some new blood, and we expect some real questions about this legislation that we can get passed today, if the minister—the former minister—would just let us get to work.

Mr. Balcaen: So, comment first, followed by a question, is that I'm new to MLA work, and the minister is new

to his position. And it's often very important to learn from your seniors and from people that have been there and walked the walk and talked the talk beforehand and actually brought in legislation that is meaningful, that has been proven and has been court tested.

So again, I'll reiterate the question to the minister: What is the difference between what you're proposing and what has already been tried, tried and tested within the courts of Manitoba?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, it's a good point, and I appreciate the member opposite for mentioning it. That's why we do listen to the experts in the field. We listen to people like Deputy Chief Scot Halley of the Winnipeg Police Service, who said, the Manitoba Association of Chiefs of Police continues to support the ongoing efforts to deal with organized crime and unlawful wealth in Manitoba.

We listen to important people like the acting chief, Randy Lewis in Brandon, I think the member opposite knows very well and knows that he said The Unexplained Wealth Act will make it more difficult for criminals to hide their dirty money and provide a mechanism for—to be taken seriously.

Again, we're not happy with the status quo. That's why we worked with experts; we worked with law enforcement and we've got a strong piece of legislation that, if the members opposite would support it, we could get to work in going after organized crime in a serious way instead of just using rhetoric and tired lines—

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): Member's time has expired.

MLA Bereza: Again, my question is, because we've heard some things today—is it \$200,000 funding, \$800,000, \$8 billion funding—what is it?

So, I'll ask the question again, please: Will there be additional staff needed in the Criminal Property Forfeiture branch, and what will those costs look like?

Thank you.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, again, there's kind of two ways to ask this question. Maybe one is more suited for question period. I'd be happy to answer that.

The member opposite says there's just one way to ask it, and that would be, I think, the way that the member for Brandon West (Mr. Balcaen) asked it, with—which was at the bill briefing, in a very serious way and got the answer directly from officials.

They have the resources that they need; they want the tools now to get the job done.

And again, we're going to be in Estimates very soon. Again, new members, but I invite you, please come. You'll hear directly from officials through me in the Chamber or in committee rooms. We'd be happy to walk through the numbers to ensure that you understand how they have the proper tools to get the job done.

MLA Bereza: Estimates are coming up very soon. You're correct with that, but we're talking about this today.

So I'll ask again: Will there be additional staff, and how many additional staff will be needed, and how much money will that additional staff cost in the Criminal Property Forfeiture branch?

Thank you.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, again, the member opposite says he only has one more serious way of asking this question, but now he's just getting onto the rhetoric part because I've answered the question—

An Honourable Member: No, you haven't.

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, I did. And the member for Brandon West understood the answer to that question as well.

The answer is is that there is no new funding needed to execute the powers being given under Bill 30. In fact, it will make things more streamlined. It will give the ability to do more work, and that's why it's important that we support this bill, we get on with the work.

I appreciate the genuine questions from the members opposite. I think there's some good work being done by the new members in the caucus, and I want to applaud them for doing that.

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): The floor is open for debate—oh, the time for the question period has expired.

Debate

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): The floor is open for debate.

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): It's my pleasure to rise today and talk on a topic that I am extremely passionate about.

* (15:10)

Criminal property forfeiture and The Corporations Act, and the other acts that incorporate this bill are

very important to myself, as a former law enforcement officer, but I think, more broadly, to the law enforcement community within Manitoba. And that is not just police officers; it's all of the agencies that may come across an area where unexplained wealth, criminal property, or the goods of criminal enterprises may come to the forefront, and it allows specific legislation to be followed to seize these assets.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, I'm not sure your familiarity or members in this Chamber's familiarity with the Criminal Property Forfeiture branch; however, as the Justice Minister alluded to, I have a great relationship with them, with all of their investigators, and I support the work that they do, because it's incredibly important work within our province.

The police and law enforcement and justice areas can only do so much within our province. They're limited by charters; they're limited by investigational processes, where the criminal or civil—sorry, the civil side opens up a whole new realm of investigation. And allowing that investigation to take place at the civil side really changes the landscape and the abilities for organized criminals, drug dealers, independent entrepreneurs who gain their assets through criminality, to be challenged on a different level.

Oftentimes police or law enforcement officers are, and I pardon the pun, handcuffed by the criminal justice system when they bring items to court because of nuances, because of investigational areas that are continually being challenged, and there's continual case law being made on these.

So, allowing a civil process that does a balance of probabilities, 50 per cent plus one, rather than beyond reasonable doubt. This allows for this process to take place, and for a reasonable person to look at the events and what has happened within the file to be looked at by a reasonable person and say, did this happen.

That's the balance of probabilities, and that's where a reasonable person and, again, people on our side of the House, very reasonable, would look at this type of legislation, this type of order, and determine whether or not the average citizen should be hiding behind shell corporations, should be hiding behind straw pollsters that will take their name on a corporation when they actually have no benefit to the corporation, they have no real income, but they're standing in the name to allow the domino effect to put in place with different corporations.

So I want the record to stand that I am absolutely in support of Criminal Property Forfeiture, the Criminal

Property Forfeiture director and the laws and legislation that are presently in place that encompass the work that these ladies and gentlemen do in this unit.

I've had the pleasure of working with the previous director of Criminal Property Forfeiture, who is a former police officer, who has his legal degree, and he really spoke well about criminal property forfeiture and the value that this brings to Manitobans.

So for those that aren't familiar, Gord Schumacher was the previous executive director of the Criminal Property Forfeiture. And I had a great opportunity to sit with him and discuss this law, and specifically how beneficial this can be to Manitobans and to all Canadians. As a matter of fact, my colleague from Steinbach talked about the Cullen Commission, and that's a very, very important commission, when it comes to organized crime, when it comes to money laundering and when it comes to the impacts that we can have, as legislators, as lawmakers, within our province.

Many of those recommendations should and ought to be followed by Manitoba. BC has been a leading province, when it comes to civil forfeiture, when it comes to investigation of organized crime and, of course, money laundering.

Manitoba is right on that cutting edge, as well, and it's because of the great work of our former minister, the member from Steinbach, and the work that he put forward at that time to bring in legislation in this House that has been tried, proven and tested within the Manitoba courts.

I can speak personally, as the previous chief of police for Brandon, and the work that our members did in co-operation with many, many municipal partners—sorry, municipal police forces across Manitoba. But not only that, we reach out to Saskatchewan, to Alberta, to British Columbia, to Toronto; down to the DEA, including all of our different agencies in the United States and across Canada when we do these very high-profile investigations.

And I got to correct myself, Honourable Deputy Speaker, I keep saying we because I spent over three decades in the policing world, so I'll back that up and say when police—and please excuse me if I say we because I'm still very passionate about that.

I can speak to numerous cases that the Brandon Police Service was involved in. Many of them are public record right now. And we talk about the use of criminal property forfeiture and about the use of doing

that to infiltrate organized crime or to hit the criminals where it really hurts, and that's their bank accounts.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, many criminals look at this as a cost of doing business. They look at jail time and they look at probation, parole, when they're released on judicial interim release, on either undertakings or recognizances; they look at that as the cost of doing business.

But at the end of the day, their business is finance. Their business is money and income, because money is power. And if we can hit them where it hurts, in the bank account, and take away that wealth, take away that income, then that really sets the stage for people and their decision whether or not they want to become involved in criminality.

So, I'd just like to talk a little bit about the consultation process on this bill. And I know, myself, as the former chief of police in Brandon, I was one of the ones that was consulted when this bill started to come to fruition.

And I was happy to be consulted on that and know that when the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) spoke about experts that had been consulted, that he thinks myself, as a member of the PC caucus, is an expert, is a testament to the great work that we do on this side of the House.

I would also like to talk about the oversight bodies of law enforcement and how—or not the oversight bodies, sorry, the bodies of law enforcement that support the great work of police and peace officers, including the Manitoba Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. Both organizations strongly support criminal property forfeiture or the civil processes used in receiving funds from the criminals to make sure that they remain robust, that they remain cutting edge and in front of all members that are out there. They provide opportunities for training, for discussion and, actually, committees set up on how this great work can be continued within our province and we can learn from many, many other countries and jurisdictions.

* (15:20)

I believe there's over 130, 140—somewhere in there, Honourable Deputy Speaker—organizations across the network that Canada works with that have some sort of criminal property forfeiture process, where they can take the funds away from the people that gain these through criminality, and then redistribute it in different ways.

