

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALTomARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	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, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan, Hon.	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	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle, Hon.	Turtle Mountain	PC
REYES, Jon, Hon.	Waverley	PC
SALA, Adrien	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SMITH, Andrew, Hon.	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
<i>Vacant</i>	Fort Whyte	
<i>Vacant</i>	Thompson	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, March 14, 2022

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

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

Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 21—The Highway Traffic Amendment and Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act

Hon. Doyle Piwniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care (Mr. Johnston), that Bill 21, The Highway Traffic Amendment and Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act, be now read for the first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Piwniuk: Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce Bill 21, The Highway Traffic Amendment and Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act.

This bill will be amend The Highway Traffic Act to enable pilot testing of vehicles and devices, including micro-mobility devices like electric scooters

and low-speed vehicles on roads, on sidewalks, by regulation.

Expanding the use of low-emissions vehicles will help to reduce Manitoba's greenhouse emissions and contribute to the Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan. It will also allow the municipalities to make bylaws designating shared streets where pedestrians, cyclists, people using recreational equipment, motorists have equal access to roadways, subject to rules of use.

In addition, the bill makes amendments to The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act to address the insurance requirements of micro-mobility and low-speed vehicle pilot projects. These changes will allow devices like 'electric' scooters to—at low-speed vehicles to be tested safely while ensuring Manitoba keeps pace with other jurisdictions that already are testing and allowing these devices.

Shared streets will also be given by municipalities that—the opportunity to let communities connect with safe zones for all road users.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Bill 22—The Environment Amendment Act (Pesticide Restrictions)

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Environment, Climate and Parks): I move, seconded by the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Johnson), that Bill 22, The Environment Amendment Act (Pesticide Restrictions), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Wharton: It gives me great pleasure to introduce the environment mental—the environmental amendment act.

The bill will amend The Environment Act to allow the use of Health Canada-approved pesticides on lawns. Previous legislation limited the use of pesticides from Manitoba-approved lists.

The bill recognizes Health Canada as the foremost expert in this field. Health Canada's pesticides review process is thorough and safe.

Madam Speaker, the product labels provide easy-to-follow directions to minimize risk.

The bill goes even further than other Prairie provinces, prohibiting cosmetic pesticide use in sensitive areas including municipal playgrounds, picnic areas, dog parks and provincial parks, in addition to schools, child-care centres and hospitals that are already protected under the current legislation.

With these protections in place, the bill will provide flexibility for Manitobans to have usable, esthetic green spaces in all our communities throughout Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Committee reports? Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Agriculture, and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

Canadian Agricultural Safety Week

Hon. Derek Johnson (Minister of Agriculture): I rise in the House today to recognize Canadian Agricultural Safety Week and the challenging work that those in agriculture do every day.

Canadian agriculture safety week is an annual campaign that is held in the third week of March of each year. This year, Canadian agriculture safety week will take place from March 13th to March 19th under the theme of Safety Is Our Standard—Your Farm, Your Family, Your Success.

The aim of this campaign and Canadian agriculture safety week is to bring public awareness to those importance and the importance of farm safety.

Farms provide a great learning ground for many positive life skills. Living and working on the farm can help to build a positive work ethic, teach responsibility, increase the respect for the land and much, much more, Madam Speaker.

At the same time, it takes time for guidance for everyone, especially children, to recognize and learn about the potential hazards that may exist on a farm.

Inspiring farm families and farming communities to think deeply about the importance of safe workplaces every day will continue to forge success in the agricultural industry.

The most important part of our farms and ag companies are the people who show up to work every single day, and we need to continue to keep our farm communities and families safe.

It is an important week for our Manitoba agriculture industry, and I encourage my colleagues to wear their Ag Safety ribbons and the—all the Manitobans to learn and participate from March 13th to March 19th.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

* (13:40)

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): I am honoured to speak about the Canadian Agricultural Safety Week, as I believe health and safety in agriculture is a top priority.

Our farmers are essential to the Canadian way of life. Many of the food on our kitchen tables has been grown right here in Manitoba. However, Canada's agricultural sector is one of the most hazardous industries in which to work. In an average year, Canada mourns the loss of over 100 adults and children due to agricultural fatalities, and many more sustain serious and life-threatening injuries.

