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DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
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(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 27, 2021

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Doyle Pivniuk): Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports? Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Jhannelle Francis Thesis Competition Winner

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate): The University of Manitoba's faculty of graduate studies encourages the development of communication skills with their annual Three Minute Thesis competition, or 3MT. Each year this event highlights the graduate students' work, promotes U of M research and connects with the community.

Fort Richmond resident Jhannelle Francis is a master of science candidate in microbiology at the U of M, and she has just completed her first year. She was a finalist in this year's 3MT competition, which is no surprise considering her impressive work on her presentation on the identification of human enteric viruses present in urban water bodies of Manitoba.

Ms. Francis's research has the potential to help make Manitoba's water treatment practices more robust and effective, including water sources for many First Nations communities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't have the full three minutes to share all of Ms. Francis's fascinating presentation, but I'll do my best to share the highlights.

The premise of the research seeks to identify the most predominant viromes present in treated effluents and aquatic environments where treated wastewater flows. From her thesis statement, Ms. Francis notes that, currently, raw sewage is treated at wastewater plants and then discharged as pure effluents into the Red and Assiniboine rivers.

The traditional treatment methods focus on finding and removing bacteria in fecal manner—matter, but do not look for other types of water-borne pathogens like viruses. She hypothesizes that viruses may

be better indicators for aquatic health compared to current testing standards for bacteria.

The concerns related to Lake Winnipeg due to pollution has created a demand for aquatic reform, and Ms. Francis is seeking to address this with her research. Her hope is that the data results will encourage an enhanced approach to wastewater treatment policies that screen and remove human enteric viruses, thus improving the quality of effluents discharged into rivers.

I ask my colleagues in the Chamber today to join me in congratulating Jhannelle Francis on her impressive achievements—

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

An Honourable Member: Leave.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leave? Is there leave to have the minister continue her statement? *[Agreed]*

The honourable member for—the honourable Minister for Climate and Conservation.

Mrs. Guillemard: I ask my colleagues today in the Chamber to join me in congratulating Jhannelle Francis on her impressive achievements.

Thank you.

Government Handling of Pandemic

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Yesterday, we had learned a Manitoba ICU patient with COVID-19 died in transport on the way to Ontario.

Krystal Mousseau, 30 years old, from Ebb and Flow First Nation—mom, sister, daughter, friend—was stable before the decision was made to transfer her to Ontario. Her family didn't want her moved.

Tragically, despite repeatedly sounding the alarm for months, alongside front-line health-care professionals, that the system would not be able to handle the third wave if significant investments were not immediately made in critical care, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his Health ministers did not listen, nor did they act.

The PCs cut 18 ICU beds, left 13 nursing positions vacant, cut ICU nurses and have continuously misrepresented their ability to increase ICU capacity.

The PCs' decisions have resulted in almost 30 extremely vulnerable ICU Manitobans transferred out of province away from their homes and families. I can only imagine how scared and worried their families must be.

The Premier (Mr. Pallister) has doubled down on blaming ICU patients for their critical condition—Manitobans in medically induced comas who cannot defend themselves. Who does that, Deputy Speaker? What kind of leader does that? And what kind of people who are elected to care and protect Manitobans just sit by while their leader devastates its people?

The PCs' attempt to save money and their lack of concern and compassion is costing Manitobans their very lives.

The Premier must stand up in this House today, apologize to Manitobans for being such an utter failure, and then the Premier should do all of us a favour and resign immediately.

Miigwech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Lagimodière.

The honourable member for Lagimodière, can you unmute. *[interjection]*

Order. *[interjection]*

I just wanted—want remind the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) and Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) to, you know, keep it civil, here. Decorum is important, especially at these times where it's very serious out there.

The honourable member for Lagimodière, on a private member's statement.

Winnipeg Jets

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): I rise today to speak about something that is on the minds of many Manitobans lately; more specifically, something very positive that we can all rally around. It's a story of facing a great adversary, one that ends in triumph with most expected the opposite.

I'm, of course, talking about the recent playoff sweep with the Edmonton Oilers in a four-game straight by the Winnipeg Jets.

After mildly recuperating from a seven-game losing streak near the end of the season, with a few of those games being lost at the hands of the Oilers, many thought the Jets had pretty much had it for the season. Yet again, we predicted them meeting up with

a formidable foe in the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs and leaving them quickly cast off like they were last season.

The sheer thought of them having to play the Edmonton Oilers brought back those childhood memories where the Jets could never get past the Gretzky Oilers in the playoffs.

Due to the 'restructuring' of the NHL divisions over the years, however, with the addition of so many US teams—mainly in the Sunbelt—as well as those cold years of not having the Jets here, the Edmonton-Winnipeg rivalry drifted into the distant past.

Then came the temporary pandemic restructuring of the divisions in the 2020-2021 NHL season, which gave all Canadian teams their own Scotia North Division. It almost felt like an Original-Six-style set-up with an amazing opportunity to rekindle old 'rivalries' and forge new ones: Leafs-Habs, Jets-Oilers and, more recently, Leafs-Jets. And I'll get back to that one momentarily.

Even though there have been no *[inaudible]* present at the games, the hockey gameplay itself has been some of the best I've ever seen. When the playoff series between Winnipeg and Edmonton started, I almost shuddered to think of the outcome, and then, one hard fast period after another led to the consecutive exciting Jets victories, culminating with a Jets franchise record-setting three overtime playoff period victory and the first four-game Jets playoff sweep of another team, and history had been made.

Now, for what will probably be a second playoff round that showcase the previously mentioned Jets-Leafs rivalry, what will be the outcome? I'm betting another Jets team win, because—like their home, Manitoba—that kind of resiliency cannot be beat.

Go Jets go.

Ernesto Nicolas Ofiaza Jr.

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): Today, I'm honoured to recognize Ernesto Nicolas Ofiaza Jr. and his many contributions to our community. Ernesto is a leader throughout his role as a neighbourhood settlement worker and an active community member in The Maples and across Manitoba.

Born in the Philippines, Ernesto and his family arrived in Winnipeg on July 1st, 2009. Ernesto was formerly a mathematics and development theatre teacher, as well as a secretary of city council for his town before migrating to Canada.

Some of Ernesto's work include engaging with other adults by running English conversation classes, organizing dances for wellness and mental health, as well as yoga classes for the community. He has mentored youth in employment, theatre, music and art.

Ernesto has worked on fundraisers to support typhoon- and earthquake-impacted communities in the Philippines. He has supported the development of student scholarship programs and organized multi-cultural activities such as the Rhythms for Peace and reconciliation, Filipino Folk Music Festival and Kultura Filipino Canadian.

Ernesto has also held a leadership role within the Filipino Music & Arts Association of Canada, Inc., Seven Oaks Education Foundation, the Manitoba Association of Filipino Teachers Inc., among many other groups.

Ernesto truly exemplifies what it means to be an engaged community member.

I ask all members here today to join me in thanking Ernesto for his many contributions to The Maples community and all of Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

* (13:40)

Filipino Canadian Heritage

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'm excited to speak virtually here to talk about Filipino heritage and how it has become a part of who we are today.

But first I want to give a shout-out to my colleague and ate [*older sister or friend*] from Notre Dame for her private member's resolution about the quincentennial, a celebration of Christianity in the Philippines for 500 years, and to my kuya [*older brother or friend*] from Waverley for his recent bill for claiming the month of June as Filipino Heritage Month.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, back in 2018 our national government officially declared June as Filipino Heritage Month, and I am proud of our province, as we followed suit just a few months later.

Now, the Filipino community right here in Manitoba has been such a blessing to my family, and that is why my father and I do everything we can to promote and celebrate Filipino-Canadian heritage.

So, back in June of 2019, I co-hosted a full-day event filled with performances, historical presentations, exhibits, a basketball tournament, great food

and a formal recognition of people of Filipino heritage living here in Manitoba who have contributed to our province.

But now, as everyone knows, the coronavirus has impacted how we can celebrate in our communities, but it is still important to, in particular in the month of June. So, this year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with all of our new tech-savvy skills, we have decided to have a virtual event that will include two surprise talk-show hosts and signing on live from remote locations as we highlight our community's Filipino heritage.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to encourage people, if they have time, to tune in onto Facebook Live on June 1st at 10 a.m. and 8 p.m. for some fun Filipino-Canadian celebrations.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and mabuhay [*live*].

Deputy Speaker's Statement

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I have a statement for the House.

Two of our pages are serving their last day in the Chamber today, and I want to share some comments with the House.

The first comments are from Trinity Sperling:

I would like—first want to thank Dave, Ray, Cam, the pages, the clerks, the Chamber Branch staff and the MLAs. They all—they have all helped make this experience a wonderful as it has been despite the unique challenges the pandemic has brought.

This year has gone by amazing fast, and I wish it did not have to end. Working in the Legislature has heightened my interest in the pursuit to work with political field and expanded my world view immensely.

I would like to—I—when I graduate next year, I hope to attend university and study health, science and psychology.

A psychology course would've been handy when you started working here.

The following are comments from Justin Harms:

My experiences as a page has been given a great opportunity to listen and learn from the important policy makers in Manitoba during this particular challenging time. It has truly been an honour to work inside this historical Legislative Building, gaining an in-depth understanding of our political system from the people who represent the residents of Manitoba.

I learned many invaluable lessons, including the importance of hearing both sides of a debate while working together to create solutions. This June, I am graduating from St. John's-Ravenscourt School, which—I—with plans to attend the Ivey school of business at the university of western Ontario in the fall. In the future, I will use what I have learned as a page in a career in business, law and perhaps, one day, as a politician.

I would like to thank everyone who helped me in my position: the clerks, the caucus staff, fellow pages, as well as Ray, Cam and Dave. I will forever cherish my amazing experience as a page.

And on behalf of the legislative of Manitoba, our colleagues and all the staff—the legislative staff; everybody works here—I wish you both all the best in your endeavours and thank you for serving us, and you guys did a great job of doing the vote, and that's amazing.

Give them—let's give them a hand.

Time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Transfer of ICU Patients Out of Province Family Consent Before Transport

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Krystal Mousseau—daughter, sister, mother—passed away, fighting for her life against COVID-19. Family of Krystal is mourning after a failed attempt to airlift her to Ontario this past weekend. Of course, I believe, on behalf of everyone in the Legislature, we send our condolences to the family.

I also want to bring a question to this House from them. I had an opportunity to speak with the family yesterday, and they want to know why they weren't asked for permission prior to Krystal being transported.

So, on behalf of them, I want to know why they were not asked for consent to transport, and whether, moving forward, the families of patients in ICU who are being transported out of Manitoba will be asked for their permission prior to them being moved?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Our condolences are obviously small consolation when someone loses a family member. We have eight more deaths today because of COVID. It's a vicious thing, and in particular for the Mousseau family from the fine community Ebb and Flow. There are many friends and many family there who are going to miss this woman.

The tragedy that is happening in our province is one that has happened around the world. It doesn't make it any easier for any family that loses a loved one to know that.

The member asks a good question, and I'll get to the answer and get back to him with that immediately and we'll find out what the process is. I can't honestly answer him right now because I don't know what the process is that is followed, but I think it's an important question to have answered for the family and for everyone else who is dealing not only with COVID, but with many other afflictions in our ICUs as we speak.

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

Coverage for Travel Expenses for Families

Mr. Kinew: Well, we can only imagine how difficult it is to have a loved one who is fighting for their life in an intensive-care unit and you can't go see them. And imagine adding to that the knowledge that that loved one is very, very far away from home in another province.

Right now, at least at the latest report, 28 critically ill Manitobans have been transferred to Ontario to receive the care that they need. That's 28 families that are further away from their loved ones, further away from a designated caregiver than they otherwise might be.

Had the opportunity to speak to a few of these families by now, and they want to be able to be closer to their loved one as they fight for their lives.

Is the Premier willing to cover the costs for family members to go and be closer to their loved ones throughout the duration of their recovery?

Mr. Pallister: The challenge in our ICUs at the present time is not going to go away in short order, either. And it's a fair question. We'll look into it as well.

The issues around the ICU demand, in spite of the doubling of the capacity just in the last year and a bit, remain. The number of hospitalizations are high and we know that that number of ICU need tracks the number of people who are in hospitals.

And so there will be a period of a few weeks yet despite—and I can give—if the member is interested, I can give more detail on the Ottawa ask and where it's at. We talked about that a little bit in Estimates yesterday, but some of that need has been met and will assist in reducing the need.

But it all depends on following public health orders, and it really does depend on that to make sure that we get a handle on COVID. We need everyone to get behind obeying the public health orders and also getting a vaccine as soon as it is possible for them to do so.

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

Death of COVID-19 Patient Medical Examiner Review

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I invoke the name of Krystal Mousseau with the greatest of sensitivity and respect. Had the opportunity to speak to her two daughters yesterday evening. My heart goes out to them.

As policy makers here in Manitoba, we must learn from this tragedy to help inform the care of other patients who, even as we speak, may be transported out of province. I think we all understand that the Premier must impress upon Shared Health the urgency of figuring out what went wrong here and whether there is anything that needs to be changed in terms of the treatment of these critically ill Manitobans.

This is uncharted territory. These sort of ICU patient transports haven't happened before. It's also not clear whether a medical examiner would automatically review a death in this sort of situation.

Will the Premier ensure that the rules are clear so that a medical examiner can review this tragic death?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): The Department of Health has asked, I understand, through our Health Minister—acting Health Minister, to be more accurate—has asked Shared Health to assess whether a critical incident should be called.

Critical incident report is designed to reflect the seriousness and the unintended harm expressed by individuals using Manitoba's health—experienced by individuals who use Manitoba's health services.

* (13:50)

I won't presume to judge. We are not the judge. There is an official who is given responsibility for making these determinations. But I do agree that the answers as to the specifics of the incident, as to any potential human error or mechanical malfunction aspects, for example, are addressed. And that information should be made available and made available most certainly to the family as well.

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

Transfer of ICU Patients Out of Province Request to Re-examine Assessment Criteria

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I think it's important and I believe that the rules around critical incidents do provide for that information to be shared for the family. And so, certainly, we must ensure that that's followed up on.

We know that Ms. Mousseau passed away while she was attempted to be transported because she could not receive the care that she needed right here in her home province.

Now, it was stated yesterday that patients are selected for transport to another jurisdiction—that they are carefully assessed by the critical-care team. So there does appear to be some sort of protocol in place for decisions on who is transported among the most critically ill.

Tragically, though, if one out of 29 of these patients has already passed away, it does suggest that whatever criteria is being used needs to be reassessed. It does seem as though someone was cleared for transport who shouldn't have been.

Will the Premier direct Shared Health to review this criteria immediately to inform the care of other Manitoba patients?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I understand that that review is already under way at the transport level; that Dr. Rob Grierson—I hope I'm 'pronouncing'—pronouncing his name correctly—who is the chief medical officer of the emergency response services, does—is responsible for making the call about who, in fact, is transported; that he acts on the advice of medical experts who the patient is in care of; that they work closely in partnership with not only the professionals involved in the transport process but also those who will potentially be on the receiving end.

So there's a partnership and a system in place there, and I believe that this analysis is done and will be done, in this case, but has been done in the past, will continue to be done as a consequence of the need to constantly improve the process and make sure that any necessary corrections or adaptations are pursued.