In Manitoba, it's very important to note that the money that is seized and that is subject to court order is controlled by the directorate or the director of Criminal Property Forfeiture, and that those funds, the main objective is to make sure that funds end up to victims of crime. That's first and foremost.

But, from a law enforcement and a public safety agenda, I think it's important to also note that those funds can be used to assist law enforcement or other agencies with tools, with programming, with different programs that they may want to put on within their communities that directly impact public safety.

And, as I scrolled through social media last night, I came through a picture from the Bear Clan from Brandon. And, on the back of their van that just recently was purchased from the Bear Clan—or, for the Bear Clan, Honourable Deputy Speaker, is a notation from the Manitoba government saying that funds for this vehicle were procured from the Criminal Property Forfeiture branch.

An Honourable Member: Brandon Crime Stoppers has that too.

Mr. Balcaen: Right. And, not just this new, large bus, 24-seat bus, that will help the Bear Clan and the people of Brandon when they need it most to get some warmth, to carry supplies, to work with their fellow clan members that walk the streets and take care of those less advantaged in the city of Brandon. This is the second vehicle that the Criminal Property Forfeiture branch has funded for the Bear Clan. So, it's not just law enforcement, it's the partners of law enforcement that also benefit from this.

I can also tell you that the Bear Clan in Brandon—and I know it's happened in Winnipeg too. I don't know exactly, because I didn't keep up with that jurisdiction, but in Brandon, they received gloves, they received flashlights and they received some different clothing to help with their tours and to help the people that are on the streets of Brandon.

If you're ever fortunate enough to be in the great city of Brandon and drive by the Brandon Police Service parking lot, you'll notice that the Crime Stoppers vehicle is in there, decaled out, and on the back of it says, this vehicle was seized as a result of criminal property forfeiture. So, we now have, in the city of Brandon, the police service, and in co-operation with Crime Stoppers, a vehicle that is fully decaled that was actually seized as a proceeds of crime.

And that is how effective this program can be with helping fund not only police organizations and

justice organizations, but the offshoots of those organizations that help public safety and the perception of public safety.

I would be remiss if I didn't talk about the funding that police services also get to help further public safety within their jurisdictions. And this goes for the 12 municipal agencies, as well as the RCMP across our province. When it comes time for division of some of the assets from criminal property forfeiture, police agencies and law enforcement agencies are allowed to put in application and ask what they can get from the funds that will help generate protection or help with law enforcement within their specific jurisdictions.

And I can speak at length of the number of different areas, because police services have been recognized for the great work that they've done with outside organizations to help support public safety.

So, again, I will reiterate, Honourable Deputy Speaker, that I am certainly in favour of any legislation that will help Manitoba law enforcement agencies, justice areas and, by arm's length, the areas that help out those agencies and that are supportive of those agencies.

So going back to the Brandon Police Service, I can state that over \$1 million was reinvested in my time as chief of police back into the Brandon Police Service for items that were not budgeted that—but would help law enforcement with the work that they do, areas as simple as getting several electric bicycles for our officers to ride in the downtown area to make sure that they could quietly and conveniently patrol the area and make sure that the streets in our historic district were kept very safe.

This didn't just encapsulate downtown Brandon but all of Brandon. So if you are ever there, you will see police officers riding these bicycles that were the proceeds of crime around the city of Brandon to ensure the safety and well-being of all of our residents and our over 200,000 visitors that use Brandon every year.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the fact that it also takes care of safety equipment that our members could use.

And I know as a result of one call for service, our members went into a smoke-filled burning building to try and find a young baby that was left trapped in the building and they suffered from smoke inhalation. And because of this and the funds that we could get from criminal property forfeiture, we were able to get some breathing apparatuses that members could carry with them in case of these urgent and emergent issues

to enter buildings before the great members of the Brandon Fire & Emergency Services could attend and take over those areas that they are super—sorry, that they are the experts and trained on.

So, again, all of these different areas are very, very important for us.

If we look at the Cullen Commission and some of the information that was brought forward, the member from Steinbach talked about that and I'm sure had great debriefings while—or briefings while he was in the minister's chair talking about what the impact of organized crime is on society.

And so when we look at criminal property forfeiture or civil processes, it is very important because individuals that are gaining these assets through criminality and hiding behind shell corporations and stacking these corporations to try and evade being caught are actually taking money out of taxation and the money that could come into our governments to run our province, not only at a provincial level but at a federal level as well.

And so it's very important that we look at this; organized crime, specifically. And we've got some legislation in here talking about cryptocurrency. The cryptocurrency or the underground currency could also cause damage to our banking systems here within Canada and undermine their ability to support the economy of not only Manitoba but all of Canada and internationally.

So there's very specific reasons to support legislation that will help law enforcement and all other jurisdictions that work under either the police or other law enforcement agencies.

*(15:30)

And so it's also important to note that law enforcement agencies, for example police services, do not actually use these orders. They liaise with the Criminal Property Forfeiture branch to make sure that these orders are followed and bring the information forward. So there is that symbiotic relationship between Criminal Property Forfeiture and law enforcement agencies such as my previous agency at the Brandon Police Service.

So it was not uncommon, Honourable Deputy Speaker, when we started a very significant investigation where we knew or believed that proceeds of crime would be part of our investigation that we notified the Criminal Property Forfeiture director and we had conversations about some of the directions

that our investigation was going to go and that we suspected that proceeds of crime would be part of this investigation. This allowed the Criminal Property Forfeiture director to engage his or her staff at that time with our organization and glean some information from us to move forward with their investigation on the civil side.

But it's also very important, Honourable Deputy Speaker, that the people from Manitoba and the people in this Chamber understand that it's not a two-way street. Police can provide the information that they glean from information to the Criminal Property Forfeiture Unit and their director, but information that is gleaned from the Criminal Property Forfeiture investigators does not flow back to the police because that could jeopardize investigations that police are undertaking, again, because of the different laws that are in place—sorry, the burdens of proof that are in place, be it beyond a reasonable doubt or the balance of probabilities. Of course, the balance of probabilities having the lesser burden of proof, but it really is the reasonableness of the trier of fact, looking at the legislation and how reasonable is that for us.

So there has been some very important legislation and information that has come forward through this government, Honourable Deputy Speaker, through this—sorry, through this side of the House. When we were previously in government we made legislation in 2021 to change—or, to strengthen the ability of the Criminal Property Forfeiture Unit to quickly act on securing money that was believed to be used for money laundering.

There was also changes in the act to allow for orders of seizure of up to \$75,000, and these could be done and gives the person who had the money or the instrument seized from them the opportunity to appeal it through the civil courts. So these were important legislation because it allowed the great work, the civil investigators, to look at and seize these funds.

I can also talk about how these investigations are multi-jurisdictional or cross-jurisdictional in this province, and so not only this province but this country and our neighbouring countries. Several of the investigations that come to my mind at the forefront involved processes where we had to engage when we—I say we, sorry, the Brandon Police Service had to engage Criminal Property Forfeiture at the start of an investigation because we knew it was going to be multi-jurisdictional.

So we brought on our partners from the RCMP, from Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia,

and the areas of jurisdiction that they have, to make sure that we're all in sync. And so Criminal Property Forfeiture in Manitoba would talk with criminal property forfeiture in British Columbia or Alberta to make sure that they weren't duplicating the work, the important work, of seizing assets from people.

I'm really supportive of the areas that this act looks at when we talk about The Corporations Act and the ability for civil investigators to look at corporations and demand from these corporations different areas to prove their wealth and—or, prove unexplained wealth when it comes forward. Law enforcement does not have that ability, Honourable Deputy Speaker.

When the Charter of Rights are invoked, we cannot demand that people provide evidence that will incriminate them. But because this law—civil law—does not go against—it does not go against a person, but it goes against property, it goes against funds and it goes against areas that are a part of income, then those levels of scrutiny are not the same at the civil level.

And so we have to make sure that when we're looking and investigators are reaching out to these corporations, it will now be codified that they have to provide the information that is being asked to make sure that these organizations are legitimate organizations.

And for those that fear that this can be fishing expeditions, that will be controlled in this legislation, I'm sure, because, having experienced what we've done before, is—there has to be some sort of suspicion before we start looking at organizations or corporations as to why.

So for those people that are running organizations or businesses that are legitimate, they don't need to worry about this. But it's the organizations that set up shell corporations and different numbered companies within Manitoba and within Canada, we have to be concerned with those when they're trying to hide the proceeds of crime.