There are many dangerous elements of agricultural work, such as working with animals, chemicals, machinery, confined spaces and weather events. That is why this government needs to continue to tackle all aspects of agricultural safety and most importantly, consult farmers for feedback and advice on what can be done to make the agricultural sector safer.

My colleagues and I want to thank everyone who works in the agricultural sector in Manitoba and across Canada. We recognize the risks you take each and every day, and acknowledge that more needs to be done to protect you and your families as well. I also want to thank the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association for all the work that they do to raise awareness and address issues of health and safety in agriculture.

Thank you.

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

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to respond to the statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, for many years, injury rates and time lost to injury in agriculture have been too high. But the numbers have come down in the last 10 years, which is a good sign. This appears to be because of a combination of improved design of equipment, improved safety standards and improved handling of chemicals. But we can and must do more.

More attention needs to be given not just to traumatic injuries but also to diseases and health conditions which are more common among farmers. These include respiratory conditions, exposures to farm chemicals, mental health issues and hearing loss. The farm chemical exposures may be the cause of the increase in certain cancers among farmers, including non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, acute leukemia, multiple myeloma and soft tissue sarcoma.

Hearing loss is common among farmers: 50 per cent or more of farmers over 50 years of age have hearing loss. Modern cabs shield the driver from the loud noise of their tractor, but, in the past, prolonged exposure was very common.

When we're talking about farm safety, we should also consider safety of farm animals. I was called recently by a farmer who lost several calves. Some hay from last year's drought was high in nitrates and his calves died from high levels of nitrates. The farmer I talked to had been farming for 50 years and he'd never experienced this problem before or even heard of it. More could be done to help farmers be aware of issues like this.

Let us work hard on an ongoing basis to continue improving farm safety. Farm safety week is a good time to remind all of us.

Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COVID-19 and Mental Health

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): Our world looks and feels a lot different than it did two years ago. We've had to learn very quickly how to respond to an invisible virus that has robbed us of our sense of safety and led to a fractured connection with one another.

There are many grieving hearts in our province, not only for lost loved ones, but also for the loss of what normal used to be. No one could have predicted

two years ago that a simple handshake would become a safety risk for ourselves and our loved ones.

Humans aren't designed to be isolated from one another, and experts will tell you the lack of positive physical interactions takes a toll on your mental health. Studies of children in orphanages who did not receive cuddles or loving embraces reveal missed growth milestones and a failure to thrive.

Adults are no different, Madam Speaker. Research has shown that hugs release endorphins in the brain and have an immediate and relaxing and calming effect on individuals. It can even improve your quality of sleep. Physical touch is important to our overall well-being, and a lack of touch can result in higher anxiety levels and feelings of despair.

I was recently reminded of my own need for human contact when a small child randomly came and hugged me at a gathering of my constituency of Fort Richmond. The effects were immediate and I was overcome with emotion at the simple gesture of this hug.

Madam Speaker, there are many Manitobans who are struggling right now after two years of efforts to fight COVID-19. People around the world are reeling from multiple waves of upsetting information and the unknowns about what the future holds, especially as we witness the unjust violence against Ukraine.

Members in this Chamber are not immune to the effects of chronic stress. I think we all could use a collective hug right about now.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Two-Year Anniversary of COVID-19 Pandemic

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): March 12th marked the two-year anniversary of Manitoba's first case of COVID-19. Since that day, our lives have been forever changed.

While I don't think any of us could have imagined what would happen in these two years, I know all of us are hopeful that we can soon truly move past the acuity of COVID-19. This pandemic has been hard and, even in between waves, unrelenting in how it's shaped our lives.

There are many people who we can and should continue to thank for their tireless commitment to the well-being of Manitobans. From public servants, scientists, health-care workers, essential workers, educators, community organizers, small businesses—the list is very long: we thank you.

Some say that this pandemic has caused divisions, and while I recognize this crisis exacerbated inequities and exposed deep-rooted issues we should have faced long before March 2020, that isn't the narrative that stands out most to me. The vast majority of people have made good choices, have been there for their neighbours, have shown up for their communities and have demonstrated the very best of us.