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

Doctor-on-Board Policy of Service Providers

Mr. Kinew: Twenty-eight intensive-care-unit patients have been transported to Ontario and more could be sent today and later this week. We're talking about some of the sickest patients in our province's hospitals.

Now, we all understand that these folks need to have every precaution, every measure possible taken to keep these patients safe. The transport companies STARS, Vanguard, Keewatin, SkyCare and Fox Flight have been named in, you know, some of the reporting on this issue.

Now, we do know, because of access to a contract, that STARS is bound to have a doctor on board their flights. But why are the other service providers not held to the same standard?

I do think that this is a critical question of public interest at this very serious time. We need to have an answer to that question and also for the government to share with the public which company attempted to transport the patient in this tragic case.

Mr. Pallister: I am confident that the issues the member has justifiably just raised would be included in any review that would be undertaken, and that review is now under way.

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

Transport Team Capacity Concerns

Mr. Kinew: I would ask the Premier to ensure that the results of that review be released publicly, save for any personal health information or other identifying details.

Now, we do understand a little bit more, at this point of the pandemic, the severity of people who are critically ill with COVID, how quickly they can turn, how quickly the situation can deteriorate. That's why it's so incumbent on the government to ensure that the service providers who are transporting these ICU patients are up to the task.

Now, we need to know, are all the planes equipped to take care of these critically ill patients? Are all the folks who are staffing these flights prepared for the various eventualities that might emerge?

Specifically, does every transport team who is currently transporting ICU patients out of province—do they have the capacity to care for intensive-care-unit patients?

Mr. Pallister: They do, or our medical health experts who are charged with the critical responsibility of addressing the needs of our patients would not be using their services.

Transfer of ICU Patients Out of Province Critical-Care Staffing Levels

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Manitobans are watching as 28 vulnerable ICU patients are sent out of province. Arrangements are being made to send more elsewhere.

Manitobans want to know: Why is Manitoba the only province forced to send ICU patients out of province due to duress?

Part of the explanation is staffing in Winnipeg ICUs, and I'll table three documents for the House. In January of 2019, there were 293 nurses by the bedside in critical care. Two years later, there were less—just 285—less critical-care nurses.

We know that critical care isn't a light switch. Once this government cut it, they were never able to catch up to the virus, and now we're completely overwhelmed.

What does this government say to those put at risk because of their—

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

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Acting Minister of Health and Seniors Care): That is a false assertion by the member opposite, and they will likely know that. When the NDP were in government in 2014-2015, they commissioned a report, and that report indicated that not only were there a lack of staff available for critical care and for ICUs, that they would often list ICU beds as being available, but there was no staff for them.

We have now doubled the amount of ICU beds available in the province of Manitoba in response of this pandemic. Other provinces have also needed to ask for resources from other provinces. I spoke to the Ontario Health minister last evening, thanked her for her support, and she confirmed that they also had relied on support from other provinces during the height of their third wave.

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

MLA Asagwara: Mr. Deputy Speaker, since consolidation, capacity for critical care was insufficient for a regular flu season.

In January 2020, an ICU patient was sent out of Winnipeg. Why? Because nurses by the bedside had been cut by this government.

On Tuesday, the minister most responsible for this mess told proceedings that it takes time to staff up in ICU, and he's absolutely right. There's a reason that Manitoba is the only province in the country forced to send critically ill patients to other provinces due to capacity limits. It's staring this government in their mirror.

Why did they cut critical care, and why did they fail this important moment?

Mr. Goertzen: In fact, both assertions are incorrect, and I would advise the member that they would do wise to look at the report that was commissioned by the previous NDP government, which cited that their government would often list ICU beds that didn't have any staff, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Absolutely, it's been difficult to catch up from that understaffing under the NDP. However, I would say that the health-care system, having doubled the ICU capacity now for this particular third wave, has done a significant job. And, in fact, other provinces—including Ontario, who I had the opportunity to speak to last night—have had to rely on resources from other provinces as a result of the severity of their third wave.

So she—so the member opposite is wrong on all accounts.

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

MLA Asagwara: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know it's difficult for this minister to reflect on the decisions that he's made and how they're now impacting Manitobans, but he knows you can't staff up critical care with the flick of a light switch. It's a big reason why Manitoba is the only province in the country to send patients out of the province due to capacity limits.

A year into this pandemic, in January of this year, there were still not as many critical-care nurses by the bedside in Winnipeg as in 2019. The Pallister government has never caught up to the virus, and the former minister of Health questioned the motivations of ICU docs and said himself, we got this. It rings particularly hollow today.

Why did this government not see the obvious consequence of their actions? Why have they failed Manitobans so badly?

* (14:00)

Mr. Goertzen: The member opposite fails to accept the consequence that was cited and reported by a consultant that the former government hired that indicated that there were ICU beds that weren't able to be staffed during the NDP's reign in government, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It has been a challenge for certain to catch up, but work has been happening to catch up, and I would say not only that, but the health-care system has been able to double the capacity of ICU beds here in Manitoba. More capacity is coming online almost every day, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it is still for certain a challenge.

We are grateful for the partners that are around us. We are grateful for the opportunity to look, as other provinces have had to do, to get resources from other provinces. We will do what we need to do—

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

Second Dose of COVID-19 Vaccine Priority for Health-Care Workers

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): This PC government's failure to explicitly prioritize all health-care workers for a second dose of a COVID vaccination is leaving some nurses without the ability to get fully vaccinated. Many pregnant nurses and nurses with health issues held off on receiving their first dose until there was evidence that it was safe to do so.

Now, despite the fact that these folks work in some of the most high-risk settings in our province, they cannot receive their second dose yet because this government will not prioritize them.

Will the minister prioritize all Manitoban health-care workers for a second dose of a COVID vaccination immediately?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Acting Minister of Health and Seniors Care): I'm certainly aware of this issue. It was brought to my attention this morning.

My understand that—standing is that occupational health has been working with those in the medical field. Of course, the vast majority of those in the medical field did have a very early dose—primarily of Pfizer, I believe, in the early days. They were among

the first Manitobans because this government prioritized it for them to get an early dose of the vaccine to protect them.

So the vast majority would now be eligible for a second dose based on the fact that they were so early in the dosing process, but I have asked officials to look into this particular case, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Ms. Fontaine: Assuming most health-care workers had their first dose prior to March 29 excludes many health-care workers who held off on booking their initial appointments due to a lack of clarity surrounding the risks for pregnant people or people living with certain health conditions.

One nurse said, and I quote, that she was blown away, end quote, when she called to book an appointment for her second dose but was told that she was not eligible because—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —she had only had her—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —because she had only had—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: Let's try this again—because she had only had her first dose in April.

We know that having two doses provides a better immunity than just having one dose.

Will the minister expand the second 'dost' eligibility to all Manitoba health-care workers today?

Mr. Goertzen: I believe that I answered the member's question in her first question, but I'll restate it for her benefit, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The vast majority, as she indicates, of health-care workers were able to receive a very early dose of Pfizer and, as a result, they are eligible for their second dose now. That is because this government, the former and the current Minister of Health prioritized health-care workers because they wanted to ensure that they were among the safest Manitobans because of the work that they're doing.

In a particular case, when it comes to someone who's held off for certain concerns, it would be a relatively small group, but occupational health is working

with those individuals to ensure that they are able to receive a second dose, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Ms. Fontaine: Earlier this year, the CBC attained data showing that 40 per cent of cases were of an, in quote, unknown source. For cases where a source could be identified, the locations of greatest—were at risk were offices, retail locations, health-care facilities, schools, daycares, congregate facilities, transportation and food facilities.

This is an alarming information and we shouldn't learn that—critical pieces of information like this through freedom of information requests or through media investigations or through leaked information. Manitobans should be receiving critical up-to-date information and should be receiving their second dose vaccinations immediately.

Will the minister commit today to the second dose vaccinations and to releasing consistent and comprehensive information on COVID transmission and modelling?

Mr. Goertzen: Of course, we would wish that all Manitobans would've been eligible for a second dose of a vaccine already when it comes to COVID-19. That wasn't possible for a variety of reasons, one of the most significant is that the federal government wasn't able to procure doses of vaccine as quickly as other countries were, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

However, now, as they're coming in a little bit more quickly, our vaccine team has been able to ensure that doses are going out quickly. I believe that, as of today, there'll be about 800,000 doses that will have been administered.

Had we received doses earlier from the federal government procurement process, many more Manitobans would've had their second dose already, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Pandemic Funding for Schools Federal-Provincial Monies Spent

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Other jurisdictions across the country have allocated and flowed federal pandemic funding to their schools. Manichoba [phonetic] has chosen not to do that, squirrelling away tens of millions of dollars.

We previously raised the issue with this House. As of March, the Pallister government had held back \$85 million that should be in classrooms now.

I'd like to update the House with new information through FIPPA, which I will table. As of April 30th, there was still \$76 million in support left unspent.

The minister can talk, talk, talk about allocations, projections and plans, but when will the support actually get into schools where it's needed?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education): I mean, we've set aside last year's budget, \$185 million for Safe Schools. We're committed to getting all that money into schools. Schools are sending us applications on a daily basis.

At the end of April we will now allocated \$122 million of that: \$59 million for staffing, \$25 million for learning and technology, \$17 million for health and safety, \$7 million for PPE, close to \$5 million for remote learning support and \$10 million in other expenses. More to come.

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

Ms. Naylor: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Education funding was underspent by \$6 million last year, \$79 million the year before that. And over the last four years, Education spending on infrastructure—like new schools and upgrades—has been underspent, a combined \$267 million.

So excuse me for being a little suspicious if the minister's words don't line up with what the government actually does, not to mention that other provinces have allocated and flowed the full amount of COVID relief to their schools.

Why is this so hard for this government? What are they waiting for? When will they flow all of the federal funding?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member opposite is just wrong.

We are going to be flowing \$185 million from this past year's budget. We've allocated \$160 million more for COVID expense in this year's budget. We've invested a record over \$1.3 billion in K to 12; this year, a record investment in capital: \$260 million—\$100 million more than last year.

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

Ms. Naylor: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's May 27th. The brand-new Education Minister might not realize that school ends in one month.

Why in the world did the minister delay and wait to provide absolute and—absolutely and critically needed supports to our schools? Seventy-six million was still unspent as of March 31st, according to FIPPA.

If I'm to believe the minister's words today, some further dollars have been spent through April, but that still leaves millions.

This minister and this government are being led by those who will squeeze every penny in a state of emergency while other provinces have long allocated and put the dollars to work.

On what date will the remaining federal funds finally come out of the minister's hands—

* (14:10)

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

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we recognize the challenges that schools are facing in the pandemic and we recognize the good work of teachers throughout this pandemic.

That's why we've committed the 185 dollars in last year's budget. We've committed \$160 million this year's budget. We've got record capital investments going into Education, record operating expenses going into Education.

We're here to support teachers, we're here to support students and we will continue to support educators.

Classroom Debate on Government Policy Education Minister's Comments

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): The work of government is the peoples' business, but yesterday the minister said this: We don't think that the classroom is an appropriate place to discuss government policy.

These are deeply troubling words. It's 2021, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I'd like to give the minister an opportunity to retract those comments, apologize and encourage all schools to engage in healthy dialogue and debate about the peoples' business.

Will he do that today? [*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education): Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when those members on this side

of the House go in and have a discussion in the classrooms, we talk about public policy. We're not there to discuss the merits of individual pieces of legislation. We don't think that's the proper place for discussion about—exactly about certain aspects—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cullen: —of certain pieces of legislation.

Clearly—clearly, the NDP are of the opinion that they should be going in and discussing specific pieces of legislation. *[interjection]*

An Honourable Member: Fascist, fascist.

Mr. Cullen: Specific pieces of legislation—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Just want to remind everybody who is on virtual not to, you know, have—you know, to heckle or have props or anything like that. So I haven't been able to see it because I don't have all—every view—person viewing here—*[interjection]*—and also, the language that's been used, too.

So we need to have some decorum in here. We need to have parliamentary language. And so we'd have respect for each other in here. These are serious times that we're facing right now, so let's have some decorum in here.

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we would love to have an honest discussion about public policy going forward. Apparently, members opposite don't want to have that discussion about our strategy going forward, but we know what's in the best interests of our students going forward, and we're here to make sure K to 12 is better.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I just want to ask the clerks if we were on the second question because now, with the distraction and stuff that's happened here—are we on the second question or the third one? *[interjection]* First sup, okay.

The honourable member for Transcona, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Altomare: I want to remind the minister that he too was invited to engage in debate and dialogue on Bill 64, and he decided not to attend and instead is now using this opportunity to berate the challenges that students are facing when confronted with a bill such as Bill 64.

And yesterday, I asked the minister to intervene in Steinbach to ensure vaccines were a topic that could be discussed and debated. The minister declined. If

vaccines and democracy itself are off-limits, what will the minister disallow next?

Why won't—allow healthy and needed debate in our schools?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was quite ironic where we had the president of Manitoba teachers' union out not too long ago saying not to get politics in the classroom.

So here we are now. We've got NDP members in the classroom talking about the specifics of a piece of legislation, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We don't think that's right. I mean, if we were to be the first ones to go in there and talk about legislation as it pertains to a specific piece of legislation, we don't think that would be allowed. But, apparently, the NDP think it's okay to go in there and talk about a specific piece of legislation.

We don't think that's right. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

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

Mr. Altomare: You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this just speaks to the narrative of this government: disinformation and a disavowment of democratic principles, free and open debate. And we saw that in the fundraising letter from this party that attacked media, calling it biased, toxic, slanted, straight-up lies. This is abhorrent and a perversion of the tenets of a healthy democracy.

The minister 'munt' not like criticism in the press or the education of young minds about the government's actions, but his attacks on the press and on classrooms have gone too far.

Will he apologize and withdraw his and his party's anti-democratic statements today?

Mr. Cullen: We're happy to go in the classroom and talk about the democratic process. We do that all the time. We always engage in the classroom.

And speaking of democratic process in our K-to-12 review, we went out and we solicited input from Manitobans. Thousands and thousands of Manitobans gave us input on the K-to-12 report. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cullen: We're out engaging—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cullen: –we've got MLAs out engaging parents in terms of how parents can be more engaged in our process in K to 12. And we—I'm out discussing our K-to-12 reforms with teachers, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's democracy in action.

We believe in democracy. We will continue to consult with Manitobans as we move the K-to-12 education system forward here in Manitoba.

COVID-19 Vaccine and Education System Topic of Discussion in the Classroom

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I'm grateful I don't have to ask for leave to be able to answer—ask this question.

We were surprised to read the Education Minister's comments today saying he doesn't think government legislation or even policy should be discussed in schools, even when all sides are given an equal hearing. It seems this offers a frightening glimpse into what Manitobans can expect from this government under Bill 64.

On the same day our province is making international headlines for our COVID crisis, public school administrators issued a gag order to teachers to tell them not to talk about vaccinations because some parents think it's a sensitive subject.

Does the Premier think that every single teacher in Manitoba should be able to talk about how vaccines are incredibly safe, effective and life-saving, or is this the kind of educational gag order we can all expect to live under if Bill 64 passes?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): So, the federal supports that are coming—I wanted to share with the House—are very important, and we appreciate and thank the federal government for their support.