And, Honourable Deputy Speaker, these laws that are being proposed will help immensely with the work that areas like Criminal Property Forfeiture Manitoba does at the time.

So when I look at the great work and the abilities of the investigators that are in this unit, I would have an extremely difficult time, Honourable Deputy Speaker, of not supporting legislation that is going to give law enforcement or investigators those extra tools in their tool belt that they can use in investigations such as this.

And you know what, it's important to ensure that the continued efforts of Criminal Property Forfeiture go on within Manitoba. Fact, Honourable Deputy Speaker, is that from 2009 through to 2021, the Manitoba Criminal Property Forfeiture Unit seized \$22.3 million in assets, and then disbursed approximately \$16 million of those into grants.

And that's the grants that I talked about that go to safety programs for police agencies, or to support the offshoots of these agencies, such as Crime Stoppers. Such as, in the city of Brandon, the Brandon Friendship Centre was the benefactor of a number of display tents so that their work could be displayed when they were celebrating national peoples Indigenous day.

And so I can speak passionately for my community, but I'm sure every community across Manitoba benefits from all of the support that this act has.

So again I thank the member for bringing this forward and thank you for the time to—

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): The honourable member's time is expired.

* (15:40)

MLA David Pankratz (Waverley): So today we get to take yet another strong step in Manitoba's journey toward safer, more secure communities. And I thank the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) for bringing this bill forward.

You know, our shared commitments to this cause is really more than a policy, it's a promise; you know, a promise to every family, every child, every senior and elder, that their well-being is our utmost priority.

And you know, our predecessors, the members opposite, they took a bit of a different path that, unfortunately, it led to increased vulnerability within our communities. Their approach, you know, marked by underfunding and cuts, allowed crime rates to climb and affected the safety and security that every Manitoban deserves.

This is not just a statement, and you know, it's a reality that many of us have really felt in our neighbourhoods, and it's a reality that has been clearly and repeatedly articulated by Manitobans that I've spoken to, and folks from Waverley.

You know, but we're here to take a bit of a different path. The government is now proud to introduce Bill 30, The Unexplained Wealth Act, and this isn't just another piece of legislation; it's a commitment to dismantle the structures that allow organized crime

and drug trafficking to flourish here in Manitoba. And it's a commitment to our law enforcement, that they will be provided with the resources and the tools they need to challenge sophisticated criminal enterprises head-on.

This bill is designed to pull back the veil of secrecy that has allowed criminals to exploit our economy and harm our communities. It empowers our courts to demand accountability from those who cannot explain their wealth through lawful means, especially when there's evidence of involvements in unlawful activities.

The message this bill sends to the big players in the drug trafficking operations: your time is up.

Our approach to public safety is comprehensive. We have a deeply dedicated and skilled Minister of Justice who I know—through collaboration and hard work—has set us on a very positive path forward. And I'm also thrilled that yesterday, we passed Budget 2024, which sets us on that path with one future, as one people and as one Manitoba.

You know, beyond tackling crime, we are investing in our communities: \$13.7 million additional funding for police agencies; \$4 million for hiring more mental health workers to work alongside law enforcements; and \$8.6 million for services that support justice, crime prevention and victim services.

These are not just numbers; they're lifelines to those dedicated to making Manitoba a safer place.

You know, continuing from this vital investment in our future, it's important to understand the contrast between our approach and that of the past. The former government's strategy or lack thereof placed a Band-Aid over a gaping wound. They failed to see beyond the immediacy of their decisions, neglecting the underlying issues that feed into the cycle of crime.

Under their watch, the resources needed to effectively tackle the roots of organized crime and drug trafficking were significantly diminished, leaving our communities exposed and our hard-working law enforcement officers fighting an uphill battle. And this was illustrated in their freeze of municipal funding over multiple years.

But with our new budget and Bill 30, The Unexplained Wealth Act, we are flipping the script. This legislation is not just a reaction to crime; it's a proactive step towards preventing it. And by requiring those suspected of profiting from unlawful activities

to explain their wealth, we are targeting the financial heart of criminal networks.

This is a significant step from the previous government's cuts, and it's a move towards a more strategic, intelligence-led approach to public safety—one that not only disrupts criminal activities, but also deters future offenses by making crime less profitable.

Moreover, the introduction of this bill sends a clear signal to criminals that Manitoba is not a safe haven for the proceeds of crime. It disrupts the ability of organized crime to launder their illegal gains through our local economy, and actually is another step our government is taking to protect legitimate business here in Manitoba from being undercut by criminal enterprises.

This legislative approach directly addresses the sophisticated nature of modern criminal activity, recognizing that to be effective in combating crime, we must evolve our strategies and tools.

You know, I also want to speak to the endorsements and some important quotes from law enforcement and community leaders, some of which were mentioned by our Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) earlier, but I want to reiterate some of those points.

So, Brandon Police Service Acting Chief Randy Lewis and Deputy Chief Scot Halley, which, you know—they not only support the necessity of The Unexplained Wealth Act, but they also highlight a stark contrast to the approach previously taken by the members opposite and their long, cold freeze of municipal funding.

This approach did not provide adequate resources to our talented law enforcement to fully address the evolving landscape of organized crime, particularly the sophisticated methods used to launder money and finance illegal operations. So the previous government's strategies often overlooked the importance of cutting off the financial oxygen to these criminal enterprises, leaving gaps that allowed these networks to thrive and expand.

You know, our government's informed by experts that were mentioned earlier like Jeffrey Simser, who has worked in this space for decades, recognizes that the battle against organized crime in the modern era requires a more nuanced strategy by implementing legislation that targets the concealment of illicit wealth.

We're not just responding to crime after it happens; we're taking steps to prevent it at its source. This

shift towards prevention and disruption marks a significant departure from past policies, offering a more sustainable solution to the challenge of organized crime in our communities.

Moreover, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs support for The Unexplained Wealth Act and our broader public safety measures brings to light another critical difference between our approach and that of our predecessors. The members opposite, while in government, often worked in isolation, rarely seeking the insight or partnership of Indigenous leaders, communities, in crafting policies that directly affected them.

I often hear from stakeholders that they felt siloed or cut out of important conversations. You know, in contrast, our government values and prioritizes these partnerships, understanding that the fight against crime, particularly drug trafficking, is most effective when it respects and incorporates the wisdom and needs of all communities, especially those that are disproportionately affected.

Grand Chief Cathy Merrick's perspective on cutting off the supply of illegal substances is a poignant example of how our approach is designed to foster healing and recovery, not just enforcement and punishment. This holistic view of public safety, which considers the social and cultural impacts of crime and recognizes the importance of community-based solutions, is something that was sorely lacking in this previous administration's policies.

These endorsements and the collaborative spirit they embody underline the significance of The Unexplained Wealth Act as a cornerstone of a broader strategy to ensure the safety and prosperity of our province. By focusing on transparency, accountability and partnership, we're not only crafting policies that address the complexities of modern criminal activity, but also building a foundation for a more inclusive, just and secure future for our province.

This is a clear indication of our commitment to not only confront the challenges of today, but to anticipate and mitigate the challenges of tomorrow. The Unexplained Wealth Act is a testament to our government's holistic approach to public safety. It acknowledges that the safety of our communities is intrinsically linked to the health of our economy, the efficacy of our justice system and the well-being of our citizens.

This is why, in conjunction with this bill, our government has made unprecedented investments in social

services, mental-health support and law enforcement, ensuring that our approach to public safety is as comprehensive as it is effective.

In moving forward with these initiatives, we are setting a new standard for public safety in Manitoba, one that acknowledges the importance of innovation, collaboration and community engagements. Our approach, again, in stark contrast to the members opposite, is designed to build trust, foster resilience and ensure that every Manitoban from Bridgwater to Brandon, regardless of their backgrounds, can enjoy a safe and secure environment.

* (15:50)

This is the future we envision and are steadfastly working towards, a future where safety and justice are within reach for all. You know, furthermore, this legislation, it embodies our commitment to transparency and accountability, not just for those we seek to hold to account under this new law, but within our own ranks as well. You know, it underscores our belief that trust between the government and the public is foundational to a safe and secure society. By taking a stand against unexplained wealth and the shadow economy, we're reinforcing the principle of fairness and equity that define our province.

I'm going to wrap up here, and I'm looking forward to hearing some words of support for this fantastic piece of legislation from all members of this House. Let's remember, though, that the path to a safer, more secure Manitoba is one we all have to walk together.