We all have stories which highlight how people came together, showed ingenuity and made it clear that leaving people behind or without what they need isn't an acceptable option. I can certainly think of many examples in Union Station: Comm.UNITY.204, Food 4 All, Defend Winnipeg, Winnipeg Trails Association—just to name a few.

Moving forward, we get to decide what we continue to practise. I think it would serve us best to practise what's most been displayed: compassion, community-mindedness, building solutions beyond the typical boxes so that as we progress we do so together.

Madam Speaker, 1,716 Manitobans have lost their lives to COVID-19—my deepest sympathies to all those who are grieving the loss of a loved one.

I ask for leave so that we can observe a moment of silence for the Manitobans we've lost and for their families.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave for a moment of silence? [*Agreed*]

Please stand.

A moment of silence was observed.

Invasion of Ukraine

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Vérendrye): Being of Ukrainian heritage and proud of it, I must speak out against what is happening in Ukraine.

On February 24th, Ukraine was attacked with a full-scary—full-scale military invasion by Russia. Since then, the attacks have only got more barbaric.

Just this past week, a children's hospital in Mariupol was bombed and left in rubble, injuring many. Women and children have been killed in this conflict. Residential areas, homes, apartment blocks, grocery stores have been targeted and destroyed, even though Putin pledged not to attack these areas.

This past Saturday on W5, report of the atrocities that Vladimir Putin is guilty of, how he's using social

media to spread his fake news, totally misreporting what is happening in Ukraine.

Putin is destroying Ukraine's infrastructure. He is trying to destroy democracy.

Madam Speaker, we cannot let Putin continue his assault on Ukraine. If he is successful in Ukraine, well, where will he go next: Georgia, Latvia, Poland? We must do all in our power to push back against Putin, continue sanctions against Russia to cripple Putin's war efforts.

W5 also mentioned that there are many Russians that do not believe in what Putin is doing and are leaving Russia.

* (13:50)

Since the start of the—of this war, more than 2 million people have fled Ukraine and are in need of help. We must continue with humanitarian aid to help these refugees survive.

I know that Manitoba has pledged \$650,000 to date and there has been great support from individuals. I know that both Canada and Manitoba are opening their doors for both immigration and refugees. But what Ukrainians want is their country back.

We have just endured two years of a global pandemic, but what is happening in Ukraine has the potential to be far worse than COVID-19.

My thoughts and prayers are with the Ukrainian people.

Thank you. Dyakuyu. Slava Ukraini. [*Glory to Ukraine.*]

Andrew and Mary Kuchenski

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): I'm pleased to rise in the House today to recognize two wonderful constituents, Andrew and Mary Kuchenowski [*phonetic*].

Andrew and Mary's great-grandparents came from Ukraine and Poland in the late 1890s to Canada and chose to make Manitoba their home.

For many years, Andrew and Mary lived on their family farm and raised their children there. In 2009, they made the choice to buy a home in the Maples, and have contributed greatly to the community.

Andrew and Mary are both hard-working Manitobans who are now retired, enjoying their time with their grandkids.

Prior to COVID-19, they would regularly exercise at the wellness centre, but during the pandemic

their exercise consisted of long walks in the community. While on these walks, they noticed how much garbage littered the streets.

Although littering laws and regulations are in place to reduce litter and the harmful effect on our communities, a simple walk or drive down any street will show you how much litter covers our streets.

Andrew and Mary identified this problem, and rather than walking past it they decided to take a proactive approach in tackling this issue.

Every single walk, they collect the litter seen in the community and properly dispose of it, making our streets safer for all.

Please join me in thanking Andrew and Mary for their invaluable efforts. Your work does not go unnoticed.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Help Ukraine—Morden and Pembina Valley

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to stand and update the Legislature on efforts in my constituency to respond to the Russian invasion and aid the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine.

Manitoba's Ukrainian community has been rallying in the last number of weeks to assist people in Ukraine. Yevgeniya Tatarenko moved to Morden in 2016. She still has family living in Ukraine. She runs a Ukrainian school in Morden and teaches Ukrainian language, history and culture on Saturdays. She and others in the community banded together to form Help Ukraine—Morden and Pembina Valley to raise funding and support for civilians and defence efforts in their country.