In terms of supports from the federal—our federal counterparts, we've come to an agreement on 14 additional nurses, including ICU and ER nurses and OR nurses; three lab technologists; additional air transport; potentially a dedicated medical team; one plane that could carry up to two patients if absolutely necessary, plus their own medical transport team.

I'll share with the member on the next question other information as I've undertaken to do so.

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

Education Modernization Act Request for Referendum

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): The questions are on education, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This is a huge concern, especially if vaccines in current government policy are considered too sensitive to discuss. What else is going to be banned from schools? The whole point of education is to add knowledge, not starve people of it, especially in a pandemic when bad information can land people in the ICU or the morgue.

Being able to ask questions is essential to a healthy democracy as well as a functioning education system so we can all get closer to the truth, like the truth that vaccinations save lives.

If the minister doesn't want to debate Bill 64 in schools, why not have a referendum, as over 4,500 Manitobans have called for, so that every Manitoban can have an informed say on this bill?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): The planning stage is, we're in right now, for some potential resources for next week. I wanted to share with the members opposite, as well, as I'd undertaken to do so. We're in discussion on a few other things. It's just a question of location, timing, some details to be ironed out. But we're looking for additional nurses to come, in addition to the 14. We had asked for 50, and we're hopeful that we can get up to that number.

Fifty additional contact-tracing resources. This is really a tough thing. Our contact-tracing numbers are incredibly—as I shared with the member, we've up to about 900 people working on that. We need more. It's becoming a really—a difficult task for our contact tracers.

Public health nurses to work with our existing staffing complement in northern communities; in particular, advanced-care paramedics. We're working also on a couple of APIs—alternate isolation personnel. We have another alternate isolation facility; we'd like to have more personnel for it to assist and additional lab techs as well.

* (14:20)

So I'll give a report to members when I have more progress to report, but I thank, again, the federal government for their assistance in this respect.

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

COVID-19 Spread Prevention Ventilation Systems in Schools

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, improving ventilation in schools decreases transmission of COVID-19, as I table. We called on the Premier to act on this last fall, but nothing was done. Air dilution methods, opening doors, opening windows and using fans have an effect, but combined with the insulation of HEPA filters can reduce COVID-19 infections by almost half—48 per cent.

Will the Premier use the summer to make improvements in ventilation and air filtration in Manitoba schools before fall 'crashes' start, much like Ontario is already doing? And will he also ensure sufficient humidification to get schools to an optimum relative humidity of 40 to 60, which should also reduce transmission?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, we've—this year's capital allocation for Education is part of our \$1.6-billion commitment.

The largest in Manitoba history is a quarter of a billion dollars for capital investments in our schools, and I can assure the member that some of those projects will relate to exactly what he just raised.

So the commitment to educational funding and support has never been greater than under this government.

Criminal Property Forfeiture Program Funding for Crime Prevention Initiatives

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): Mr. Deputy Speaker, just recently this week, the Brandon Police Service announced the results of Project Brazen, along with the Winnipeg Police Service, the RCMP and the Manitoba Prosecution Service, in removing drugs and items like that off the street.

And so I'm wondering if the Minister of Justice could please update the House on their recent funding to the proceeds of crime prevention and safety initiatives through the criminal property forfeiture program.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I thank the member for Brandon East for the question.

Criminal property forfeiture program seizes criminal assets and redirects funding to initiatives designed to protect Manitobans and enhance community safety.

Last week, our government announced \$2.3 million in funding to invest in youth, strengthen

communities and support victims of crime. In Fisher Branch, for example, we are providing over \$20,000 to a domestic violence prevention initiative for at-risk youth in the community.

Last week our government passed Bill 58, The Criminal Property Forfeiture Amendment Act, to further enhance this program. And what did the opposition parties do? They voted against it.

Processing Times at Vital Statistics Request to Reduce Backlog

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): In the past few years, many member on this side of the House have received phone calls and emails from concerned Manitobans who had to wait excessive amounts of time for pieces of documentation from Vital Statistics.

These concerns have been raised more and more frequently over the last few months, especially from parents who are anxiously awaiting birth certificates for their recently born children.

Can the minister explain why this backlog has yet to be dealt with?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Our government has been working on this. I do acknowledge that we need to ensure that time frames do go down, from a Vital Statistics basis. We have put more staff; that has been there. The numbers have dropped in terms of a number of the forms that need to be part of it.

I know there was a story last week that talked about federal benefits. I do want to recognize the fact and make sure that all Manitobans recognize the fact that they need—just need to be registered under Vital Statistics, as opposed to having the forms, to get any federal benefit that's a part of it. That's a approach that we want to ensure that all Manitobans know about.

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

Mr. Wasyliv: Well, the Province acknowledged the long wait times in February of this year and said that Vital Statistics expects to see a 20 per cent improvement in processing times within the next couple of months. They promised to take initiatives to reduce wait times. However, just two weeks ago, one Manitoban mother spoke to the media about how she has been waiting five months for her daughter's birth certificate.

These delays cause issues for families who are trying to access the Canada Child Benefit, and, ultimately, parents are concerned that in an emergency situation, they don't have a way to prove identity.

What is the minister going to do to reduce the wait times for certificate issued from Vital Statistics?

Mr. Fielding: Our officials have reached out to that individual. I want to make sure that she does recognize the fact that you just need to be registered, so I want to make sure that individual has all the information which is there, and that's why we took the proactive measure to do that.

We have taken steps in terms of changing the facility, IT approaches. Our birth certificates are down by 8 per cent in terms of the long waits, death certificates, as well as marriage licences.

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

Mr. Wasyliw: We're hearing from folks who simply cannot reach anyone at Vital Statistics by phone or email, and walk-ins are not permitted. More staff are obviously needed to address the backlog and to ensure that Vital Statistics can operate in a timely manner.

The services that Vital Statistics provide are essential, and not receiving important documents hurt many Manitobans who are waiting.

Will this minister commit to investing in Vital Statistics immediately to ensure that the agency is able to function properly, moving forward?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): We'll continue to invest in Vital Statistics.

Today it was reported by Global News that the NDP leader federally, Jagmeet Singh, had broken public health orders. This is not new, of course, as we remember very recently the provincial leader doing the same. The difference here is that Mr. Singh said, I really hope that this doesn't discourage anyone from wearing their masks and following public health protocols.

We would hope also that the NDP leader here would follow the lead of the federal leader, would apologize for breaking public health orders so it doesn't discourage people from following public health orders elsewhere.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

The honourable Government House Leader.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): On a point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On a point of order, the honourable Government House Leader.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would ask that we have the opportunity to review the tape of question period. The member for Wolseley (Ms. Naylor), at one point during question period—and you've admonished her for having her mic on, as she's not supposed to do—but if you were to review the tape, I think you would find that she used a word that is, I would think, generally not parliamentary, but specifically when it's in reference to an individual, it would reflect upon the honour of that member.

And after you've had the opportunity to do that review, I'd ask that you ask the member for Wolseley to retract that comment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Anyone else on that point of order?

I'll take that under advisement. Again, I never had the opportunity to—it didn't come up on my screen. I only have a limited amount of members on my screen. So we'll take that under advisement and get back to the House on the next business day. *[interjection]*

Oh, no, not on the next business day, the next time we're in session—on Monday. *[interjection]* Yes, we'll get back after we review it, yes. So it might take a little bit longer than one business day.

* * *

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, we'll go on to petitions.

PETITIONS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara)?

The honourable member for Keewatinook.

Epilepsy Treatment

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

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, these are the reasons for this petition:

One in 10 Manitobans will have a seizure in their lifetime, and the incidence of epilepsy in the Indigenous populations is double the national average. Epilepsy occurs just as often as breast and lung cancer worldwide.

(2) COVID-19 has cancelled epilepsy surgeries booked for Manitoba patients elsewhere in Canada because they cannot receive this standardly routine surgery in the province.

(3) Manitoba is the only province which has an inappropriate hospital environment to perform most epilepsy surgeries because it conducts epilepsy monitoring on an orthopedics ward with orthopedic staff, instead of an epilepsy ward with trained epilepsy staff.

(4) Patients in Manitoba have to wait three or more years for epilepsy surgery, which has resulted in them having to continue to suffer uncontrolled seizures, struggle with mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, headaches, general poor health and even death, in some cases.

(5) Since an epilepsy neurologist resigned in 2012, more neurologists have resigned due to dealing with old and failing equipment, which has resulted in sending patients out of province, costing the provincial government millions of dollars.

(6) Epilepsy surgery is extremely effective, resulting in patients requiring less medication, sometimes becoming seizure-free, enabling them to return to work, drive and live fulfilling lives.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to open a genuine, four-bed epilepsy unit, similar to the one recently opened in Saskatchewan, at the Health Sciences Centre, with modern equipment and adequate epilepsy neurosurgeons, neurologists, nurses, clerks and technicians.

(2) To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to formally establish an epilepsy program to ensure that all epilepsy staff can deliver care to patients in a co-ordinated fashion.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

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

We'll go back to the honourable member for Union Station.

* (14:30)

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

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) One in 10 Manitobans will have a seizure in their lifetime, and the incidence of epilepsy in the Indigenous populations is double the national average. Epilepsy occurs just as often as breast and lung cancer worldwide.

(2) COVID-19 has cancelled epilepsy surgeries booked for Manitoba patients elsewhere in Canada because they cannot receive this standardly routine care—rather, surgery in the province.

(3) Manitoba is the only province which has an inappropriate hospital environment to perform most epilepsy surgeries because it conducts epilepsy monitoring on an orthopedics ward with an orthopedic staff, instead of an epilepsy ward with trained epilepsy staff.

(4) Patients in Manitoba have to wait three or more years for epilepsy surgery, which has resulted in them having to continue to suffer uncontrolled seizures, struggle with mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, headaches, general poor health and even death, in some cases.

(5) Since an epilepsy neurologist resigned in 2012, more neurologists have resigned due—dealing with old and failing equipment, which has resulted in sending patients out of province, costing the provincial government millions of dollars.

(6) Epilepsy surgery is extremely effective, resulting in patients requiring less medication, sometimes becoming seizure-free, enabling them to return to work, drive and live fulfilling lives.

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(1) To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to open a genuine, four-bed epilepsy unit, similar to the one recently opened in Saskatchewan, at the Health Sciences Centre, with modern equipment and adequate epilepsy neurosurgeons, neurologists, nurses, clerks and technicians.

(2) To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to formally establish an epilepsy program to ensure that all epilepsy staff can deliver care to patients in a co-ordinated fashion.

This has been signed by Andrea Bartmanovich, Caitlyn Hagyard, Melanie Lemoing, Kristy Perkins, Jamie Talbot, Jaime Eccles, Karen Twankow—sorry,

Twankow—[interjection] Oh, I'm good? Okay, and many—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Remind the member that they only have to read three of the names, and many others.

Riverdale Aggregate Quarry—Request to Deny Conditional-Use Application

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

A conditional-use application has been filed in relation to a proposed gravel pit, or aggregate quarry, located at SW-11-12-2 WPM in Riverdale municipality. Many local residents have—concerned about the proposed gravel pit which are not being addressed.

The site has an extensive forest of oak, ash, poplar, saskatoon, chokecherry, pin cherry and two kinds of hazelnut trees. It also has a considerable grassland area with significant unplowed areas of extensive native prairie grasses and flowers, including numerous prairie crocuses, Manitoba's provincial flower.

The site is in the centre of an ecologically sensitive area of approximately 1,500 acres, which is an important habitat for wildlife and may be a significant elk-calving area. Other species include, but are not limited to, white-tailed deer, black bears and many migrating and breeding birds in summer and varied winter-resident species, including bald eagles. The area also has species listed by the committee on the status for endangered wildlife in Canada as endangered: red-headed woodpeckers; threatened: loggerhead shrikes and bobolinks; or species of concern: short-eared owls and Baird sparrows. Local landowners rent the Crown land within this area and have been stewards of the Crown land and their adjacent privately held land for many years. The forested land has been used for decades by local hunters.

The site is located within an important wildlife corridor, extending from Riding Mountain National Park along the Little Saskatchewan River to the Assiniboine River in the south. Such corridors are absolutely critical to preserving animal species in their natural habitat.

The site has been identified by Manitoba Sport, Culture and Heritage under section 12(2) of The Heritage Resources Act as having potential for both known archaeological sites and human burials, as well

as unknown heritage resource sites. The proposed pit is located on the edge of a large glacial meltwater channel. Numerous archaeological sites exist in the immediate area, including pre-contact Indigenous settlements with intact teepee rings and other stone features, as well as historical cart trails and human burials.

The drainage from the site is initially west-northwest, and then southwest into a series of springs, small ponds or lakes, in a coulee leading down to the Little Saskatchewan River. This is a pristine waterway and offers habitat to a variety of native plant, bird, animal and invertebrate species. A quarry would gather water and interrupt this critical water flow with serious implications for the habitat on the 1,000 or more acres downstream, an area that includes grazing land for two cattle herds.

There are existing wells downstream from the quarry location. Quarries often disrupt the existing movement of surface water and groundwater, as they interrupt natural water recharge and can lead to reduced quantity and quality of drinking water for residents and wildlife near or downstream from a quarry site.

Many other quarries exist in the southwest Manitoba region, including four existing gravel pits within a few kilometres. These have extensive reserves, reducing and making unnecessary any need for gravel from the proposed aggregate quarry at SW 11-12-21 WPM.

The value of property decreases significantly within the immediate vicinity of a quarry. The effects are also felt several miles away. Home values within a quarter mile of the proposed site are expected to drop by approximately 30 per cent.

The community is concerned about an expected rise in silicosis, an interstitial lung disease caused by breathing in tiny bits of silica, a common mineral found in many types of rock and soil. Over time, exposure to silica particles causes permanent lung scarring called pulmonary fibrosis.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to deny the conditional use application for mining on SW 11-12-21 WPM because of the adverse impact it will have on important ecological and archaeological treasures in this area, and because there are alternative sites for obtaining the gravel and/or rock needed from this site.

To urge the provincial government to protect the habitat on all quarters of 11-12-21 WPM and to undertake to develop a shared stewardship approach which preserves traditional uses for the Crown and private lands in this ecologically sensitive area.

Signed by Gary Burling, Barry Kennedy, Danny Dumas and many, many others.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

Scrap Metal Legislation—Consumer Protection

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) The spike in catalytic converter thefts occurring across North America has hit Winnipeg. The price of precious metals in catalytic *[inaudible]* dollars an ounce. Scrap metal recyclers have catalytic converters priced to the vehicle, with some catalytic converters worth \$800.

(2) Organized groups of criminals are climbing under vehicles and cutting catalytic converters and selling them to scrap metal recyclers for cash, without any record of these transactions.

* (14:40)

(3) Catalytic converter thefts cost consumers about \$2,000 each for each replacement. Manitoba Public Insurance charges a betterment fee for new replacements, so insurance doesn't cover the full cost.

(4) Currently, sellers do not have to provide government-issued photo ID and recyclers do not need to record and retain this information or record details of the transaction.

(5) Scrap-metal recyclers do not report to police any transactions involving catalytic converters.

(6) Provinces like BC and Alberta have scrap-metal-recycler legislation requiring businesses to keep proper records.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to bring in consumer protection legislation requiring scrap-metal recyclers to keep proper records so only legitimate sales are allowed and criminals can be caught.

This petition is signed by many Manitobans.