Bill 30, The Unexplained Wealth Act alongside our investments in public safety and community well-being represents a significant step forward on this journey. It reflects our shared values, our resilience and our unwavering commitment to each other, and as we continue to move forward, let's do so with the knowledge that our collective efforts will create a legacy of safety, security and prosperity for all Manitobans for generations to come.

Thank you, Honourable Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, and the opportunity to say a few words today on this particular piece of legislation.

I want to begin by thanking my friend from Brandon West. I've thanked him for his service several times when it comes to law enforcement, but I want to offer him again my thanks for the work that he has done outside of this Chamber and now the work that he is

doing currently inside of this Chamber. It is truly a life of service for the member for Brandon West (Mr. Balcaen), and I think all of us who are getting to know him as a new colleague appreciate that opportunity.

Now, members who are new to this Chamber—and I know that there are many members who are relatively new to the Chamber; at some point we'll stop saying that, Madam Speaker—might not remember a time—it wasn't that long ago; it was prior to 2016—where there wasn't a question period when it came to—

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): Excuse me. I'd like us to use the language that the Speaker has addressed the House with multiple times.

Mr. Goertzen: Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Rachelle Schott): Thank you.

Mr. Goertzen: The—it's a part of the challenge of being an old member is you have to learn new ways.

But, Honourable Speaker, I would, you know, like to go back to a time in 2016, prior to that, where there wasn't a question period before bills. And I was one of those who was a strong proponent of it. I thought it would be, you know, a way to engage members who were not in the Executive Council, who were not in Cabinet, in the debate, and that it might actually be a good way to draw out information about bills.

Unfortunately, today, you know, we saw—is a minister who isn't quite aware of what his legislation does and so is struggling to answer the questions about the legislation, so it wasn't as valuable a process as one might have hoped when these new rules were brought in in 2016 because it really does rely upon a minister to understand the legislation with which they're bringing in. And I say that in particular when it comes to the issue of unexplained wealth.

Members might, if they are frequent readers of the Free Press, the Winnipeg Free Press, and I know that many members would be frequent readers of the Free Press, might remember an article in the Winnipeg Free Press in late 2021. And in that article—and it was a very lengthy article, actually; it might've been one of their feature articles on the weekend.

It went through the criminal property forfeiture process in great length, and they interviewed—I was interviewed in the piece of literature, the executive director for The Criminal Property Forfeiture Act was interviewed. I know there were criminologists and others who were interviewed as well. And within that article, Honourable Speaker, the article spoke about

how there were amendments in 2021 in this Legislature to allow for unexplained wealth orders, and it spoke about the process under underexplained wealth orders under the 2021 amendments. Some of the members on the other side and a few on this side will have been here in 2021, would've voted upon those amendments, and, in fact, since that was three years ago, there have been already court action taken on unexplained wealth orders under the 2021 amendments.

And so the questions that I think that we've been having, and we had these questions during the election campaign, as well, when this issue was raised, is, how is this any different?

Already in Manitoba, under The Criminal Property Forfeiture Act, there is the ability, as a result of those 2021 amendments to the act that this House voted on and passed, the ability to have an unexplained wealth order. It allows the Criminal Property Forfeiture director and the mechanism within that area of government to explore an individual's finances to see if there is an explanation for their wealth. And there might be questions regarding civil liberties, and we can have that debate yet further in the House. But, already there exists, madam—or, Honourable Speaker, the ability to do that in Manitoba.

So the questions that we were raising with the relatively new minister is: how is this act any different? And I've learned over my time here that the more boisterous and the louder that a minister gets, the more likely they don't have an answer or they don't know what they're talking about. Sometimes volume and division is a bit of a cover for a lack of knowledge, and I think we saw that today with the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe).

And I don't say that as a criticism, because some of this legislation, when it comes to criminal property forfeiture, is actually relatively technical. And he's no doubt involved in a number of different briefings, and maybe just never really got to this portion of the department yet. So it's not meant as a criticism, except that when a minister so clearly is showing that they don't understand the particular piece of legislation, it's often best just to sort of step out of the debate and wait 'til you get more information, as opposed to trying to replace that with volume.

And it is important, because this is, I would offer, Honourable Speaker, a critical part of the Department of Justice. And it—sometimes, it's an unknown part of the Department of Justice, even though it's been around, I think, since 2003 or 2004, the legislation was first brought in. We weren't the first jurisdiction

in Canada to bring in criminal property forfeiture legislation; we certainly weren't the first in North America. By then it had been used for a number of years.

But it was certainly new to Manitoba, and there were lots of questions about it at the time. One of the questions, of course, comes from those who are rightfully concerned about issues of civil liberty, as an example. Because this isn't a criminal process, this isn't something that's going before a criminal court; it's using a standard of beyond a reasonable doubt; this is a civil process.

Often, the forfeiture or the seizure happens under an order before it's been tested in court. Not that there hasn't been a test on the particular issue that's the result of the seizure, but it's not the same court process that most people would be, sort of, at least broadly familiar with when they're talking about legislation or due process, Honourable Speaker.

So it was new at that time, and it was, you know, uncertain how it was going to be utilized. And what we've seen over the last 20-some years is that it has increased in terms of its usage; it's increased in terms of its scope. And I would suggest that law enforcement would say that it's a valuable tool, something that's become something that they not rely upon, but that they certainly support and see as valuable. And I will get into that a little bit more in my comments.

But I wanted to draw the House's attention, in particular, Honourable Speaker, to the fact that for the last three years, and going back to that article in 2021, there has been the ability for the Criminal Property Forfeiture division in the Department of Justice to explore unexplained wealth. That's not new.

In fact, there was an article that I remember reading from British Columbia, where British Columbia was looking at what Manitoba had done with the 2021 amendments under The Criminal Property Forfeiture Act, and said, we want to do the same. We want to copy what Manitoba has done when it comes to unexplained wealth, as well as with money laundering, and that's a different issue that, if the time allows, I hope to explore in these comments as well.

But, when it comes to the issue, then, of unexplained wealth, so we have already provisions that exist in the Criminal Property Forfeiture division, the ability to act upon unexplained wealth—that's already happened; it's been documented in the newspapers.

* (16:00)

And so we're left with the question, the question that is still unanswered, about how this is an improvement. Now, I think my friend from Brandon West has already articulated well, Honourable Speaker, that none of us have an objection to making this legislation stronger. In fact, I think if you'd look at the history of this legislation—and it's been amended several, several times—that it's almost always been done on a non-partisan basis.

In fact, I think their original bill that came in in 2004 was amended by the then-NDP government. It might have been under the government of Gary Doer; it might have been under the government of Greg Selinger; it might have been under both governments.

And then I believe, you know, obviously, under our government it was expanded at least once in 2021 with the provisions regarding unexplained wealth and other provisions. And, in fact, last year I think we announced that there'd be additional staff to be able to focus on the issue of money laundering.

And money laundering, in particular, has, you know, become something—and I referenced the Cullen Commission in my earlier questions, that the minister obviously had not heard about or didn't know much about. And the Cullen Commission in British Columbia did a significant study into criminal property forfeiture, and it spoke specifically about unexplained wealth but also about money laundering.

Now, you know, there's a lot of correlation within government about how one needs to act on this issue because, Honourable Speaker, you and others might not be aware, but one of the common places that money is laundered are in casinos.

And so the minister who is responsible for liquor and lotteries or the casinos would be, you know, well versed, I would hope, but certainly well vested in terms of an interest into ensuring that there are mechanisms to ensure that money isn't laundered in casinos. And that is certainly something, I believe, that they were seeing in British Columbia and was a particular reason why the Cullen Commission was brought forward.

Now, when it comes to this particular bill, we've yet to hear an explanation from the government about how this is an enhancement. At worst it probably is a do-no-harm sort of piece of legislation. It probably doesn't make the situation any worse when it comes to how our Criminal Property Forfeiture division operates. And one would hope that it makes it better.

I think that all the member for Brandon West (Mr. Balcaen) and I and others were asking is, could the minister provide some sort of explanation of how this is an enhancement over what currently exists? And if that was able to be determined, I think that all of us would say, well, this has always been a piece of legislation that has been relatively non-partisan; brought in by an NDP government in 2004, improved upon, I believe, by maybe the great Gary Doer government, probably the great Selinger government, certainly the Brian Pallister government and now there's changes coming again under the Kinew government.

So that is truly the definition of a non-partisan piece of legislation, where it gets enhanced over time by a variety of different forms of government. But the minister was unable to articulate how this is any different.