Their first project was sewing Ukrainian flags to raise donation money; 150 flags into that effort, they began receiving humanitarian aid including medical supplies and donations. Madam Speaker, \$9,000 and 13 days later, the group is setting its sight on an even more ambitious project: sewing thousands of first aid tactical bags for volunteers and paramedic teams on the front lines in Ukraine, with a local plant, a custom sewing plant offering free labour to assist with those bags.

This past Saturday, the organization hosted an artisan fair at 500 Stephen St., where local artists donated artwork and crafts, and all proceeds were provided to Ukrainian organizations and to help dislocated people. They also accepted donations of

clothing, baby food, pet food and fleece jackets and, of course, Ukrainian flags in exchange for donations.

The 2021 Canada census reveals that Morden is the fastest growing city in Manitoba with a 14.5 per cent population group, but that includes the 120 Ukrainian families who have come to live in Morden since the Morden immigration program started in 2012.

There are many exciting and inspiring stories in our communities that are happening where individuals and groups are coming together to make a difference, to respond to the crisis in Ukraine. It's my pleasure today to be able to highlight the efforts of one such group for my colleagues in the Legislature.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Transfer of ICU Patients Out of Province No Inquest into Patient's Death

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Krystal Mousseau's life mattered. She is dearly missed by her family, friends and children.

As you know, Madam Speaker, Krystal Mousseau died on May 25th, 2021, when she was moved out of Brandon hospital as part of an effort to send Manitoba ICU patients to other provinces. Her death is an instance of a Manitoban dying in a situation that was created when our health-care system ran out of capacity.

We now know that the Chief Medical Examiner will not call an inquest into her death.

I will table the letter in which the Chief Medical Examiner outlines his reasoning for not calling the inquest, or at least not yet.

I would ask the Premier if she agrees with this decision?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Well, obviously, our hearts go out to the family members of Krystal—this very difficult time for the last two years for many families in Manitoba and, indeed, around the world. And, of course, obviously, I'll have a look at this and we will assess it.

I don't comment on individual cases on the floor of the Chamber, Madam Speaker, but, certainly, we're willing to look into this.

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

Equipment and Staff Training Concerns

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, the letter from the Chief Medical Examiner leaves many unanswered questions.

We know that proper training is important when transporting ICU patients, given how sick they are and how closely both they and the medications being administered them need to be monitored.

Now, I asked former premier Brian Pallister if the staff transporting Krystal Mousseau had the proper training to care for ICU patients—this is on May 26, 2021. He said, and I quote: They do, or our health experts would not be using their services. End quote.

But the CME letter—Chief Medical Examiner's letter—is conspicuously silent on this point.

Will the Premier advise the House if the company transporting Krystal Mousseau used staff that had the proper training to transport ICU patients?

Mrs. Stefanson: Of course, I'll—as I said before in my previous answer, we'll look into the matter further.

The member is just bringing this forward on the floor of the Chamber today. I would have been happy to have looked at it if he wanted to bring it to my attention outside the Chamber or to my office. Certainly, we'll—we will look into it, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Kinew: As I said, Madam Speaker, many unanswered questions, which continues to suggest that an inquest is needed in this case.

We know that health-care staff need the proper training to be able to transport ICU patients, but they also need the right equipment. When a patient is in an ICU, they are very sick and the slightest change can be catastrophic for them. That's why that right equipment for the patients to be able to monitor them closely so that they can get the best care possible is so important.

Now, this is especially important when you try and move a sick patient like that out of the ICU.

Did the staff transporting Krystal Mousseau have the right equipment to monitor her condition in the vehicles they used?

Mrs. Stefanson: Certainly, I already told the Leader of the Opposition that we would look into the matter further, Madam Speaker.

But what I will say is that I know that we have done a lot of work in terms of increasing the capacity of ICU over the pandemic period, Madam Speaker. I know that more nurses have been trained to work in ICUs over the course of the last couple of years. We'll continue to move in that direction as needed.