Epilepsy Treatment

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) One in 10 Manitobans will have a seizure in their lifetime, and the incidence of epilepsy in the Indigenous populations is double the national average. Epilepsy occurs just as often as breast and lung cancer worldwide.

(2) COVID-19 has cancelled epilepsy surgeries booked for Manitoba patients elsewhere in Canada because they cannot receive this standardly routine procedure—routine surgery in the province.

(3) Manitoba is the only province which has an inappropriate hospital environment to perform most epilepsy surgeries because it conducts epilepsy monitoring on an orthopedics ward with an orthopedic staff, instead of an epilepsy ward with trained epilepsy staff.

(4) Patients in Manitoba have to wait three or more years for epilepsy surgery, which has resulted in them having to continue to suffer uncontrolled seizures, struggle with mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, headaches, general poor health and even death, in some cases.

(5) Since an epilepsy neurologist resigned in 2012, more neurologists have resigned due to dealing with old and failing equipment, which has resulted in sending patients out of province, costing the provincial government millions of dollars.

(6) Epilepsy surgery is extremely effective, resulting in patients requiring less medication, sometimes becoming seizure-free, enabling them to return to work, drive and live fulfilling lives.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to open a genuine, four-bed epilepsy unit, similar to the one recently opened in Saskatchewan, at the Health Sciences Centre, with modern equipment and adequate epilepsy neurosurgeons, neurologists, nurses, clerks and technicians; and

(2) To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to formally establish an epilepsy program to ensure that all epilepsy staff can deliver care to patients in a co-ordinated fashion.

And this petition, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Any further petitions?

Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Deputy Government House Leader): Mr. Deputy Speaker, could you please canvass the House for leave to alter the Estimates sequence for tomorrow only, so that in the room 254, section Executive Council will be replaced by Enabling Appropriations, followed by Finance?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there leave to alter the Estimates sequence for tomorrow only, so that room 254, section Executive Council will be replaced by Enabling Appropriations, followed by Finance?

Is it—is there leave? *[Agreed]*

* * *

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I call for debate this afternoon second reading on Bill 72, The Disability Support Act and Amendments to The Manitoba Assistance Act.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It's been brought to the attention of the Minister of Justice that we do the second reading of Bill 72, The Disability Support Act and Amendments to The Manitoba Assistance Act in the honourable name of the Minister of Families.

SECOND READINGS

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

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Friesen), that Bill 72, The Disability Support Act and Amendments to The Manitoba Assistance Act; Loi sur le soutien pour personne handicapée et modifiant la Loi sur les allocations d'aide du Manitoba, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Families, seconded by the honourable Minister of Justice, that Bill 72, The

Disability Support Act and Amendments to The Manitoba Assistance Act, be now read a second time and referred to the committee of this House.

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

Ms. Squires: It is my pleasure to rise today and give second reading to Bill 72, the disability support act, a historic piece of legislation that I am proud to sponsor. Bill 72 enshrines our government's commitment to a new income support program for persons with severe and prolonged disabilities that promote the social inclusion of persons with severe and prolonged disabilities, recognizes their unique needs and barriers, ensures there is strong support for service navigation and service access and removes barriers to help them achieve their full potential.

We recognize that many Manitobans living with disabilities struggle to meet their needs and they rely on government programs such as Employment and Income Assistance for support. Currently, persons with disabilities who require income assistance are enrolled in the persons with disabilities category of income assistance. However, this category provides benefits to persons with a wide range of needs that include persons with severe and prolonged disabilities, as well as persons with less severe or episodic disabilities.

In addition, due to the many changes, factors with disability in the less severe and episodic category, as well as legacy requirements in the EIA Program, many people with severe and prolonged disabilities have to regularly reconfirm that they do indeed have a disability in order to keep receiving their support. We believe that that is not appropriate and counter to the widespread acknowledgement that all Manitobans, including those with severe and prolonged disabilities, deserve to live with dignity.

Beginning in the fall of 2019, my department began collecting feedback from Manitobans on how we could better support those persons with severe and prolonged disabilities who require income assistance. Through various feedback methods, Manitobans emphasized that people living with severe and prolonged disabilities have unique needs and may need targeted supports to help them fully participate in their community. This information led directly to the work the department is now undertaking to develop a new income support program for persons with severe and prolonged disabilities, which this legislation will enable.

The new program will be separate and distinct from the Employment and Income Assistance. It will provide income support and shelter support, as well as other benefits to be established in regulation. We also recognize that Manitobans may have concerns about whether or not they fall into the requirements of this new program. Manitobans will have the opportunity to appeal decisions, as always, made by this program and any other program to the Social Services Appeal Board in the same manner as other social assistance programs currently do.

In addition, Bill 72 will assist the expansion of supports to meet the diverse needs of persons with severe and prolonged disabilities while ensuring that right supports are available for those who need them the most to help them move forward with financial independence.

The Manitoba Assistance Act is also being amended to reflect the new configuration of income assistance for persons with disabilities without the approximately 10,000 individuals who will be moved into the new program.

* (14:50)

The Manitoba Assistance Act will maintain an income assistance category for those clients with short-term, recurring or episodic disabilities. Clients will be eligible for this category if they are unable to support themselves financially for a period of one year due to their disability, rather than the current 90-day standard, which will be a welcome change and reduce unnecessary red tape in the current requirements.

Further amendments will help simplify The Manitoba Assistance Act and will reflect any obligation of clients with respect to employment and training. The amendments to The Manitoba Assistance Act also clarify requirements for recipients to actively plan and participate in programming to better move them towards financial independence.

Bill 72 and the accompanying amendments to The Manitoba Assistance Act are vital parts in transforming the income assistance program towards a more assessment-informed practice that will help clients move towards financial independence.

I look forward to further discussion on Bill 72 in debate today and later in committee, and, most importantly, I look forward to it receiving the full support of this House so that we can better support Manitobans with severe and prolonged disabilities.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Questions

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

The first question is from the honourable member for Thompson.

The honourable member for Thompson, would you unmute? *[interjection]* Oh, you know what, you're right. Okay. Just have to wait 'til the member for Thompson plugs her headset in. *[interjection]* Yes, we can hear you.

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): Bill 72 redefines disabilities to be 'prolonger' than a year. The current act defines it as 90 days. When the bill comes into force, those currently on disabilities will either be transferred to the new program or will lose disability benefits.

Why not remain the interim supports for those disabilities less than one year?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): So just to clarify that we are creating a new income stream for people with perseverant, prolonged disabilities and that people with episodic disabilities—there will be a secondary program that will be created for those people.

And, of course, this will reduce the regulatory requirements for them to come in on a regular basis and confirm that their disability still exists and may, of course, require health resources. We are eliminating that requirement. If you've got a disability that you are going to be disabled for a year, you'll be in the episodic disability category, and if you have severe and prolonged that is in perpetuity, you will not be required to be getting those doctor's notes and verifying your—

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

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My question to the minister is this, just to clarify the requirements for employment for somebody who has got a severe and long-term disability.

Is it correct that they will not be required to seek employment but that, on the other hand, that they will

not be unable to get, well, training for employment which they might be able to have a chance to get, even with their disability?

Ms. Squires: That is a great question. I thank my friend from River Heights for that question.

Of course, we want all people with disabilities to live full lives and realize their full potential, and if there is other programming that is relevant to their situation that they wish to avail themselves to, that would certainly—there's nothing in this legislation that would ever prohibit someone with disabilities from pursuing opportunities.

Ms. Adams: We heard today's bill briefing that there are currently 22,000 Manitobans on disability. We also heard the department anticipates the new definition of disabilities will accommodate just 10,000. That means going forward, there will be 12,000 less Manitobans receiving enhanced benefits because of a disability.

Does the minister feel that this is fair?

Ms. Squires: Once again, the member for Thompson (Ms. Adams) is misinformed. We recognize right now that there are about 22,000 people on EI benefits that are also collecting a disability benefit. We anticipate that about 10,000 of those will move into the severe and prolonged disability category and that the remaining 10 to 12 thousand will move in the episodic disability category, which also entitles them to additional benefits, given the fact that they are likely unable to obtain employment.

Mr. Gerrard: My—this question relates to the—where the government has made a payment in respect of mortgage, principal or arrears.

Now, I can understand that this could apply if the government has paid, you know, tens of thousands of dollars in order to put somebody into a house, but if the individual, for example, was able to have an arrangement so that instead of the money being used for rent that they get for housing was used toward a down—toward mortgage payment, would the government still claim the lean against that house?

Ms. Squires: There are certainly many circumstances where we take a case-by-case approach to having assessments and providing that individual services. And we have worked with many individuals to ensure that they have—are able to have—receive benefits without having a clawback.

We've done that with many of the benefits that some of our EIA recipients have received and certainly we'll continue to look at future benefits or current benefits and make those assessments accordingly.

Ms. Adams: We have heard from a number of physicians the effects of COVID on our health system are devastating. Many have long-term enduring COVID-19. They can't work.

Under the proposed bill, many of those current 'inelible'—where the disability would no longer be eligible, unless their disability is likely to be more than a year. This will be difficult to maintain to determine for the effects of a virus that we have never seen before.

Will the minister reconsider her plan to move 12,000 people off of disability?

Ms. Squires: Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member opposite is clearly misinformed, and I will try to make it clear for her to understand, because I do not want there to be any misinterpretation and despite the fact that we had a very comprehensive bill briefing this morning in which she attended.

I can assure Manitobans that are receiving the disability benefit, if they do not qualify for the severe and prolonged category, they will—and yet they do—there will be the episodic disability category, which a majority of the people that are currently receiving disability benefits will indeed qualify for and be admitted into that particular program with all the corresponding benefits that go along with that program.

Mr. Gerrard: My question to the minister is this. If there's an individual with a disability that needs special housing needs, that housing will cost not what it is allocated, which might be in the range of \$700, potentially with the Rent Assist component, but costs \$1,000. And suppose that they have a family member who would be willing to top up from \$700 to \$1,000 in order to get that place.

I'm concerned about this section here which talk about that gift from a family member to be considered as income. I'm just trying to understand whether the government will claw back that \$300 so the person would not be able to get into that \$1,000 rental place—

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

Ms. Squires: I thank the member for that question.

Of course, there are many exceptions to the benefits that—and—a recipient can receive without having additional clawbacks being taken, such as payments

that they've received from other levels of government for—whether it be for a class-action lawsuit or whether it be for—as a survivor—as a residential school.

* (15:00)

Those payments were never clawed back. These are something that we look at on a case-by-case basis. This is enabling legislation that allows us to bring in this new income stream for people with disabilities and, of course, a lot of those details will be worked out in the regulations. And I look forward to working with the member on ensuring that our regulations—

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

Ms. Adams: Physicians are talking about the serious effects of delays in surgeries. Other provinces used the time between waves of the pandemic to staff up and bring wait times down. Manitoba did not. The waitlists grew and grew, and so many, many of those on disabilities are because of the delays in surgery, and will not be, unless there is effective, permanent disabilities.

Does the minister feel that this is fair?

Ms. Squires: So, once again, we've got the member for Thompson (Ms. Adams) not on point and putting incorrect information on the record.

And I just really want to reiterate for her that this new disability support legislation, it differs from the current disability legislation that was upheld by the former NDP government that required people with severe and prolonged disabilities to go to their doctors to get a note and then go to their Employment and Income Assistance worker and to justify that their disability, it still exists and is still a barrier to employment and other additional provisions required of EIA recipients. So we are streamlining processes to make life better for people with disabilities.

Mr. Gerrard: In follow-up to the minister's answer last time, I'd be very concerned if the government was considering as income gifts from a family member which might be, say, less than \$500 which are helped and in fact sometimes necessary in order for them to get equipment or to get things that are not covered.

The—my question this time has to do with whether the disability community will be consulted with regard to the regulations before they're proclaimed.

Ms. Squires: Absolutely. I—we have undertaken to have a very robust consultation thus far. In fact, we've had two rounds of consultation on the legislation,

which includes an online survey as well as a large in-person consultation session; that was pre-pandemic, of course. And then, more recently, we've had online focus groups.

What we are going to continue to do is hear from our individuals with disabilities, service providers, advocacy groups and people with lived experience about the legislation and about the corresponding regulations.

We released a What We Heard report last July, and the second What We Heard report is being finalized right now for approval and then released to the public so that the member can see what the consultations bared out.

Ms. Adams: New terms to the disability program are being referred to regulations.

What does the minister expect the cost will be, and has she been given orders to ensure that it is a net neutral program?

Ms. Squires: I'd like to thank the member for that question and, of course, we recognize that people with severe and prolonged disabilities have unique requirements. And last year, that is why one of the things that our government did at the onset of the pandemic was we ensured that there was a—COVID response dollars that flowed to all people in Manitoba with disabilities.

We recognize right now that there is greater need, and there will be corresponding increases in the benefit to go to each of the recipients in the disabilities—severe and prolonged disability category.

Mr. Gerrard: In my experience, that is very important if you've got somebody on a chronic severe disability, there may be—particularly if it's a mental health condition, for example—the ability to work some of the time but not all the time.

And so it seems to me and my experience would be that it's very important that people are able to move back and forth in terms of earning income and—so that the program won't drop them when, in fact, they can't earn an income again, and that they would continue on the program.

I wonder what assurance the minister would provide in this respect.

Ms. Squires: I agree with the member that we need to ensure that the supports are there for people living with disabilities can live a full life and achieve their destiny. That is one of the things that we think is very important about this legislation, that right now we

would remove that employment obligation that is currently outlined in legislation for them, and that and that employment services will be offered as voluntary only.

We think that that's really important, that people with severe and prolonged disabilities have the ability to achieve a full life and also receive these benefits that are vital to their well-being.

Ms. Adams: Why does this bill not lay out the eligibility criteria and the payments? In the bill, it is—rather, it is deferring them to regulations.

Ms. Squires: Well, I could ask the member why, in 17 years, her government never bothered to pull the payment schedule out of regulation and put it in legislation if she thought that that was such an important item.

That is something that is in all of our legislation. We bring in enabling legislation and then the fee schedule or the payment schedule is always in regulation so that we can make annual increases. Right now, for example, the Rent Assist is in regulation. It's very easy to annually go in and index that Rent Assist and to make increases to that amount that individuals on Rent Assist could achieve.

If this is put in legislation, I would suggest that it would be more cumbersome and less often available to have increases, and if the member's advocating—

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

Mr. Gerrard: I ask the minister, am I correct in interpreting the—what the minister has said as that she is attempting to individualize to a greater extent the kinds of support that people with severe and chronic, long-term disabilities are going to receive in terms of supports?

I wonder if the minister can provide can provide a little bit more detail of how she will approach this ability to individualize support.

Ms. Squires: Certainly, I think that it's very important that we do take a look at the program—the traditional program where people with severe and prolonged disabilities were treated similar to how all the other individuals in the province of Manitoba, which is sometimes around 40,000 individuals, receive EIA benefits.

And the type of client outreach that we would do with the regular non-disabled EIA recipient is very different. And I think that we need to continuously

modernize our approach, and when we've got people that we know are on the severe and prolonged disability category, that we have a very tailored approach to suit their needs and help them achieve a better destiny.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The time for the question period has expired.

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The debate is open.

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): I would like to put some concerns I have on Bill 72 on the record.