Now, one would become concerned if this was just sort of a showpiece of legislation where the government was sort of saying, well, we're not really doing a lot when it comes to the issue of public safety. We've sort of abandoned the bail reform field. We're not pushing for any sort of Criminal Code changes, so we have to look as though we're doing something. So let's bring forward this piece of legislation and trumpet it as something and hopefully the public won't look any closer or won't say, hey, don't we already have that, I remember reading something about that in the paper.

Because often what we see with NDP governments is they don't really want to act on the issue of criminality or law and order or crime, but they want to be seen to be acting. So one would hope that that isn't what this piece of legislation is actually intended to do. But we have seen that with other NDP governments in the past.

And, of course, when it comes to the issue of bail reform and others, we've seen a number of sort of platitudes. One would look at the particular direction, that when it comes to prosecutors that this government has trumpeted, not, of course, remembering or perhaps publicly recognizing, that prosecutors have always had to look at the issue of public safety when it comes to recommendations on bail, as well as whether or not an individual is actually going to show up to court or whether it'll call the system of government into disrepute.

So we are concerned that not just this piece of legislation but other things that the government is doing when it comes to law and order are all just about show. We see the budget's been cut in a number of

different areas when it comes to the Department of Justice—some concerning areas, I would say, Honourable Speaker—and it relates particular to this bill.

When you look at the criminal intelligence portion of the Department of Justice, the Criminal Intelligence Centre was created by the former government to ensure that the different forms of law enforcement were sharing information.

And so one of the things that we have in Manitoba, by being a pretty large province in terms of land mass, but a relatively small province in terms of population, is the ability to share information, and that should particularly be true across different forms of law enforcement. And so whether it's the Brandon Police Service or the Winnipeg Police Service, that sharing of information is critically, critically important.

So the Criminal Intelligence Centre was all about ensuring that there was a mechanism by which that information could be shared. And this was quite complicated, because you need to be ensured that the people who the information are being shared with can do so in a way that it maintains the integrity of evidence and, of course, case investigations. And so we brought forward that Criminal Intelligence Centre.

And I'm concerned that I've seen, in some of the budgetary documents, that it looks like this current NDP government is cutting those services and those financial provisions. So a number of different areas where we've seen financial cuts.

And this is one particular area, when you talk about criminal property forfeiture, that there's, actually, generally been an increase of funding coming into the government. An increase of funding coming into government, sometimes because the tools have been expanded under the former government and under previous governments, and, of course, sometimes because there is just more crimes and so more assets are being seized.

It's been a specific benefit to law enforcement. Now, not everyone will realize—I think my friend from Brandon West touched upon it—that this is actually run by the Criminal Property Forfeiture branch, and for law enforcement to access the funds, they have to put forward submissions or applications and say, this is how we want to use these funds. And it's a bit of a rigorous process by which applications would come in.

I remember my friend, when he was the chief of police for Brandon, would put in a submission and say, I would like to fund a certain sort of thing, whether it was cameras or other sort of issues; I think

it would be good for the people of Brandon, for the safety in Brandon, and I'm putting in an application to the Criminal Property Forfeiture branch to get funding for that. And my friend, because he is particularly diligent and because he knows what would make the community safer, he was often very successful in those applications.

And I had the opportunity, along with former ministers of Justice, I believe, probably Cam Friesen and the current member for Tuxedo (Ms. Stefanson), to be able to attend a variety of different announcements where those funds were dispersed. And the fund is generally intended for law enforcement.

Now, there are some exceptions. Money can flow to Victim Services, as an example. There are standing amounts of funds that flow to Victim Services under the Criminal Property Forfeiture Fund.

Now, I know that Victim Services has been cut under this budget under the current government, so I'm not sure if they're cutting the funding out of this particular part of government from flowing to Victim Services. I'm not sure which of the victims are going to be disadvantaged by the cuts in funding from the government, but certainly, you know, there are concerns when we see less and less funding for those who are victims of crime.

But I remember, and perhaps why I am most concerned and passionate about this issue is I remember well when the now-Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine)—who was then the critic of Justice—the member for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine)—sat on this side of the House and, in speaking to this particular fund, the Criminal Property Forfeiture Fund, specifically said that she didn't believe that any more money should be going to law enforcement.

In fact, I could look it up in Hansard, but I believe her exact quote were—was that the police didn't need an additional penny, they didn't need any more money and that more money shouldn't be coming from this fund to law enforcement.

So when my friend from Brandon West sometimes speaks about the issue of defunding the police, and he rightfully raises a concern, one of the examples that I am sure he is—has raised or would raise in the future are the exact words for the member for St. Johns who specifically said police don't need any more money. So we're watching this fund very, very carefully and what the distribution of it will be.

* (16:10)

Now, the letter of the law—and I know they're—my friend from Fort Garry might want to opine on this issue as well—you know, speaks about The Unexplained Wealth Act, but also the orders. Now the orders, as I mentioned, already have existed since 2021. The amendments came in, in fact, I believe my friend from Fort Garry might have spoken about it at the time, but certainly, he would have voted on the bill. So the orders exist currently in The Criminal Property Forfeiture Act for unexplained wealth orders.

As I mentioned, there was a very long article in the Winnipeg Free Press about that. And one of the concerns that was raised was about civil liberties and I'm not sure if our friend from Fort Garry spoke about that. And it's an interesting perspective and it's an interesting point, because I think all of us as legislators have a responsibility to defend civil liberties.

And in everything, whether it's the Charter of Rights and Freedoms where there is a balance between rights, it's always a competing interest within the charter and I think it's sometimes described as a living tree. It changes, in terms of those balances, and those rights compete against each other.

In an act like this and in a particular part of justice like this, there are competing interests. So the public rightfully demands, and this is one of the reasons why we brought the unexplained wealth orders in in 2021, the public rightfully demands that those who are dealing drugs or are money laundering as a result of dealing drugs or other sort of things, that there's a punishment put upon them.

Now, of course, there are the criminal punishments that can be put upon them when a charge is laid by police and they go through the criminal procedure. But there's also a civil punishment that can be laid as well. And this is about a civil punishment, about ensuring that crime doesn't pay, ensuring that the proceeds of crime aren't there left to benefit the individual. And that often happens before the criminal procedure because sometimes a criminal procedure can take quite a long time, in terms of charges. So often, you know, this has to occur in advance of that, Honourable Speaker.

But in doing so, because it's a civil standard, because it's not beyond a reasonable doubt, because it's on a balance of probabilities, you have to ensure that you're not impeding upon the rights of an individual unduly.

And my friend from Fort Garry, I don't think this is the area of law that he's practised, but I'm sure that he has an interest in this sort of thing as he's a defence

lawyer, and I respect that—I—because the criminal justice system only works well if every part of that system is working well and that includes those who are offering a defence to individuals, which is, you know, obviously an important part of the system.

But if he were to look at this from a civil liberty perspective, I think what he would find is that when an order is given under The Criminal Property Forfeiture Act, that the vast majority of them—I would say up to 70 per cent—are never contested by the individual.

So it's important for legislators to know that if an order is issued against an individual, they have the right to be able to go to the court and say, well, you know, I've had my property seized or an order has been given to me, but I disagree. I disagree with the order and I want to have my day in court, as we would often say.

And the individual can then go and contest it. The vast majority of the orders that are issued under The Criminal Property Forfeiture Act are uncontested. They're never contested by the individual by which the order has been given. They just simply don't—they don't respond, more often than not.

And I think that that's an indication. I mean, one doesn't want to read too many things into a non-response, but because it's been tested over a couple of decades, I think that that's an indication that there is significant due diligence that is being done by the officials within this particular division.

And I do want to say, because I had the opportunity for a couple of years to work as the minister with the officials in this particular part of the government. And I know that they take their job very seriously and I know that they understand the issue of civil liberties and they understand the concerns that are raised and they're not obtuse to them.

And when the legislation has been crafted by the different governments that have been in power over the last 20-some years, it's with that in mind. How do you ensure that, you know, you can meet that public demand to ensure that those who are profiting on crime, whether that's drugs or otherwise, are acted upon, but also to be done in a way that's reasonable and that the due process that all of us would expect, even outside of the criminal process, isn't trampled upon?

So I think that the legislation, as a whole, fulfills that balance, but we always have to be mindful,

Honourable Speaker, because we continue to make changes and advancements to this legislation.

Now, whether or not this particular amendment to the legislation actually is an advancement at all is difficult to say, because the minister couldn't explain it. The minister—and they couldn't explain it during the election either, about how this is different from how the act currently exists, which allows unexplained wealth orders. Whether it's just simply to look like something's being done, or whether it actually does something. But, regardless if it's just for show or whether or not it's going to do something more significant than that, we have to ensure that the balance is always there.