Of course, again, we'll look into the details of this, but I will say, Madam Speaker, that it's very important that doctors are left to do their jobs in this. They make the decisions. They are the experts when it comes to these things.

I hope the Leader of the Opposition is not saying that for some reason I should interfere in this and overrule something that a doctor or professional in the situation would make—a decision that doctors make, Madam Speaker.

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

Transport Services—Equipment and Training

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, last May our hospitals had run out of room. We didn't have the capacity to care for anyone else being sent to an intensive-care unit. That's why Krystal Mousseau was moved from an ICU bed.

Now, government, in that situation, hired companies to transport patients out of province. We know that government should conduct due diligence at any time, but when you're talking about moving critically ill patients, the standards that those companies should be held to need to be even higher.

* (14:00)

The Premier was the Health minister at the time these transports were taking place.

Can the Premier tell this House if she did the due diligence necessary to ensure medical transportation companies had the proper equipment and training to care for ICU patients?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, doctors make difficult decisions every day about transferring patients, but they do it based on the best interests of the patient. And I—and those are decisions that are made by clinicians. Those are decisions made by doctors. It's their professional decision that is made in these instances, and we'll continue to look to those doctors to make those professional decisions.

It is not something that the premier or any elected official should be making. Those are not decisions for

us to make. Those are decisions that should be made by medical professionals.

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

Guidelines Used to Select Patients

Mr. Kinew: The decision to hire the company that moved the patients was taken by government, and that was a question on the due diligence.

The letter that I tabled from the Chief Medical Examiner states that there were several criteria used to determine which of the ICU patients would be transported. He lists these guidelines as (1) the age of the patient, (2) their overall level of health and (3) the existence of comorbidities. The Chief Medical Examiner's letter is very clear about these guidelines.

The Premier was the Health minister at the time when these criteria were developed and implemented in our province.

Is the Chief Medical Examiner correct or incorrect in saying these were the guidelines used to select ICU patients for out-of-province transport?

Mrs. Stefanson: I—again, I indicated to the member opposite that we would look into the individual case that he is referencing here.

Again, in general, these are decisions that are made by doctors, not by politicians, Madam Speaker. We thank the doctors for the incredible work that they do on a daily basis. They make difficult decisions, but these are decisions that are made by professionals, by doctors, not by politicians.

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

Inquest into Krystal Mousseau's Death

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, Krystal Mousseau's life mattered. Her death represents a significant moment in the pandemic. It is a clear instance of a Manitoban dying in a situation that came about because our health-care system ran out of capacity.

Now, the government's decision to not call an inquest here is disappointing. But there are still many unanswered questions about her care. We will continue to advocate and ask questions, pushing for answers and demanding justice for Krystal.

Will the government listen? Will the Premier commit to justice for Krystal Mousseau?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, the decisions around an inquest are made by the Chief Medical Examiner, and we will continue to look to that individual for their expertise.

Again—decision to move patients around, Madam Speaker, is made by doctors, by clinicians. They are the professionals in these situations, not politicians. We will continue to take the advice of the professionals, whether it be the doctors or the Chief Medical Examiner in this situation.

Paid Sick Leave Program Request to Establish

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, the pandemic has made it clear that those whose labour we depend on are often the very same people who have the least job protections and the hardest time securing a living wage. For them, staying home sick and not getting paid is simply not an option, especially when they see—we all see the cost of living increasing. Gas is up. Food is up. Their hydro rates are up. People can't take unpaid days off.

Will the minister commit to implementing permanent paid sick leave program for all workers—sorry—today.

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services): I'm pleased to respond to the question opposite. To date, the Manitoba paid sick leave program has paid out just over \$5.9 million in claims to employers, supporting 21,306 employees.

The program will end down—wind down at the end of March. Currently, we are consistent with most other provinces and we're paying close attention to what other jurisdictions are doing.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, no Manitoban should ever have to choose between a paycheque or their health. But that's what this PC government is forcing them to do.

Mandatory self-isolation requirements are ending, the cost of living is rising and Manitobans barely making a living wage will be left with no choice but to go to work sick, just to be able to hopefully pay for food and shelter.