Bill 72 does not address the needs or the concerns of people within the disabilities community. While it helps some, it is leaving many people out. Bill 72 is a checkbox; it's about a failed, tired government who is lost, and we know this because they have introduced this bill at the end of session after being mentioned in the Throne Speech not once but twice.

I asked at the bill briefing at the rates people will be receiving will tied to the poverty rate, and the minister's office said that those will be done through regulations and the amount will be determined by regulations. When I asked when the regulations will be coming out, it won't be until December of this year. So, once again, this government is coming to this House without having their homework done.

This is an important part of the bill. This government is coming to this House and saying, please support Bill 72, while leaving out some very important and crucial information. They're asking us to trust them, but this government's actions have shown we can't trust them.

Their choices have actually put Manitobans at risk. They have cut health care; they have left millions of dollars from the federal government on the table when it comes to education; they have hurt renters with Bill 71. This government, on a regular basis, actively makes choices—puts in Manitobans in jeopardy. And that just doesn't work for this side of the House.

We need to know all of the information before we are willing to support a bill, and this government didn't do their homework. So how can they come here and ask us to support a bill without having the crucial information? I asked if it was—there is 75 per cent of median rent income, and when I asked if it was going to be regional or community-based, I was told it's going to be based off of Winnipeg.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is more to Manitoba than just Winnipeg. Rents can differ throughout and be higher than in Winnipeg in some parts of Manitoba, and that just doesn't work. We need to ensure that this bill works for all of Manitobans, and this government isn't doing it.

* (15:10)

They have proven time and time again that they don't like consultations; they say they like consultations and do the exact opposite. Look at what they've done with Bill 64. They have made the North an entire region. I will guarantee you there is not a single person in northern Manitoba that thinks all of northern Manitoba should be one school region; and that just doesn't work.

So once again, this government didn't do its homework, and when it did—and now that they're coming to us and saying this, this isn't going to work. One of my main concerns with this bill is amendment section 5(1), which strikes out physical or mental illness incapacity or disorders and likely to continue for more than 90 days—impacted for more than one year.

For—there are many people with disabilities that are going to need supports after the 90 days, and while it will help others, they're doing it at the expense of others, just like they did with the enhanced nursery grant program. They took money from 66 nursery schools and gave it to other people, instead of enhancing everybody. So it was \$5, they chose—an active choice, they made that decision—to make it so more people would pay more money; instead of having everybody pay the \$5, they chose to have people pay the \$10, and that doesn't work.

They want us to trust that they're going to be doing what is in the best interest of Manitobans, but they haven't done that yet. And we have seen how they have treated people through the pandemic, and it's not been effective.

And now they want us to give them a blank cheque when it comes to people with disabilities? I'm not willing to do that. These are some of our most vulnerable Manitobans and they need to know that this—that a government has their back and is not going to leave them out to dry by changing some regulations in the middle of the night.

This government continuously wants to have more power at the Cabinet table. That doesn't help anybody. That is not transparent. That is not accountability. And that is not something I support or stand for. A government needs to know and say: This is the

bill and this is what I'm going to do with the bill and here are the corresponding regulations.

And where are the regulations? They're asking this House to pass a bill when the regulations and the homework isn't even done. That is absolutely ludicrous. Why on earth would the minister bring this bill forward without having her homework done? Why? Because this minister and her government wants to show that they're trying to do something; they're trying to change the channel from their failures to the pandemic. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's not something I'm just going to let slide by.

Manitobans with disabilities are not a checkbox. They are not something to try and get good media off of. They need to be treated with the respect and know what they are getting, and this government isn't doing that. They are kicking 12,000 people off of supports with disabilities. And they need to know why. They said the—with the Portable Housing Benefit, after they cancelled it, after the 2019 election—after promising, I might add, they weren't going to do that—they cancelled it and said, oh, don't worry, we're bringing in legislation. Well, that was 18 months ago.

So what of those—they left those people out and struggling for all of that time and during a pandemic. They did nothing for people with disabilities during the pandemic. They have not provided supports. They sent expired masks into the community and when called on it, they said, oh, well, no; we didn't do that—oh, wait, yes, we did—uh, can you prove it? And if you can prove it, you have to come get your own masks.

That doesn't work and now they're coming to us with this. And there's so many questions and so much of the bill is being left to regulations. And where are those regulations? They're not done and that's unacceptable.

Instead of doing the right thing and increasing supports for all Manitobans with disabilities, this Families Minister is instead increasing supports for some at the expense of others. And that doesn't work. That's so sad that this government feels that it should only support some Manitobans and not all Manitobans.

All Manitobans need supports. All Manitobans need to know that their government is going to be there to support them and work for them and do what is in their best interest. But this government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is only out for them; they care about themselves, their rich friends, and they want to know what government can do for them, and that's not

what government is about. Government is about ensuring that supports are there for every Manitoban because no Manitoban deserves to live in poverty and below the poverty line and be struggling just because they have a disability. And that is unacceptable, and that's what this government is trying to do.

They don't even know what they're going to be raising the rates to. And how can you not know that? That is a crucial part of this bill. That is so important. People with disabilities have reached out to me during the pandemic, letting me know that their costs have gone up 'expedientially' because they are not able to access transit, they're not able to access the same levels of supports. They had so many things going on and a lot of them had underlying health issues, and this government wasn't there for them.

And after such an epic, epic failure with the pandemic, this government now comes to us and says—and goes to the disability community and is saying, hey, we've done this bill for you, but some really important information isn't quite done yet. So trust us, we're going to do the right thing.

Well, they haven't done the right thing yet today. So why should we believe them? They have left out so many people in other bills, in other legislation that they've done, that I just—I don't have the faith, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that they have the best interests of Manitobans. And that's not okay.

This government needs to show us the regulations, have people be involved in developing those regulations and not be so secretive about these regulations, because this is such an important part of it. It is going to outline who is eligible for this magical enhanced benefit. It's going to lay out how much money people are going to be getting. It's going to lay out the criteria and all of that stuff.

And while I think it's really good and really great that we're going to have this enhanced program for people, I'm really concerned for the people in the middle. Where are they going to be left? And the truth is, the minister can't answer. She's talking about some intermediate program, which is, once again, going to be left to regulations. But where are those regulations? They're not done.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's the talk of education, and, you know, I can tell you, with talking to some of my friends that are teachers, that they would not accept somebody coming to class with their work half done asking for full credit. That's not how it works. You can't show up and say, hey, I've done part

of it but not all of it, so can I have full marks? No. That's not a reality and that's not how things work. You need to show up with all of your work and show what is happening. You can't leave some very crucial parts out and say, hey, look, we're here to support members of the disability community, without actually having all of it done.

This bill is going to leave over 10,000 people with disabilities and not have them have adequate supports. And that's not okay. We shouldn't be sacrificing the some—we shouldn't be sacrificing people and leaving them and not ensuring that they've got the supports they need.

Think of all of the Manitobans that are going to be suffering from long-hauler syndrome with COVID. They're so—because of this government's inaction on the pandemic, they have left so many people with—susceptible to COVID by their choices. These are their choices. They walked into the third wave knowing it was going to happen. They have not provided supports for people with disabilities during the second wave, during the third wave, and they have left people vulnerable.

And now they're saying that there's going to be an intermediate program, but kind of, sort of; it's in the regulations, and you'll just have to wait. Well, people can't wait.

This bill was promised in the 2019 Throne Speech. I don't know if the minister is aware, but it's 2021. They have had—and have been supposedly working on this for a year and a half, and they're coming without having the regulations done? That's unacceptable.

The minister needs to apologize to this House and come back when she's finished her homework. This is unacceptable by the minister; it is unacceptable from this government, and I would expect more from a government that has been working on something for a year and a half. It had one and two mentions in the Throne Speech and they're coming at it at the eleventh hour, without having their work done, and saying that this is a priority. If it was a real priority by this government, they would have introduced it right at the beginning so it was guaranteed passage.

* (15:20)

But nope, not this government. This government is trying to change the channel and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm not going to let them change the channel off of the backs of people with disabilities because

Manitobans with disabilities deserve better; they deserve to have all of the information so that they can make an informed decision when contacting their MLAs to let us know if this is a bill that they want us to support, because without having the work I just don't know, it leaves me with a lot of questions.

And I just don't know if this minister and this government should be trusted with something as important as this without all of the information because they fail to mention that, you know, when we were getting up to having a lot of COVID patients how many were transferred out of Manitoba. And they weren't wanting to admit that.

We heard yesterday with somebody dying while in transport. That is not okay, and this government's choices made that happen. This government's choices have put Manitobans in the position we are today. And that doesn't work. This government needs to stand up and do the work and come back.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a lot of suffering for many people our—due to our hospitals being overloaded by COVID patients. There's been surgeries postponed, and many of those surgeries are for people with disabilities. We've heard about how that is impacting people in Manitoba, and this government just doesn't seem to care.

Instead of addressing the wait-list during—in between the waves, this government just carried on and didn't do the work it needed to do. They have laid off and cut health care. A lot of what we're facing now is because of the choices they made in terms of cutting ICUs. This is not what governments should be doing.

There are people who are now waiting to have their spines operated on and are losing controls of their bowels and their bladder and are becoming paralyzed; and that's something this minister is okay with? That is something that this government is okay with?

I just—every time they bring something forward or do something, it just leaves me going, what are they doing? Manitobans waiting for surgeries are falling into depression and undergoing psychological trauma as we can see with their physical conditions generally 'deteriating' and that is just so, so sad. And all of that could have been prevented if this government had made different choices.

And I know I keep talking about choices, but it's so important for people to understand that we are in this situation we are in now because of choices, because of choices this government made when it

came to the pandemic, and choices it made in treating people during the pandemic. They didn't choose to treat people with dignity. They didn't choose to treat people with compassion. They have chosen to treat people with disrespect, and they have caused chaos and confusion everywhere they go—the chaos and confusion they have caused with Bill 64, the chaos and confusion they cause in the child-care sector at the start of the pandemic, and in the summer with the pandemic, and in the fall with child care, again in the winter and now again.

And they just keep going on and causing nothing but chaos and confusion because Manitobans aren't their priority. Their priority isn't Manitobans. Their priorities are themselves and what can be in government get them, as we saw with Bill 71 and how much more money they would be getting with Bill 71 and the education property tax rebate. And that's—that is not what government is about.

Longer wait times for the increased dependency on 'addictive'—on addictions is another just—it's so, so unacceptable, and it's about choices. This government's decision to make surgery times longer is putting people at risk for having more dependency on addictive 'substances', and that's not okay.

Many people are so desperate that they're considering travelling out of the country for private care. And that's not okay. People shouldn't have to be—shouldn't feel like they need to leave Manitoba to receive the care they need, and this government, because they are not wanting to be paralyzed and be put in a position where maybe they are relying on the government for EIA—for the disabilities program. And that is something that is—needs to be laid out. What is going to be the criteria? Who's going to qualify? Who doesn't qualify. And that—they're saying that's in regulations, but once again, where are the regulations? There are no regulations. The regulations aren't done yet. And that doesn't work. We need to know what the—is in the regulations.

Under the current disability supports model, Manitobans are waiting for surgery to—could—see a doctor who could provide them with the disability supports until they get the surgery needed. But under this bill, these people would be completely cut off and left out unless their situation is effectively permanent. And that is leaving out so many Manitobans.

And part of what upsets me with that is that's their choice. It was their choice—'cutted' health care. It was their choice not to staff up in between waves; it was their choice. And by their choice, they are effectively

leaving so many Manitobans in a position where they could have a prolonged disability; and that's not okay. They would instead have to apply for general assistance, which is substantially less and provide—and doesn't provide the necessary supports for people with disabilities. And that's not okay.

Like, this government's actions with people with disabilities has been disrespectful. They've not provided the additional supports that have been requested. They did not provide supports during the pandemic. They did not provide adequate financial supports.

There was calls for people with disabilities to receive more supports and more funding and this government didn't provide the funding needed. They gave a little bit of money, but that little bit of money didn't even cover people's added cleaning costs, added—there was added costs for masks, added costs for hand sanitizers, added costs for the transit systems. A lot of it was scaled back, which means they either would have to have left earlier, taken multiple buses—which is putting them at risk—or in some cases, some of them had to take private transportation like cabs. And there was no additional funding for people with cabs—that needed to travel for cabs to go to doctor's appointments, to go to get groceries. And that is something that was not addressed and this government didn't provide the necessary supports.

They didn't—and people in the disabilities community was saying that they needed to be a—prioritized in the vaccine rollout, and this government wasn't making people with disabilities a priority in the vaccine rollout. And part of that is because this government doesn't value people with disabilities; doesn't value them. And we can see that by them entering this bill so late.

This isn't a bill that they really care about. This isn't a bill that means something to them, because it's entered so late. It is May 27th, and we rise on June 1st. Our last day is June 1st and they're introducing it now? That just shows how little they—how much—how not a big priority people with disabilities are, that they're not willing to make this bill a priority, that they had it done sooner. They had a year and a half.

In addition, there are concerns that COVID patients who make it out of the ICU will be left with severe disabilities, and this government doesn't have an answer for that. This government isn't providing them with the supports it needs. It's—in Manitoba, we actually don't have a rehabilitation resource to look

after these people, and that's because of choices by this government.

The minister and her government are kicking people off of their disability benefits once in a global—a once-in-a-century global pandemic, and doesn't have a way for people—like, doesn't have an answer. The minister could increase supports for all Manitobans who are currently receiving disabilities, but no. This government, like always, their response is to kick people off and find the bottom line. This government, on a regular basis, looks at balancing the books off of some of our most vulnerable Manitobans, off of some of the people who need to know and have support of the government.

This government continuously, every day, kicks people off of—and makes it harder for Manitobans. They make it harder for Manitobans by their choices. They would've reduced stress and improved quality of life for thousands of Manitobans if they had just made the choice to enhance disability benefits for all Manitobans.

* (15:30)

But that's not the choice this government made. No, this government made the choice that it's going to support some people with disabilities—not all disabilities—only some. And that doesn't work. That is leaving so many Manitobans out, that is putting a lot of Manitobans at risk and it's putting a lot of Manitobans in jeopardy.

This minister should not be looking to save money off of some of our province's most vulnerable people. These are people that need government supports. They need to know that their government is going to be there to provide the medication they need, their dental, their mental health supports, their housing supports. We should not be saying to people who have disabilities: oh, well, you have a disability; now you are going to live in poverty.

This government was given a really great opportunity to reform disabilities services and supports in Manitoba, and this government, instead of being a visionary and envisioning how Manitobans' disability supports could work for all Manitobans and provide all Manitobans with disabilities with the supports it needs, that's not the choice they made. Instead—instead of being a visionary and making a program that we all could be so proud of, that meets Manitobans at all of their needs, they made the decision to meet the needs of only some Manitobans, at the expense of other

Manitobans, and that—that just—that doesn't sit well with me.

Our other main concern with this bill is it continues the worrisome trend of this government referring to specific regulations and giving the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) and the board of regulations powers that—as she pleases, which means that, once again, this government is going to be changing regulations with the stroke of a pen behind closed doors, under the cloak of darkness, and hoping nobody realizes.

This bill gives no concrete guidelines for the eligibility criteria. It does not provide information on monetary payments. It doesn't even indicate if it's going to be tied to the poverty line. There's nothing to indicate that this government is going to be providing people with disabilities even to the poverty line.