But ultimately, I think, Honourable Speaker, when we look at the importance of this kind of legislation, whether it's here in Manitoba, in other provinces in Canada or across North America, it's very important to remember that this legislation ultimately—when it's done well, when the checks and balances are in place, when the civil liberty concerns are addressed, when we're ensuring that we're hitting that balance—it's important, because it supports victims and it supports law enforcement and, ultimately, then, it supports communities.

Because I didn't mention, Honourable Speaker, but I would be remiss if I didn't, that law enforcement can also make applications not just for the things that people might think law enforcement receives funding for. In fact, I think it was Gord Mackintosh, when he was minister of Justice, he was famous for taking a picture in front of a bit of a robot or something that the Criminal Property Forfeiture Fund bought. I think it maybe even funded an armoured vehicle at one point. I mean, those are the kinds of things people might think all of the funding is going for when it comes to criminal property forfeiture.

But police can actually make an application if they believe that there is a community organization in their community that is doing good work in perhaps reducing crime as a result of that good work.

An Honourable Member: Bear Clan.

Mr. Goertzen: They can put in a submission—like Bear Clan, as my friend from Portage mentions—they can put in an application for that organization. The organization itself generally can't make a direct application, but law enforcement can say, you know, we know the work that Bear Clan or that, you know, a

particular youth organization is doing is really important and it is preventing crime in our community, so we will put in an application for them.

So that's part of why this particular fund is very, very important for communities. It is important for community organizations and, of course, as an extension, it's important for law enforcement.

So, I know my time is drawing short. I could draw—I could speak longer on this particular issue, but I do want to conclude by advocating in particular for the Criminal Property Forfeiture branch.

I've had the opportunity, long before I was in government, I mean, as a—in opposition previously, and then in Cabinet generally, and then, particularly as the minister of Justice, I've seen the work that they do. It's very, very important work. They ultimately are helping reduce crime in the community. They ultimately are sending the message that crime doesn't pay. They are helping community organizations, and they are helping police.

Now, we've seen this government cut a number of different things in the last few weeks from the budget: everything from schools to parks, and the list goes on and on in terms of the cuts that they have brought forward. And I worry about what the future is for this particular fund, because I recall clearly—it rings in my ear like a clarion bell—the member for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine) talking about how police should not get any more money under this fund; they should not be able to draw any more funds from The Criminal Property Forfeiture Act.

And I would hope that that was sort of a fleeting moment in time. Sometimes, members—because we speak a lot in the House—sometimes they just say things that they don't mean; they've had a bad day, whatever the issue is. And I hope that my friend for St. Johns has had the opportunity to reflect upon that and, now that she holds a significant position within the Cabinet, will change that particular view and will advocate for the importance of this fund, the importance that it is for law enforcement and others in the community.

Because I do know that, sometimes, when you change positions in this House and you get into government, you can view things a little bit differently, because you can see that things maybe aren't quite as black and white as you might have thought at a particular time when you were in opposition. So I imagine that some of the members are feeling some of those experiences on a day-to-day basis.

And I hope that, for the member for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine), this is one of those moments where she goes, you know what, I probably went a little too far and I now see the value of this fund, and I hope that it continues to go to law enforcement.

* (16:20)

On this bill, we look forward to hearing a clear explanation from the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe). I know he's—he will probably take the time when the session is over to have a briefing now with his department to try to give a clearer explanation in terms of how this actually improves the system that currently exists.

Already in Manitoba, you can have an unexplained wealth order. So all he needs to do is, in a non-partisan way, explain to the House why this is better. I don't presume to suggest that it's any worse than the system that exists now. But he has to explain why it is actually an improvement, why it's an enhancement.

And then, like all pieces of legislation that are good for Manitobans generally and good for the province generally, it'll find speedy passage through the House.

So we're not asking him to do anything extraordinary; we're just asking him to do his job. Nothing more, nothing less. And I look forward to the Minister of Justice at some point, presumably at committee, being able to put forward a coherent explanation about why this bill is different than amendments that were brought forward and passed in this House in 2021.

Thank you very much, Honourable Deputy Speaker.

MLA Billie Cross (Seine River): I'm proud to rise today to speak in support of this bill. As a mother-in-law to a Winnipeg police constable, I think it's important that we bring legislation that'll tackle organized crime and crack down on drug trafficking in Manitoba.

The Speaker in the Chair

We know under the previous PC government, they allowed crime to rise due to their cuts and underfunding of programs. Manitobans can take comfort in knowing that your NDP government is giving law enforcement more tools to deal with sophisticated criminal enterprises through The Unexplained Wealth Act.

This bill allows us to remain tough on the causes of crime by zeroing in on the big players in the drug trafficking operations. The purpose of this bill is to

give the court more power to require individuals to explain how they acquire property or an interest in property if it appears that their known sources of income and assets are inadequate. It gives the courts the ability to look more closely at individuals to see their ties to unlawful activity.

Our NDP government is working to make our communities safer. In Budget 2024, we made investments that support law enforcement, as well as to help those who are looking to make a difference in their lives and in their communities.

And NDP government is increasing funding for police agencies by \$13.7 million, better supporting those who serve and protect us.

We're investing \$4 million to hire 25 more mental health-care workers to work alongside law enforcement. In speaking with my son-in-law, I know how important this commitment is. He spends more time working with individuals and supporting individuals who are having a mental health crisis, and so to have extra supports to work alongside our officers might alleviate some of the stress put on them to try and deal with these difficult situations.

We're investing \$8.6 million for services and programs that support justice, crime prevention and response, victim services and to provide resources to families navigating the justice system.

And this next thing that we're investing in is super important, because it demonstrates our commitment to reconciliation. We're funding the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program in direct response to calls to justice—call to justice 5.4, to be exact—which is to transform Indigenous policing into an exercise in self-governance and self-determination, and ensure that funding is equitable with other non-Indigenous police services in Canada.

As the member representing Seine River, my community of St. Norbert is extremely close to a landfill site. So I know how important it is that our NDP government remains committed to searching the Prairie Green Landfill for the women who were murdered and laid to rest there in such a disrespectful way.

The members across failed these women and the Indigenous community time and time again by refusing to meet with families or to even search for their bodies. Residents of Manitoba can rest assured that our NDP 'government' will never leave anyone behind.

Our budget includes \$20 million to search for these women, and we'll work with Indigenous leadership and law enforcement to do so. We're providing \$500,000 to support the families of victims during the trial.

We're working on bail reform. Bill 30 is just one step in the processes that we're taking to increase and improve our justice system. Bail reform is an important thing that we need to work on. I know, in talking with my son-in-law, there are some days where he arrests someone, and the very next day they're out and he has to arrest them again.

And one of the biggest problems that we face in that—sorry, scenario is the lack of supports to individuals who are released on bail. They don't have mental health or substance abuse supports to help them actually meet their bail conditions.

Our plan is also making bail policy stronger by including the consideration of the impact of bail on victims and the community. We're expanding legislation to protect children, women and other vulnerable people by amending The Intimate Image Protection Act, including AI-generated images.

Our work won't stop there. Bill 30, along with all of our other commitments, will help bring community members together, will bring law enforcement and other agencies to the table and, in fact, we're going to do this for a public safety summit, where we can discuss and work together to address crime and the root causes of crime.

Bill 30 is an important step we are taking. We're working with law enforcement to make our communities safer for Manitoba families. The Department of Justice worked with Jeffrey Simser, one of Canada's leading experts in asset forfeiture and money laundering. He also worked as a lawyer and legal director with the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General for over 30 years. With his expert advice, we identified that organized crime in Manitoba benefits from the secrecy of beneficial ownership behind member-numbered companies.

Bill 30 is a strong step that our government is taking to improve our justice system.

Thank you so much.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Thank you, thank you, thank you. Portage.

Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I'm honoured today to be standing up and talking about Bill 30, The Unexplained Wealth Act and property forfeiture act. It affects my constituency, it affects

Manitobans, it affects Canadians and it affects people all over the world.

And I think we can—we need to talk this out. And the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe)—*[interjection]*—the minister of—I'm sorry, I'm being heckled from the other side of the floor when we want to talk about an important thing, about people that are laundering money and things like that. And I think that it's important that we should be talking about that.