So, this government and this minister is—are asking us to trust that they are going to do what is in the best interest, and they haven't done that yet. Manitobans living with a disability deserve to have this information readily and accessible, available to them, rather than it being left up to the minister at her discretion.

And that—this is not something that should be done under the cloak of darkness. It needs to be transparent; it needs to be done in a way that all Manitobans are able to be accessible, and that is something that is really unfortunate, and this minister and her government, I think, really missed the mark.

Unfortunately, cutting supports for Manitobans with disabilities is more of the same from this government and her—and this minister. It hasn't stopped during the pandemic. They failed to provide meaningful supports for Manitobans living with disabilities and have actively cut supports they depend on.

The Pallister government continues to try and balance the budget off of Manitoba's most vulnerable citizens. They've done it with our children, they've done it with health care and now they're doing it with people with disabilities.

I just—I don't understand a government that goes out of their way to balance the books and make money off of some of our most vulnerable citizens in Manitoba. That brings it to a whole new level of low. That is something that this government and that minister should be ashamed of, that they are willing to balance the books off of some of our most vulnerable citizens.

They've tried to put a hold on applications for child-care inclusion supports. They have made it harder for children with disabilities to access inclusion supports and—in the child-care sector. They only reversed that decision when they face public 'outrage'.

This is a government that is regularly trying to cut supports for people with disabilities, and now they want us to support a bill without showing the regulations, saying please trust us.

I can—I know that there is a lot of questions that this—we have for this government and they're not willing to answer them. They don't come to school with all of their homework done. They continuously put things into regulations, which means that they can change it at a stroke of a pen under the cloak of darkness. They have frozen funding for single moms' autism program for four years, and they have cut the number of hours for supports for children. This government has eliminated the funding for Manitoba's Community Services Council, non-profit supports by MCSC, including Manitoba society for disabilities' ethnocultural program.

According to the law, the Province needs to develop a plan that will create a fully accessible labour market by 2023. They haven't—where's the work on that? They haven't done that. In 2018, Barrier-Free Manitoba launched a Broken Promise campaign calling out the government to—failing to meet the needs.

And that's what this is about; this a checkbox. This is something that the government is going to try and say: see, we're doing something—without actually doing anything. And that doesn't work, that—this is not what government does. Government comes to work, comes to this House with all of the regulations done and if not, you don't—you don't.

Like, you cannot say we're changing something dramatically and not show how you're changing it. That's not acceptable. That is not what this minister or this government should be doing. They should be coming—if they are proud of what they are doing, they should be showing everybody. They should show the work that they've done on it, they should be showing what they're going to be paying people, what they are going to be doing or who's going to qualify; they have yet to even increase the funding for people who provide the supports for people with disabilities. And that doesn't work.

This government continues on a regular basis to show people that Manitobans with disabilities are not their priority, and now the Pallister government is

changing the rules so only an employee with over 50 per cent have compliance with the AMA, and before it was 20.

So when they don't like something, they just change the rules and—they just change it; and they do that through regulations, which is why it's so troubling that so much of what they're doing is in regulations. Because we need to know how things are going to be tied.

It would have been really easy to say we're going to tie the benefit to the poverty line. It would be really easy to say the criteria of how people are going to qualify for this new benefit, but this government didn't do that. This government is all about wanting to try and change it and get a good headline, and that doesn't work.

The Pallister government's plan to cut costs to EIA in the proposed 2021 Budget cuts nearly \$4.5 million on a fast-growing caseload that means absolute gruesome cuts to EIA programs. They cut the \$25-a-month job-seeking allowance for people with EI—

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

Point of Order

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I go to the next member for Bill 72—the debate of Bill 72—I have the honourable member for Wolseley on the same point of order that brought forward by—new point of order.

The honourable member for Wolseley.

The honourable member for Wolseley, if you could unmute your mic?

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): It was earlier today when I was alone in my office listening to question period, I made some comments in response to things that I was hearing. I was not aware that my mic was still on at that time, after question period. I thought that I was alone by myself making those comments.

So I just want to say to this House that I completely respect the rules—the established rules—for virtual engagement in the House. I had no intention to be heckling or projecting my thoughts into the Legislature and was not aware that my mic was on. And for that I apologize.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And you know, I just want to say we take that apology as acceptance for the point of order. And I want to thank the member for

Wolseley to bring that forward and that concludes the point of order for today.

* * *

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now we'll go on to the next speaker for debate 72.

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): It's a real privilege to get up and speak to Bill 72 today. This is just another example of a smart government bringing in smart legislation that is really sensitive to the special considerate needs of people—persons that are living with severe and prolonged disabilities.

* (15:40)

Now, we know that—and again, these people have extraordinary challenges in their lives, and, of course, it—and it does go beyond the individual; it does include the family and friends. And, again, they live in some pretty tough times that I think most of us can't understand. So I do think there's room for, you know, some discretion and special circumstances for these people.

And, again, I applaud the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) for bringing this legislation through, that really does put a focus, a sensitive focus, on these individuals that are dealing with challenging circumstances and turning the focus on their needs a little bit more so they can live in dignity.

And this is really, again, an essential role of government to, you know, look at the programs that are being offered on behalf of the government, on behalf of the people of Manitoba. I think Manitobans are by and large very generous people and they expect their government to look at the programs, assess their programs and make sure that they're working and that they're serving the needs of the people that really need the help.

So, again, I'll go back to this Bill 72, how it is very sensitive. Smart on the part of the government to do a review across government departments; that's always very, very important role of government to make sure, again, whether it's health care or in this case, persons with disabilities, get the help and attention that they need to move on and that the systems are functioning effectively and efficiently with the focus on the persons that the needs in mind.

And, again, I think, you know, quite often things can get off the rails. So, again, I would say it's an important role of government to do assessments on the programs, especially social programs and especially, again, with something like this where people are,

again, they're living through extraordinary circumstances with severe and prolonged disabilities, and a lot of times they don't have the means or the opportunities or ways to, sort of, come out of that and help them come out of that situation.

So, again, they have to—we have a responsibility as citizens and as a government to make sure that the programs and services for those that are wanting to live independently, and especially those—again, they have those challenging conditions and they may have extraordinary drive and striving to live independently and be part of the economy, and we absolutely need to enable that. And this is—Bill 72, it does exactly that.

So I think when we look at 72, again, it does—and I think I was reading the words on The Disability Support Act where it really is about bridge supporting these people. And I can speak not—because I can't say I personally know what it means like to live in this situation, but I do have a constituent of mine that is absolutely quite amazing and he does live with a unique cerebral palsy situation. And this person is an inspiration to me and I think quite an inspiration to a lot of people that are living with disabilities, and I've told him that.

He's quite an ambassador, and in spite of his challenges, he really does have an accomplished resumé of accomplishments. And, you know, he's striving and he's trying to really, really trying to get ahead and with such a positive attitude. I know I had a chance to speak with him on a number of occasions and listen to his story and I just couldn't believe how upbeat and positive he was.

But he also had a chance to talk with him and his mother about some of the challenges that the family was facing on this situation and some of the unfairness, I guess, in some of the programs. And again, he wasn't angry about it but he did—you know, he did highlight that there was—you know, there's things that weren't working. And, of course, we had a good chance to talk about this, and from the perspective of the government, you know, I tried to be devil's advocate and say, you know, where it's important, you know, when governments are looking at programs, that we look at precedent and how that can affect all programs.

So it ended up that he ended up needing a—really, a bit of help with extra home care, and he did—he was at the maximum level that he had and I guess he was, again, running between the curbs of the programs that were available to him. And he was also, you know, trying to get a post-secondary education at

the same time, and I thought, wow, that was pretty amazing, what he was trying to do. And it—the help that he needed, you know, he just—he was outside the curbs and I thought, you know, that was pretty unfair.

So again, I'll go back to Bill 72 and I—again, I applaud the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) on this and the government of Manitoba for looking at this—bringing forth this legislation. It really does give some exceptional consideration beyond what's actually the essence of the bills. We're trying to create the sensitivity and consideration for the people that are dealing with severe and prolonged disabilities.

But in this person's case, again, he was looking at post-secondary, and I thought, you know, if I was a director of a program, I'd say, like, this is something not quite right here. So we need to look at the systems and it's not so simple to just throw more money at situations. It's not simple like that. I know that's what the NDP like to do and they don't really like to assess outcomes and performance and if programs are really, really working well. It's just, you know, tax more and throw more money at it.

So I would say I had a good conversation with this individual and we tried to find a solution that works. And again, I see it in this bill, really, the flexibility and the discretion to look at individual cases. And (1), let's make sure that the most vulnerable, the severe and prolonged persons that are disabilities are separated from the main body. And I see that the number here was 40,000 or so on EIA and, you know, 10,000 will be regrouped. But I think that regrouping is, again, is a very sensitive and considerate act by the government to make sure that those people are being looked after or being looked at on a case-by-case basis.

And again, because the situations are so unique, you know, whether it's the physical condition or location or the—there's just a ton of moving parts here. It's important that, in this case, with the individual I'm—what I was talking to, you know, he had unique a set of circumstances, and things change from time to time and when it's—and it's smart to do assessments. Like, I can't believe that, you know, the existing legislation required this person to qualify every year. That makes really no sense.

* (15:50)

But in this new program, if we're looking at doing assessments on what this individual needs and sort of tailor and help along, then it is a bridge.

And it is what he's wanting in this particular case, was to get on—get into the workforce and become a,

you know, get into employment and be part of the broader economy. And that's what we should be enabling, so this bill really is a major step toward doing that and helping this individual.

And I'll say: the guy is an inspiration. He did complete his post-secondary education, he's on his way to starting his own business. And quite an inspirational. And I will absolutely say, if you go to WillPower Media, you know, there you'll meet this fellow who's doing a great job of trying to, you know, develop a positive motivational type of work for people. And it absolutely is important that he's able to do that.

So again, I would go back to the point, again, where this individual with severe and prolonged disabilities—there was an opportunity there, and if we're looking at trying to help these people—in this particular case, you know, with post-secondary education and training, those—that's really a doorway, not only for the individual and from the family. So, we should be making efforts to ensure those doors are open for people with severe and prolonged disabilities. And it really is a—we can't, certainly, write them off. And that would be absolutely the wrong thing to do.

You know, they're people that need a little bit more help, a little bit more bridge. Their families do—in a lot of cases—they work through this on their own and they do a lot of stuff on their own plus, you know, with the help of government. But some cases, we just need a little bit more bridge.

So, I'm not saying that, you know, to paint a brush and say, okay everybody, we're all getting this. But what's important is if you look at the particular case there could be a good reason to provide perhaps additional funding. You know, I don't know.

But what's important is this legislation differentiates the unique situation that these people and the challenges that they live in and it gives them an opportunity to be—a little more attention being played into this and I think that's—this is hopeful legislation, not only for persons with severe and prolonged disabilities but I think their families. And I do think it is absolutely a great example of a listening government that is providing practical common-sense solutions.

And really, in the essence of it, this is really responsible in terms of how we look at programs, how we—how effective can they be and making sure that the resources are being allocated in the right direction

and that we're evaluating all the systems. But especially when it comes to social funding and social programs, that we're getting the desired effect and the patience, and the people that are living with these get the attention they deserve. And again, I applaud the government for excellent legislation.

And just a bit of a reply to the previous speaker, this is never too late to bring smart legislation and again, I think this is a right step forward and smart move by the government. Thank you.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Appreciate the opportunity to rise, put a few words on the record with regards to Bill 72, The Disability Support Act and Amendments to The Manitoba Assistance Act. As we know, this bill enacts The Disability Support Act and also makes amendments to The Manitoba Assistance Act.

The Disability Support Act creates a new support framework for individuals living with a severe or a prolonged disability who have no other adequate means of support. Individuals can now apply for a basic disability support payment as well as shelter assistance.

The act will also allow for additional discretionary support payments in special cases. Disability payments under The Manitoba Assistance Act remain available for individuals who do not qualify for assistance under The Disability Support Act, but only for disabilities expected to continue for more than one year.

The Manitoba Assistance Act is amended to add a preamble and a statement setting out the act's purpose. The act's provisions are also made general-gender neutral, and obsolete provisions are repealed.

I want to begin this afternoon in speaking to this particular bill by acknowledging the member for Thompson (Ms. Adams), who is the critic for this particular piece of legislation, and is somebody who I highly regard as being knowledgeable and somebody's who's put a lot of work into reaching out and speaking with folks in the disability community. And I certainly appreciate her words on this bill here this afternoon.

What I heard from the member—who I also note, I believe, took the bill briefing just today, so, you know, is sort of just still working through some of the details as presented here in this legislation—but what I'm hearing from her is that there are a number of concerns that she has with this bill, you know, questions that are, to this point, unanswered.

And I guess I shouldn't be too surprised because this continues to be the MO of this government, that they bring forward pieces of legislation either, you know, either bring them forward in title only and not in substance and not in the—in terms of what's actually in the bill, or they bring in pieces of legislation late in the sitting and expect, you know, quick passage by the Legislature. You know, these are all tactics of a government who doesn't respect the democratic process.

And I think it's right for the member for Thompson (Ms. Adams) to point out some of the concerns that we have and to kick off debate here by calling into question the motivations of this government. And I do hope to spend some more time later this afternoon speaking to those specifics.

But suffice it to say, this is part of a pattern of a disrespect for democracy and bringing forward legislation that, ultimately, while on its surface may seem to be moving in the right direction, often times has consequences that are far reaching and that need to be fully addressed. And we intend to do that as an opposition.

I also want to take an opportunity here, before I begin talking to the specifics of the bill, to recognize the disabilities community in Manitoba in general and, specifically, Disability Matters as a vocal lobby group here within the province. I think every member in the Chamber, whether they represent a constituency here in the city or elsewhere in the province, will have memories of in the 2019 election and also, I guess, in the 2016 election, going door-to-door, knocking on doors, talking to voters, and you'll be walking down the street and you'll come up to a Disability Matters sign in a front yard.

And I got to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, those are the houses where, you know, you sweat a little bit, you take a pause, you know, you check your notes and you make sure you're as prepared as you can be because you know when you knock on the door of that person, on the other side of that door is going to be somebody who's incredibly knowledgeable, somebody who is passionate, oftentimes is either directly affected or understands how this kind of legislation impacts their family or their community.

They were engaged, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in a way that very few other groups are, and I can say it makes a difference. It makes a real difference to know that as legislators we're responsible to speak to those folks individually and be knowledgeable and be ready to answer the questions that they have.

Mr. Dennis Smook, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

* (16:00)

And so I do feel it's incumbent on us, once again, as I said earlier, when dealing with legislation like this. I know that people are watching. I know that people are paying attention to this. This is not just, you know, a theoretical debate or a philosophical argument that we're having in the Chamber.

This affects people's lives, and I know that, in particular, Barrier-Free Manitoba and Abilities Manitoba, through the Disability Matters campaign and the work that they're doing, they're going to be paying attention to how this is going to affect the disabilities community in Manitoba.

So we want to get this right. We want to make sure that what we're doing here, in fact, is actually benefitting folks in the disabilities community. And what I'm hearing from, as I said, from the member for Thompson, you know, even though it was dismissed out of hand, you know, by the minister and sort of say—you know, trying to talk down to the member for Thompson, try to say, well, you don't understand; you don't know what you're talking about.

In fact, I do think she knows what she's talking about when she brings up concerns about people who, you know, potentially could be caught in between two programs or two sets of criteria in terms of coverage for disability supports.

You know, I had an opportunity when I was—before I was elected—to work with people—folks who were seeking assistance in terms of disability. We often would, you know, the sort of gold standard at that time—and to be honest with you, my knowledge isn't quite as up to date as I would like it to be—but at that time, you know, the federal government's disability coverage was sort of that standard that we would try to always give people access to—not always easy to get them that access. There were many, many barriers at that time to that federal program, but then, you know, when we—you know, if we weren't able to get that we were often looking to the provincial government to step up.

And this is where you would get into this kind of, you know, Swiss-cheese approach, where it would be like there's holes everywhere in terms of people who qualify and don't qualify, and it was incredibly difficult to explain to somebody who, you know, is coming to you in a place of vulnerability—you know, not really understanding, you know, the ins and outs of exactly which system they would fall into or not

fall into or be covered under—to try to explain to them, well, you actually don't qualify for this, or you do qualify for that, and to explain to them that they had to—oftentimes it was a waiting game or it was, you know, a bureaucratic sort of nightmare that they were entering into.

That system continues to be in place, and what I'm seeing here—and as I said, I, you know, just having seen the bill here today and having very little time to talk with my colleague in terms of her knowledge of the bill, but trying to understand how people in real world situations may not be covered. This is a major concern for us here in the Chamber.

There are—there's sort of a real, I think—see change in terms of how people understand disabilities and how, you know, some, as the minister said, some disabilities are episodic or periodical and then, you know, and they need to be seen as kind of in the holistic way. There is an element to that, and so I do applaud that this is something that the government is starting to look at.

But, if at any point someone is falling between the cracks, this is where we need to be able to step up. You know, we know it's important for every Manitoban, no matter their ability, to feel included at all times and supported by reducing any barriers that exist to provide equitable access for all.

Unfortunately, as we see here this afternoon, the Minister of Families' (Ms. Squires) bill, the bill that we're debating here, Bill 72, treats some Manitobans with less support if their disability lasts less than one year.

Our main concern with the Minister of Families' bill is that the amendment to the subsection 5-1, which strikes out physical or mental incapacity for a disorder that is likely to continue for more than 90 days, and substitutes that for incapacity or disorder likely to continue for a period of more than one year.

So this change, as we understand it, means that the disability supports will effectively only be available to Manitobans who have had what amounts to a permanent disability.

We're worried that when people who are currently in receipt of supports have their conditions reassessed under this new framework that's being proposed, they then will be moved from those supports or kicked off. Right now, we know that there are 22,000 Manitobans who currently receive disability supports and, as I mentioned earlier, it was just today that the member for Thompson (Ms. Adams) had a briefing

where the department said that they anticipate that only 10,000 people will meet the new definition of, quote, disability for the purposes of this act. And I think we heard the minister reiterate those figures here as well.

And that means that going forward, potentially, there is 12,000 less people who will receive supports as a result of this particular bill. This decrease is due to the change from anyone experiencing a disability for more than 90 days being eligible for supports to now only those who will experience a disability for longer than a year.

So instead of doing the right thing and increasing supports for all Manitobans, which was certainly an option for this—the minister and a tactic that could be taken, you know, despite what the member for Dauphin (Mr. Michaleski)? *[interjection]* Dauphin, I think, who spoke before me—you know, he says, well, you know, we don't want to spend more on a program; you know, he says, our government's No. 1 priority is don't spend more on supporting Manitobans who are on a program, you know, just look for efficiencies, you know—a.k.a. cuts.

This is our big concern. They won't go ahead and give these supports to everybody. There will be this potential for a loophole.

So instead of doing the right and increasing these supports, the Minister of Families is instead increasing supports for some, and that means that it's at the expense of others. So while this bill potentially strengthens disability supports for some, it also makes it harder for other people to receive them. And it doesn't even lay out if the 10,000 people left on disability supports will actually receive any more. It could very well be the case that the net outcome is that this change will actually save the minister and her government money.

Oh, there we go. I think we might have just hit the core of the bill that's being presented to us.

It would be truly despicable if the minister was trying to pinch pennies at the expense of 12,000-plus Manitobans, but of course we know that is exactly what they have done in every area of government and it has been their No. 1 priority.

Once again, we have a government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that wants to—oftentimes, you know—and, you know, I guess this is a clever political move, right? Because out of one side of their mouth, they'll say one thing and then as we actually get down to the

nitty-gritty and to the details of the bill, we realize that actually there's something else going on.

Now, this bill is a good example of that because, you know, first of all, I want to point out that this particular change is something that this government has talked about before. It's talked about in—not last year, the year before's Throne Speech—I guess that'd be 2019–2020's Throne Speech into this current session.

This has been something that this government has said it wanted to do: it wanted to tackle this issue, wanted to address some of the shortcomings.

However, you know, given the opportunity in both of those years—and I believe if—I may be mistaken, but I believe this was also a campaign promise. You know, probably every candidate on the other side knocked on those doors and they went to those Disability Matters how-homes and they said, don't worry, don't worry; we're going to look into this; we're going to get something done, we're going to change something.

Did they do that in their first year of office? No. Did they do that in their second year of office? No. Here we are, going into a third year of office and we still have a bill that was just brought forward now.

And if you look at the, you know—and for those following along at home, this is Bill 72–72, which is—you know, and I keep being told by the clerks this is not unprecedented; there have been this many bills before. However, this is—in my time, anyway—this is the most bills that have been brought forward.

But this bill was brought forward at a time when it is not what's called a guaranteed passage. It's not, you know, sort of slated as part of the legislative schedule to be brought in at a certain time, debated for a certain amount of time, brought to committee and, you know, seek out that public input that we all value so much. It wasn't given that consideration because it was brought in so late, hence the number, Bill 72.

*(16:10)

So I've got to ask: Was this, you know, priority No. 1 for the government? Was it priority No. 2? Was it priority No. 10? Or 20? Or 30? Or 40? No, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Apparently this is priority No. 72 and it was brought in so late that this government can't even move this forward as part of the legislative schedule that would guarantee a passage.

An Honourable Member: What's priority No. 64?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, and, you know, maybe I shouldn't have gone down this road because now, members are calling out other numbers which are certainly other priorities of this government which are more important, apparently, including taking away rights for people across the board, damaging democracy; I could go on.

But I don't want to get distracted. I do appreciate the help from my colleague but I don't want to get distracted because this bill is also something that we should be very careful in terms of debating and making sure we pay attention to, even though the government didn't prioritize it. It is something that they now want to move forward with and they want to go out in the public and say, well, look; we're doing the right thing; we are doing something great for folks in Manitoba.

But we know that oftentimes, as I said, something, you know, in the bill that actually is damaging or just people that are left out. And that's the biggest concern that we have with Bill 72. So they're going to continue to talk the talk, but again, it's a government that refuses to walk the walk.

And I'm very concerned that they haven't done the necessary work with the disabilities community beforehand. But more importantly—and this is something that I think all of us have raised in various forms with regards to a number of bills but in particular a bill that, you know, does have a lot of substance that will be decided in the regulations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're concerned once again that we have a government that refuses to lay out exactly what their strategy or their plan is in the bill, you know, try to, you know, get it through the Legislature in a day.

Well, sure, let's just bring it forward and pass it and move on, but then leaves everything else to regulations. In other words, it leaves it to the member for—the Minister for Families and her Cabinet colleagues to sit around and make decisions about people's lives behind closed doors without any public input—*[interjection]*—potentially in the middle of the night, as the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie) so aptly points out.

At that is—at that point in the process is when it's most important to bring in members of the community, to reach out to folks in the disability community, and to really seek that kind of input and the kind of—do the kind of work necessary to ensure that nobody gets left behind.

And, you know, we have, you know, platitudes or statements from the member opposite: oh, of course, we'll do that, but again, no guarantees and no input to this point that would give us that confidence. *[interjection]*

Just trust us, they say, as members in the House are pointing out. Well, we don't trust them.

We don't trust them because time and time again, they're continually consolidating power around the Cabinet table and they're making decisions that are hurting Manitobans. Because at that Cabinet table, with the blinds drawn and the doors closed, there's only one priority and it's saving money; it's saving a penny; it's saving a nickel; it's saving a dime. That's the MO of this government.

So it's very concerning that the member for Thompson (Ms. Adams) has brought forward these issues with this bill. I do think that there's an opportunity—you know, again, I mean, if we're serious about the democratic process here, if the government wants to say I'm wrong, you know, they're open and transparent; well, then, let's have the proper debate on this bill; let's have the proper consultation. Let's have an opportunity to listen to the folks in the disabilities community and make sure that this bill doesn't leave people behind.

Now I see my time is winding down here, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *[interjection]* My apologies, I do see my time is winding down. But I do want to just mention one area that is obviously very important right now and was also mentioned by the member for Thompson, but that is in particular the long-term ramifications from the COVID-19 pandemic with regards to people accessing disability benefits.

You know, we are, as has been said by the Leader of the Opposition, in uncharted territory in a lot of ways. But, in particular, when it comes to the long-term impacts—health impacts—of the COVID-19 pandemic, we really just don't know at this point. There's a lot of work being done, studies around the world, of folks looking into what this will, you know, what the long-term health impacts are for people who either have been exposed to the virus, have been exposed to it and recovered, or, you know, were exposed to it and didn't even know that they were carriers of it at one point, because, of course, there are some folks that are asymptomatic.

There's a lot that we don't know, and we also have seen that, in a lot of cases, especially with the variants, that folks who do contract the virus have long-term

effects and are continually, you know, relapsing or having additional issues that we just don't fully understand.

I mention this because, you know, in particular, or in relation to this bill there are some concerns about what the impact will be. I do think that there needs to be a closer look or a better understanding about how folks might need additional assistance going forward. You know, for a lot of people, you know, any kind of—if you have any kind of physical work that you need to do, if you've been affected by COVID-19 that can be a serious impediment to your ability to earn a living. So I think there's—there needs to be a special consideration, you know, as we move forward.

And in this case, I think—I guess what that means is partially making sure that the legislation, again, doesn't leave some people behind. But, you know, also going forward, I would suggest that proper funding for these kind of supports would be an appropriate response to ensure that if there are issues where we need—we see additional people who need these kind of supports that we're able to fund the supports to make sure that they are okay, that they can get through—either get through whatever situation they're in or be able to be supported for the long term. This is a major concern that I think people have.

I also think that there's a whole—the whole other consideration of the psychological impacts of the pandemic from folks who have had the virus, but also people who have been directly affected in their own household, their own families, or in their communities. And I do think that there is going to be a significant fallout that we need to, as a society, begin to grapple with, and here in this province ensure that any legislation that we bring forward would address that.

So, you know, maybe I'm suggesting at this point. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that in the middle of this pandemic and in this—in the middle of this health crisis when folks, you know, even those who are part of the disabilities community, are probably stretched thin in terms of a whole number of factors related to the pandemic, and then the additional people who may need to access disability supports, is this the time to be making changes like this? Is this the time to be wholesale throwing out legislation and bringing in new legislation? Or is this the time, maybe, that we, you know, we start the conversation, we begin the debate, and we make sure that we listen to everybody, that we listen to folks that are impacted, we listen to

the health experts, we listen to every Manitoban on this. That might be a better strategy.

But, once again, we see a government who, you know, doesn't seem to want to have that debate; they don't want to listen to folks; they don't want to hear from the public. Again, as the member from Keewatinook, who's doing a great job in helping me formulate my thoughts, so I want to thank him—you know, they are—they're only willing to silence—or they're only interested in silencing voices rather than lifting up and enabling.

So, you know, that's the work I think that we can do as an official opposition. Again it's, you know, it would be one thing and it would be a task that would, I think, be appreciated by a lot of people right now just to simply oppose this government, and that's certainly something that we've committed ourselves to doing.

* (16:20)

But we're also always looking for ways that we can make things better or, you know, work with folks to bring their voices here to the Legislature. I think that's the work that I heard the member for Thompson (Ms. Adams) say that she's committed to doing, and I think all of us in this caucus are committed to doing that, and we'll continue to bring forward these voices.

So I appreciate the words that have been put on the record so far by the member for Thompson. I know there are others that want to speak to this and put some words on the record as well. I hope that we don't leave anybody out.

And again, you know, I mean, sometimes I'm accused of being, like, this eternal optimist, right. Like, I always say no, no, no, these guys are, you know, they're really not trying to, you know, to impact Manitobans negatively, you know; they're generally good people and they're really just trying to make things better from their own, you know, political standpoint.

You know, maybe that's true here, and I'll give the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) the benefit of the doubt with—in that regard. You know, although, you know, as many are cautioning me, every time I seek to give them the benefit of the doubt, it seems like I'm wrong. But, you know, eternal optimist, I will continue to do that.

But at the very least I will encourage the minister, if she is being—coming to this in an honest way, into this debate in an honest way, that she take the time to sit down with the member for Thompson, that she sit

down with members of our caucus, that she make available her staff and departmental resources to ensure that we have an opportunity to understand how this legislation might impact people. And then if there are holes that need to be plugged, that she listen and that she take advice.

It doesn't—you know, this doesn't have to be a partisan place in regards to making sure that people don't get left behind. So if it comes from us, if it comes from members of the public, if it comes from people on the steps of this Legislature in protest, listen to the advice, make things better and don't always just think about the bottom line. Think about how this is going to impact real people.

And every member of the opposite should just remember that, as I said, in 2016 and in 2019, we all knocked on doors with those Disability Matters signs. You know for a fact that they are going to have that same campaign next election. I encourage them to do that. We're all going to be going and knocking on those doors and talking to those folks. And every single one of us is going to have to answer for this legislation.

And we're either going to stand up and say we fought for you and we fought to do the right thing, or they're going to stand up and say, you know, we ran this through without proper consultation and without listening to people. Where do you want to land? Where do you want to be on those days when you're knocking on doors and listening to people?

So I hope that members opposite are paying close attention. I encourage them to get up and put a few words on the record if they so choose, because I think every member of this Legislature has a duty to respond to the concerns that real people have in real situations, and make sure that nobody's left behind.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): Could the honourable member for River Heights turn on your camera and make sure you're not muted?

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): There we—oh. Son of a gun. Finally. Thank you.

Yes, I certainly want to put a few comments on the record on this bill, which I think is an important bill and could potentially be a important step forward.

I will say that the Manitoba Liberals proposed that there should be a separate approach to people with disabilities, that was about 20 years ago. So it's good that the PCs are only 20 years behind us. Of course,

the NDP never got there in 17 years, they maintained the status quo, and that's unfortunate; unfortunate for people with disabilities, unfortunate for all of Manitoba.

Now, as I understand this proposal, it would provide for a more secure approach for those who have severe and long-term disabilities. It would 'apri'—it 'pote'—provide the potential for more individualized approach. It would not require that individuals search for employment, but that if they would like training or support in order to learn or to have the potential for employment down the road, that that would be available to them.

These steps can be potentially very good, but of course much will be in the regulations. So, as one individual who's concerned about people with disabilities said to me: The devil is in the details as to whether this will turn out to be a good thing or not.

I'm pleased that there's going to be consultations with individuals and organizations in the disability community. This will be absolutely vital, in order to get measures and regulations which are workable and which will be helpful to those with severe and long-term prolonged disabilities.