One of the things that was—one of the things that we didn't get a chance to get to because the minister wasn't quite getting the questions or not answering the questions. So, you know, again, I just want to make sure that everybody here has a chance to know the questions that were going to be asked by this side of the government on this bill that I am so proud to say that we introduced a number of years ago and brought so many good things to the province of Manitoba with it.

* (16:30)

You know, one of the things that we talked about was, you know, we—one of the questions we wanted to ask was: Can the minister explain who was consulted in the development of the bill? And you know, hopefully, there's been a number of people that were consulted in this.

I look at the member from Brandon West, a former police chief, who, you know, has much experience. Again, were the chiefs of police from Morden, were the RCMP, were they talked to at all. You know, from Portage la Prairie, city of Winnipeg, you know, the chiefs there—Selkirk, Manitoba. Whoever, you know, we—were there—hopefully they did that.

The next question that was on there, too, was, can the minister give examples of other jurisdictions that have implemented unexplained wealth orders. And again, it would've been nice to hear where those situations were, how much time they spent on that and who was consulted on that. And my question that I kept asking was: Will there be additional staff needed in the Criminal Property Forfeiture branch? And it took four times, I think it was, but it finally got answered; I believe he said that—might be, or something like that. But I'm not quite sure on that.

Will the Criminal Property Forfeiture branch budget change to enhance capacity? I know that we had people in place on this, and again, we—just on this side of the House—want to get clear answers to this. This is an important bill that we're looking at here. This is important to many people all over the world, and we can

be a great example here in Manitoba. We just need to hear the answers.

What measures were in place to protect innocent individuals from being unjustly investigated? That's what we want to know. You know, where do our older relatives go in this position here? When do we look at how they're going to be protected in a situation like that?

What mechanisms will be in place to protect Manitobans who legally engage with cryptocurrency; is cryptocurrency included in other jurisdictions and legislation? You know, I—again, that was something that was really important for me to hear the answer to, because I don't understand a lot about cryptocurrency, but I do know that it is used in a lot of organized crime organizations. And I would hope that we would've heard about that.

How will we—how will this amendment change what was done under the previous government? When I look at some of the things, like the Bear Clan being, you know, being financed by this, by other things, again, I just wanted to hear more so we can let Manitobans know what's going on with that.

So that was just a couple of the things that, you know, I was looking to. And you know, when it talks about crime, anything that we can do to take criminals off the street and make sure that our communities are safe, make sure that those people don't have the ability to move further and make us look foolish.

But the other thing, too, and Minister Cross, for me, spoke about this too, is the mental health issues that we deal with. I think, really, one of the things that I'm hoping that this government will do if this bill is passed is look at the roots of crime. Why are people looking to launder money? Why are people looking to gain wealth on the back of someone else? Has there been any work done on this regarding telephone scamming, and the kind of money that is being laundered all over the world when it comes to telephone scamming out there? Where's that going to happen?

When I look at places like Swan Lake—or, Swan River, you know, they're—

An Honourable Member: And Swan Lake, too.

MLA Bereza: And Swan Lake. They're being inundated with criminals now trying to take advantage of our aged population that we're seeing there. People like my grandparents, that were—that have been passed for a number of years. But, again, we want to make sure that that's taken care of.

They're taking—you know, when we look at crime and this Unexplained Wealth Act, people out there are taking advantage, criminal organizations are taking advantage of those that are less fortunate, that may not, you know, that may think that somebody is taking care of them, that somebody is looking after them, that somebody is going to take care of the situation that they're in. In reality, they're taking advantage of those people. They're taking advantage of kids on the street with wads of money; money that they've gained from places where it's been done by crime.

You know, another issue that we look at when we talk about, you know, this Bill 30, The Unexplained Wealth Act, is human trafficking. Human trafficking is becoming more and more of an issue that we see all the time. You know, we only have to look at our US border and down around the Emerson area, where people are paying to come to this great country of ours, but they're being left in the cold and freezing to death and not having a chance to come to this great company—country of ours.

But again, I have to look at—and, again, when I was asked to speak on this bill, any time that I can speak on a bill where somebody like the member from Brandon West, who I believe has so much to give to us back in a situation like this. You know, in a city of Brandon here that we talk about the Wheat City, the place that is so important, our second largest city in Manitoba, did we consult with the right people on this bill here? Did we look at things that are going on in Brandon? I know I've had the opportunity to talk to the member from Brandon West about some of the issues that are going on there, and, again, they're no different than the issues that are going on in Portage la Prairie. Those people don't have an opportunity and are being taken advantage of, and are being advantaged of that.

The RCMP officers: I had the opportunity again to talk to an inspector that used to be in the city of Portage la Prairie, Jean-Marc Nadeau, you know, and he said crime like this that we're dealing with—Jean-Marc Nadeau, three—that we're dealing with, in situations like this, where we're suffering, the people are suffering because of things like—of the money that is taken here.

Organized crime, you know, when we talk about motorcycle gangs, when we talk about, you know, looking at—one of the things that I think we need to look at very clearly here, too, is sports betting. You know, you see that the sports betting that is going on there, and it's creating large amounts of money out

there, and people are preying, they're preying every day, on those people that have the most to lose out there, and that's our most vulnerable, at times, our seniors. Where are we in here that we're taking care of our seniors when it comes to this? You know, a lot of seniors are at home; they don't have a lot of people to talk to. And, again, when we talk about, you know, their—the root of this crime, how can we get the people that are causing these crimes, you know, how can we rehabilitate them so that they're out there looking after some of these people and learning why these seniors or younger people out there or people that are disadvantaged out there, why they are being victims under this Unexplained Wealth Act?

I want to talk a little bit about, you know, some things regarding this too, that I saw some things in here that concern me a little bit. And I want to make sure that I do get this correct when I'm looking at this. So, some of the presumption here is, you know, cash is proceeds of an unlawful activity if it is mailed or shipped with no information or false information about the sender; a building is an instrument of an unlawful activity if a controlled substance is found in the building in a quantity or in a circumstance consistent with trafficking of the substance.

* (16:40)

One of the questions that I do have here—and I'm trying to understand this—is the maximum value of property that can be subject of administrative forfeiture proceedings in—is increased from \$75,000 to \$125,000. I think we need to build that up. When we think of it here, \$75,000—you can't even buy much of a home for \$75,000, and these people are living in millions and millions of dollars of homes. These people are operating corporations that are monstrous out there, and we're only talking about maximum value of property being increased from seventy-five to \$125,000.

I don't think I can buy a new pickup truck that's loaded up today for \$125,000. So, again, why wouldn't we continue to look at increasing the value of this?

Another one that I see here that I need to question on this is the maximum length of interim orders under the act is extended from 30 to 60 days. Let's keep these criminals where they should be, and that's behind bars for taking advantage of the good people of Manitoba, the good people of Canada, and all over the world. Let's not let this be a haven for those criminals to operate in our great province here.

You know, the background on this is the Criminal Property Forfeiture Unit has been active in Manitoba

for a number of years. The group has seized 22—under this government the group has seized \$22.3 million in assets and dispersed \$16 million in grants.

Under the former PC government—our government, who introduced this—included distributing dollars to various initiatives, including supporting Bear Clan patrols, combatting cybercrime. And let's talk about cybercrime. It's the kids. We're letting the kids be taken advantage of under this act, and it's people that are older that are taking advantage of this.

There's kids that are sitting there today, that are looking at their computer screen, that are being taken advantage of, that are being taken advantage of the money, that are maybe giving their parents' credit cards out over the Internet.

Again, we must make sure that we're looking after them to make sure that we're protecting them. This is about protecting all Manitobans.

So, again, did I say under the former PC government this included distributing dollars to various initiatives, including supporting the Bear Clan patrols, combatting cybercrime, reducing catalytic converter theft.

Again, we're going to—you know what, one of the things that I think we should be proud of in Manitoba here, we're going to protect these criminals from themselves. Think about crawling underneath a car with a hot exhaust system and cutting that catalytic converter out. We're saving these people. We're saving the health-care system in this province by Bill 30 here, because, again, we're going to keep them out of the hospitals. We're going to keep them out of the burn unit so that they're not being troubled that way by doing that.

In 2022, this PC government made changes that included preliminary preservation orders and preliminary disclosure orders. The former could prevent a person from disposing of their property before a statement of claim is filed against them in court. Because, again, that's another opportunity that if we don't look after this and don't get this right, and maybe, you know, again, I think we're all in support here of legislation that takes care of our people, but let's make sure that we get it right. Let's make sure that we get these amendments that we're looking at putting in place.