I have some concerns and I will list these. First of all, the definitions of what is a severe disability—clearly, a severe physical or a mental disability should be eligible. There are instances, I suggest, where somebody who has chronic addictions, which is essentially a chronic mental illness, should also be included on an individualized basis because I think that that is the kind of security that some individuals with addictions need in order to be able to access these supports and the help that they need to make progress and to get their lives turned around.

A prolonged disability: There seems to be an indication that this would be a disability for a year. I think very often, speaking from a medical just—perspective, one can make a judgment without having to wait a year to assess the extent of the disability, and I would hope that the government would enable this.

That is to say that just from an assessment of the type of disability that a person has and the type of medical condition, it should be able to make a—which should be possible in many circumstances. You know, one can't always predict, but certainly in many circumstances it should be possible to say that an individual fits the category of a prolonged disability without having to wait a long time.

It has been suggested—which I think is a suggestion which should be taken into consideration—that this category might include both those with a severe disability which is not necessarily prolonged and those with a prolonged disability which is not necessarily as severe as the government seems to indicate. So I hope that the government will look at those options.

There is a concern that many of the supports may just be the supports which have been present under EIA, that this could be just changing the name without really changing the substance. If this is going to be effective, the goal can't be just EIA under a different name; it needs to be something that is focused and needed and helpful to people with a long-term disability.

* (16:30)

I would like to suggest that—to the government several areas where there are particular concerns. In this bill, the government has the ability to put a lien on a property where the government has contributed dollars to that property. There may be some instances where the government contributes a large sum, a single large sum of money to purchase a home or an apartment or make it into a condo, what have you, and that, you know, it would be justifiable for the government to take a lien on that property.

But on the other hand, if money from what would ordinarily be a rental allowance was able to be used in some circumstances by the person to pay on a mortgage—to pay for a home, so the person can build equity—then the government shouldn't take a lien on that property. That should be allowed.

Why can't somebody with a severe prolonged disability use the same money for equity in a home as they would be using to rent a home, just like others have that choice. Now given the amount of support, that may not often be possible, but where it can be, there's no reason it should not be.

Gifts from friends and families should not be considered as income. Most of the time, when friends or families provide funds for somebody who has a severe disability, they are providing those for a specific need or purpose, or so that the person with a disability can have, on occasion, a little extra money for something special. This shouldn't be clawed back. It shouldn't be considered as income under the program and clawed back as earned income is in the same way. I think that's not fair.

Earnings shouldn't be clawed back, as they currently are, as severally as under EIA at the moment. As an example, we shouldn't be taxing—which is essentially what you're doing when you're clawing back money—individuals with a severe and prolonged disability at a higher rate than they would if they were earning, you know, that particular level of income total.

So if somebody was earning \$20,000 or had an income from—both from the support from this program and from what they earn of \$20,000, their marginal tax rate should be the same as somebody who's earning \$20,000. It shouldn't be 90 per cent after the first hundred or 200 dollars as it is today. So that this would allow individuals to retain more of the money that they earn without having to feel that, you know, everything they earn is being taken away from them which is not fair, and that's a bad system.

In fact, under the current system, what happens is that people often don't report that, it becomes a gotcha game on behalf of some of the people who work in EIA. But I mean, the fact is that we shouldn't be clawing back money or taxing it at a higher level in the way we are currently. We should change that.

It is—it should be easy to add income without moving out of the program, recognizing that a person with a severe and prolonged disability is starting behind others, quite frankly, and the ability to have employment, to work, to manage conditions for themselves—there are often a lot of extra costs either from equipment or from therapies which are needed and, you know, this is not reasonable to be clawing back all the income that people are earning or the large majority of it.

It's important, with this program, to give people more flexibility. The program shouldn't try to control people's lives. EIA too often ends up putting people into a straitjacket and it is often not a happy straitjacket or an easy straitjacket because they become very limited in terms of what they can do. They feel they're being watched every move they make. And we need to be able to make people's lives a little more livable, a little more friendly, a little happier.

It is good that there is an appeal process. That appeal process needs people sitting on the board who have had lived experience, who have disabilities, should form a considerable portion of the people on that appeal board so they understand what it is really like to live with a disability and can be really helpful.

There needs to be a process, clearly, for people who are moving off the program, who have got work, if—and we should congratulate them for that success. But there needs to be some security in terms of the ability to get back on the program if needed. There needs to be a situation where the people are not—feel like they're taking a huge risk. It should be easy to move on and off the program so that it is a seamless change and not one which has got lots of hurdles.

The current legislation constantly includes changes in the income of a spouse or common-law partner. I think one has to be very careful with this, and part of the reason is this: A number of years ago, I was visiting in New Zealand, and we met with individuals in the disability community there who had been fighting hard to get a better situation. And what they had realized was that a very high proportion of instances where one of two partners or a spouse was severely injured in a car accident, that a very high proportion of those relationships ended up breaking up.

And why was that? That was in part because the demands of looking after somebody with a disability were so high that, in fact, it burnt out people or it resulted in them having to use a large proportion of what they earned to help their partner who had a disability and get them the support.

So it's really important to be able to create a little more distance between the income of the spouse or common-law partner and the individual with a severe disability. The severe—person with a severe disability needs their ability to have, even within this relationship, some independence; independence in terms of financial stability, financial security.

And to have a situation where the whole burden is put on the partner is not satisfactory, because what you end up doing is breaking up really good and strong relationships which just can't stand the sort of pressure that is put on them. And we need to do better than that. We need to recognize this.

In the section in this bill under the Manitoba assistance amendment act, similar to what I've already said, we should be very careful about including as income gifts and gratuities. We should be careful in terms of including in income all real and personal property. There has been a tendency in the past to force people to sell properly—property or take it away. You know, we should enable people to have some stability in their circumstances without having to take away lots of property, including the house and putting

people really on a straitjacket under—whether it's EIA or under this new program.

* (16:40)

So there's a—under the regular EIA there is a need to look at this issue of clawing back a marginal tax rate. This is an area which would really help with some changes so that people who start to earn or have ability temporarily to earn income, to have their income, you know, all taken away is very discouraging and disheartening. We should give people a better chance than that.

Now, I want to, at this point, talk a little bit about where things are going. I said 20 years ago we put forward this sort of a program. We would have been a little clearer on some of the design, as I've already talked about. But now, in fact, what has happened is that there is a clear move toward providing people a minimum basic income.

And, quite frankly, I think that this is the direction that we need to consider. It is a step beyond what this bill is looking at. It provides people a—much more ability to determine their own situation. It provides a framework for people to earn income without having it taxed back at the—or, clawed back the rate that it is here, and it provides a situation where people can have a better opportunity to have a better overall income and get out of poverty.

So I think that we should be, in fact, taking a step beyond this and looking at a minimum basic income and implementing that. I know the Conservatives are not there at this point. I think that's a direction that we, as Liberals, have decided that it is worth looking at and moving forward on.

So I, at this point, have some generally favourable things to say about this bill, but at the same time some cautions in terms of how it will actually turn out. I think we await still what will happen at committee stage and the input from people. I hope we have a circumstance where there are many people who come to the committee, who are there, ready to present and provide input and advice.

It is an important forum for people to contribute their ideas for all of us who are MLAs to listen to, and I think it would be a great thing if we had lots and lots of people from the disability community presenting and, at the moment, when we have virtual presenters, that, in fact, should be a lot more possible.

There are many people who are not going to be easily able to attend the usual type of committee

meetings that we have but who now can, and I hope in the future that we're going to be able to continue to have virtual presenters because I think that would be a step forward and I think it would be a significant step forward, particularly for individuals with disabilities.

So, thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to put these words on the record. Merci. Miigwech.

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Happy to be speaking this afternoon on Bill 72, but before I get into that, I want to just first just address, you know, where we are right now and in terms of the pandemic, just acknowledging that we have, you know, eight more deaths recorded and announced today.

You know, our condolences go out to their families and friends. I think this is the highest death-day of deaths since midway through January, I believe January 19th.

And so it's significant that, you know, the—we're kind of right now in the middle of the third 'wave' of the pandemic. And I think that this is notable as it relates to Bill 72 because we know that many people in the disabled community are disproportionately affected at a greater rate for COVID-19 than the general pop—public.

And we know there are very many people in the marginalized community, those who both are, you know, find themselves in a lower economic status, those who might be part of a racialized community, those who are a part of the disabled community are all more and higher risk of COVID-19, this very deadly virus that's in our community.

And I am very concerned about that because we have seen over the past many weeks the rising case numbers of COVID in our province. And it worries me about what that would do to the population in our province who is a part of the disabled community.

I wish that there were, you know, very positive things to say about our current health-care system but, sadly, the news we've seen has been very negative with ICUs overrun, at full capacity and members—patients having to be flown to other jurisdictions to seek that medical help from an intensive care unit that they, you know, would have expected their provincial government to do that.

I know that members of the disability community have been strong advocates for there to be triage—proper triage protocols so that they would have

assurances that they wouldn't be treated any differently than any other Manitoban. And I think that's important aspect to consider as we are navigating this record level of cases and trying to find our way through as a province through the third wave of the pandemic.

And I think the key aspect that this relates to Bill 72 is that the community is asking for respect as it's being dealt with during the pandemic, and same thing with changes to services for disabled individuals.

And they're looking for respect, they're looking for programs that are going to respect their needs and their—and serve them best in their lives so that they can have the care and the services and the frameworks to support them so they can enjoy the—and be the most beneficial and the—you know, really expand their quality of life and give them the most options that they can have.

Now, we know in Bill 72 that it really acts to understand that there are people who have long-prolonged and severe disabilities and it changes the supports for them.

We know that in this bill, what we are concerned with is that some Manitobans who might be with a disability that lasts less than one year, we are concerned that this bill would allow for those people to get less support. That is a major concern because those individuals are key members of our community, and our government should be looking out for them as a primary objective, especially when it comes to the disabled community.

* (16:50)

You know, in the bill—and I know many members before me have stated this, the section which, you know, amends subsection 5(1) which strikes out, you know, physical or mental incapacity or disorder that is likely to continue for more than 90 days, and substitutes incapacity or disorder that is likely to continue for more than one year.

And that's really important to note the difference there. And I'm wondering, when I see this written in language like this in the bill, whether this change in time frame and—is coming from the disabled community and their—and the people who work in that community.

Is it coming from a place of knowledge and a place of understanding the best needs and the best services that can be provided for individuals who have

severe and prolonged physical or mental disability? Does it come from their stories and their requesting to have this change in place? Does it come from their advocacy work to call on the government to make this change? I don't think it does.

And I think it comes from a place of financial means and budgetary constraints. And this government, again, putting its policies on the same string with its strict agenda of austerity.

And when you combine trying to be able to provide proper services for a group such as those who suffer from prolonged and severe disabilities, and you are being so stringent with this approach, it often leads to policies that don't take into full account the vast array of outcomes that could actually happen when a bill like Bill 72 would be enacted.

Now, we're worried that this change means that disability supports will effectively only be available for Manitobans who have what amounts to permanent disabilities, and we do think that there's a subset of Manitobans who could be left out in that case. And we know that 22,000 Manitobans currently receive disability supports.

Now, in the briefing, you know, we know the department is anticipating about 10,000 people will meet the new definition of disability for the purposes of this act, and what we want to know is—question is, what does that mean, going forward, for the supports of the less than 12,000 people as a result of this bill? Is that going to mean that there's going to be decreased supports due to the change, of anyone who's experiencing disability for more than 90 days being eligible for those supports?

And it's a question that I think, you know, is concerning and that, I think, these sorts of things, if it's rooted in a place where the disabled community is coming and asking for these sorts of changes to this time frame, then I understand that it's something that we should be listening to as a Legislature. But I don't see it coming from this group. I don't see that consultation having been done. I see this coming from a budgetary place, and that is very concerning for me.

I do want to share my own experience. It's—you know, prior to my being elected, I served on a board for a non-profit called Open Access Resource Centre. In that organization we worked with people who had disabilities.

The goal of that organization, Open Access Resource Centre, was to improve the lives of

Manitobans who had speech challenges through the use of communication devices.

And we know that for these people it's—communication is essential for everyone; these people with disabilities, they needed a long-term system, solution, to help them provide the supports so that they could be successful in their communication.

So, as an organization, we were able to help people, you know, acquire—find resources to acquire these sort of communication devices for their long-term communication. Often these were children who are still trying to learn, you know, in school, but also learn about how to use these devices and communicate with them.

So I know that a lot of training went in. A lot of training went in to help these individuals, often young children. Their network of support, whether that was EAs in schools, family supports or other support workers in their lives, to train them about how to use this device and how to properly communicate.

And I think that is—that's an essential part. I mean, I'm talking to all of you right now.

And so, with a—for a person with a disability to have that same conversation, they need to have, many times, a tool or technology or device to assist them in doing so. That—those programs were important in those individuals' lives, but they were essential for all of us as a community. And they worked because we listened to those people and those families who are trying to go through this and support an individual with a disability.

We worked with them to try to find the best fit and the best need. We knew that every device out there wouldn't just work for everyone. There wasn't a one-size-fits-all solution for individuals.

What it was is working together, seeing whether this was, you know, an eye gaze system for one person, you know, with a Proloquo2Go technology or another sort of technology, another app on a device that needed to be fit.

We were often able to accommodate using a trial run, you know, of a few weeks to see if that person was able to fit this and to see whether their support network was able to assist them with this, if this was a good fit.

But that happened because we had conversations and were able to talk back and forth with these people to find what worked best for them in their lives.

And that's the same model and the same work that should be done with this bill and with—that the minister should be doing, to have these conversations with these people as this bill is being framed, and so that this bill can represent the true interests and the true best interests of people who are going to be the ones who are going to be affected by this, the legislation. And I think that's the missing step.

The minister has talked about the many, you know—and I think the—our member from Thompson has kind of highlighted the many gaps in this bill and the many parts of this bill that are not clear.

And the minister says that many of these gaps and holes in the legislation are going to be filled in by regulation and that that regulation—during that process of regulation it may be, you know, listen to community members and do some consultation at that time.

Oh, why wasn't that consultation and that, you know, conversation happening at the start of this legislation so that at the very root, at the very core of framing a bill that will affect the disabled community, you have the input from the disabled community? Right? Like, that only makes sense. And I think that's the missing aspect of this bill.

So I—you know, I think that we all see the intention with this bill. We all see what the minister is intending to do and improve our system but, you know, it's getting, like, a C grade here. Right? There's a lot of incomplete here.

We see what was—the attempt is, but there's a lot missing. A lot more should be done and should be input into this bill to make it truly something that is going to support a wide variety of Manitobans.

And think that that's important that we actually take those steps to ensure that, as legislators, we're truly bringing forward bills that are going to be beneficial for all Manitobans.

I'm very—I know that my time for today is running close and I'll ensure that I touch on the—many of my points as I continue to speak at the next opportunity for this bill.

But I do want to just briefly—if I—while the time is remaining, to speak to the member—the point brought up by the 'mini'—the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) regarding to a basic income.

And I think that's an important discussion that we should be having—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): Order.

When this matter is again before the House, the member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses) will have 15 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., as previously agreed, the House is now recessed until 10 a.m. tomorrow, when we will resume proceedings with the House resolving into the Committee of Supply.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 27, 2021

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