You know, when we talk about \$125,000 as being a maximum to look at, let's look at that realistically. What are we doing with \$125,000? It's just ludicrous to be looking at something as low as that.

The PC government made legislative changes to the legislation to strengthen the ability of the Criminal Property Forfeiture Unit to quickly act on securing money that we believe to be used for money laundering; again, with using banking e-transfers.

Again, e-transfers for a guy like me, I wouldn't make a very good criminal because I don't even understand how to e-transfer someone. But, again, when we're talking about the Internet, we can, you know, we can move money from place to place. We don't just move it by person to person; we can move it from place to place.

So let's make sure that teeth are in this legislation and I think we can thank this Conservative government for the teeth that we put behind this.

Cross-jurisdictional: In 2023, BC brought amendments to their Civil Forfeiture Act to allow the provinces to pursue ill-gotten gains more efficiently and compel people to explain how they acquired that wealth when there's suspicions about criminal activity through unexplained wealth orders and redirect them to community safety and crime prevention initiatives. I don't think we can say enough about the crime prevention initiatives that we could be looking at through this.

In December 2023, the BC government filed their first application to secure an unexplained wealth order to compel individuals to explain how they purchased a property on Salt Spring Island in 2017. Again, let's go back to the \$125,000. Salt Spring Island is a beautiful place. I've had the opportunity to spend a few days there, but I don't think you could buy a dock in Salt Spring Island for \$125,000.

So let's make sure that when we are putting this together that we make sure that we're taking criminals off the street. We're not just taking them off the street; \$125,000 to some of these organizations? It would be a drop in the bucket.

Let's not drop the ball on this legislation. Let's make sure that it's got the teeth in it and that we're making sure that Manitobans can feel safe by the great work that we're doing there. *[interjection]* Crime doesn't pay, that's right. And we got to make sure that, again, if we're letting people get away with—oh, I lost \$125,000. To all of us, that's a huge amount of money. To these criminals, to these organized criminals? To these people that are out there that are providing these kids with drugs, providing these kids—giving them what they think is an opportunity out there, let's put them in jail.

Let's make sure that they don't have an opportunity to operate in this great province of Manitoba, in this great country of Canada. Let's make sure that we're shutting out criminals that are coming into this province and thinking that they can get away with that. It is not possible for them to get away with that. We want to make sure of that.

The former PC government took steps to combat money laundering and was among the leaders in the country, taking action against organized crime. Excuse me. In 2021, the PC government passed legislative changes that strengthen the ability for the Criminal Property Forfeiture Unit to quickly act on securing money that investigators believed to be illegally acquired and could be subject to money laundering.

When I look at the opportunities that we deal with in Manitoba here, I see things like the Winnipeg police helicopter that's flying around there. Isn't that a great opportunity that we should be looking at? It is—it—that—a great opportunity for us to be doing to making sure that we're doing that; that we're making sure that we're funding these opportunities that are at our disposal to make sure that we're taking these people off the street.

In 2022, the PCs expanded staffing capacity within the Criminal Property Forfeiture Unit to combat money laundering. They hired two investigators and a financial analyst to target the organized crime. And, again, it was the reasoning for my questioning when I asked the minister across: Will there be additional staff needed in the Criminal Property Forfeiture branch?

* (16:50)

Again, when we can see real results—I think we're all in favour of seeing real results out there—and, when we can see real results happening from people that are taking advantage of other people within our province, I think we need to step up and make sure that we're looking after that.

You know, when we had the opportunity—you know, again, when I look at—when we look at the opportunity under The Unexplained Wealth Act, you know, I look at what's going on with the cost of food and things like that. Is there a way that we can subsidize with the amount of money that we will bring in under Bill 30, The Unexplained Wealth Act, are we going to be able to bring in more money out there, so that we can maybe help people feed more people out there? Is there an opportunity out there to hire more mental-health workers out there with that going on in there?

The—Bill 30, what it does is it—you know, there's some questions that are answered here, but it's leaving a number of questions that are unanswered.

Give law enforcement and Criminal Property Forfeiture office and regulatory enforcement agencies stronger tools to build cases against assets used in organized crime, drug trafficking and money laundering. When it comes to drug trafficking, we've got to do whatever we can, through whatever means we can, to make sure that we're getting drug traffickers off the street, to make sure that they don't come back and to make it harder for them to have money.

There's nothing worse than seeing kids out there that think it's okay to drive a fancy sports car that—but, what they don't understand, and where we have to help them out, is crime doesn't pay. And, you know, again, by looking at the easy way out, there. You know, under The Unexplained Wealth Act, you know, it gives the opportunity for children to learn out there.

Again, the Bear Clan and combatting cybercrime—the cybercrime, you know, I don't understand these bots and, you know, they talk about bots and AI and, again, I'm from the agriculture business, and AI means something completely different, and I was lost, somewhat, with that.

But, again, when we look at, you know, cybercrime out there, it can be people operating from anywhere in the world. But they need to know, Manitoba's not a place you want to come to do business in. Criminals shouldn't be welcome here in Manitoba.

There's a couple other things I want to talk about. I know that my time is getting short.

An Honourable Member: Leave.

MLA Bereza: But—I'm sorry, I thought you said leave—meant leave, so.

The—you know, it is so easy when we think about the organized criminals that are out there, you know, they operate from many different places.

You know, to think about these criminals operating to get money out of some of our grandparents out there, you know, some of our most vulnerable people, the seniors that are out there that are listening to us today. You know, to say to them that, you know, your child has been in an accident and, you know, under The Unexplained Wealth Act, these people are taking money from grandparents out there, you know, sometimes five, eight, ten thousand dollars at a time.

We need to make sure that these people don't have a chance to get back on the streets. We have to educate—again, I think with some of the money that is obtained through this, does it give, thus, the opportunity to be able to speak to our seniors and let them know to be careful under these scams that are out there, you know, the telephone scams, things like that, where they don't have an opportunity.

You know, the—my apologies. Again, we have to look at, you know, where we're going and where we want to be when it comes to Unexplained Wealth Act. And any time that we can take criminals off the street, we can take money that is gotten from illegal activities such as—I look at the drugs that are on the street right now, and look at some of those, you know, they, I don't even know what it is, but they talk about some of these drugs on the street right now that are 500 times more addictive than a cigarette.

And you know, I was a smoker, and if I was given the opportunity to have a cigarette that had 500 times the—you know, then I would be hooked on some of these things. And again, that's all it takes for this illegal activity to continue is to get these kids, these parents, these adults, these grandparents, we just have to—they're vulnerable out there.

If I hear that somebody calls me and says that one of my kids has been in an accident, but they don't want anybody to know about it, but we could use eight or 10 or 15 thousand dollars, you know, to make sure this is kept quiet because, you know, one of the—you know, the first thing we think about is how can we help our kids. And I think it's up to us, as leaders, to make sure that we're making sure that those people are not on the street.

I think the work that has been done by this previous PC government has laid the framework and has done a great job. It's done a great job for organizations like COPP in Portage la Prairie, and it's kept people like Bud and Rose Carriere from Portage la Prairie, who have been working at it for 40-some years of doing that job. Again, they've done work—who knows how much money that the work that they have done has taken off the streets when it comes to The Unexplained Wealth Act. I can't even imagine.

When we think about it at those times when we, you know, let's take the time; let's learn. I think we need to learn ourselves more about these different scams. And I think it's up to us, and again, we can help with the kids that are in school. We can help at the personal-care homes. We can help throughout there to

make sure that we are giving everybody the opportunity to know. They don't want to be scammed out there.

The Unexplained Wealth Act, you know, in the past, has brought many dollars back into the province but we need to continue and keep doing more.

I know that my time is coming to an end, and again, I want to thank the member from Brandon West. I want to thank my mentor that sits in front of me, as well, also for giving me the opportunity to speak here; to the Justice Minister across the way, thank you for the answers and some non-answers. But again, thank you to everyone in this room for giving me the opportunity to be the MLA for Portage la Prairie and representing my constituency.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): I appreciate the opportunity to share just a few words on this, a piece of

legislation. And I understand that members across the way are heckling, and I suspect that's—that is their right to do so, but it is important in this Chamber that all members be given the opportunity to speak on legislation, and that is what is happening today.

And so, with regard to Bill 30, The Unexplained Wealth Act, I think it, there are several ramifications that this bill has, in particular, with regard to the Criminal Property Forfeiture program, or, fund, which I've always enjoyed in years past, getting together with the minister of Justice and to celebrate the recipients—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The—when this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 29 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 o'clock, the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 10, 2024

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