That's wrong, Madam Speaker, and this government has done nothing to help them. Instead, they've continued to raise the cost of living.

Will the minister do what's right and implement a provincially funded, comprehensive paid sick leave program immediately?

Mr. Helwer: Well, I take issue with the member's statement opposite. We were the first province to introduce this paid sick leave. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Helwer: There were 21,306 employees that took advantage of that, Madam Speaker. There were federal programs in place as well.

So, obviously we've responded to this need in Manitoba, and we'll continue to watch what other provinces do. We are consistent with what is happening in Canada.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, if this government has learned anything from the pandemic, they should realize that people coming to work while sick will result in more disruptions in the workplace, not less. Paid sick leave results in faster recovery times, greater health outcomes and better productivity because less people will contract illness.

The federal government has realized this. BC has realized this and implemented a paid sick leave program for both full-time and part-time employees.

Will the minister do what's right: Implement a paid sick leave program for Manitobans today?

Mr. Helwer: Perhaps the member opposite didn't listen to the answer that we had here: \$5.9 million, Madam Speaker, that was used for Manitoba taxpayers to help with paid sick leave. Federal programs were in place.

I've talked to other labour ministers across Canada and listened to their experience, and they're looking at this issue as well, and we're determining what works best for Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: I would ask the clerks to please stop the clock.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: We have a guest in our gallery that I would like to introduce to you.

We have the honourable Ahmed Hussen, the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion from

our federal counterparts in Ottawa, and we welcome him and his staff to the Legislative Assembly.

* * *

Madam Speaker: And I'm just going to take a moment here, as we have special guests in our gallery and we haven't had very many in the last couple years, I'm going to ask for everybody's co-operation, please, so that we can show that we can have respectful decorum here in our Legislature—maybe more than they have federally. But let's do our best and listen to the questions and answers.

Education System Reform Government Intention

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): Madam Speaker, I hope to add to the theatre today.

So, what the government did to health care, they plan to do education: cuts and chaos. On July 27, Adam Topp met with the DM and ADM for Education, regarding, quote, learning from Shared Health for Manitoba education transformation work.

I'll repeat that again: learning from Shared Health for Manitoba education transformation work, and I'll table the FIPPA for that for the House.

The minister and his staff are trying to find the best way to spin Manitobans of their cuts. The government cut health care, now they want to cut education.

Will the minister commit to not cutting education like they did health care?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): It gives me great opportunity and pleasure to rise in the House today to put some factual information on the record, Madam Speaker.

*(14:10)

So, the member opposite unfortunately is using his time to put misinformation on the record, Madam Speaker. We on this side of the House have increased education funding to school divisions by almost \$120 million, not counting the \$80 million in one-time funding that we provided them for the '21-22 school year, plus the \$77 million, what we've included for the upcoming '22-23 school year.

Madam Speaker, that's more, not less.

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

Mr. Altomare: What they did to health care they're doing to education. Years of underfunding and cuts have continued under the new Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), and it's in the FRAME documents from 2016 right up until today.

And now the facts are even clearer; it's in black and white. They want to learn from Shared Health for what they want to do in education transformation, and what they did to health care they're planning to do for education: cuts, more cuts and control at the Cabinet table. And we've seen how these cuts have worked out for Manitobans the past two years.

Will the minister then commit to not cutting education like they did health care?

Mr. Ewasko: And, again, it's unfortunate that the member, who is an educator himself as well, would stand up in the House today and put misinformation on the record, Madam Speaker.

We're talking about over \$320 million—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: —just in the last two years alone, Madam Speaker, to our education funding. That's a 17.2 per cent—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: —increase. In addition to that, the member comes into the House, after years and years of NDP mismanagement, comes into the House and starts telling us that we should be doing what they never did.

Well, Madam Speaker, we're actually bringing forward a funding review and we're going have that all ready to go for the '23-24 school year.

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

Mr. Altomare: I just remind the other side there about bill 64 and how it devastated the education system, and what they did to health care they're going to kind of do to education.

But the bill—that—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altomare: —bill 64 went even further. It wanted to centralize control right at the Cabinet table, just like with the health care. And they then accused people like parents, community members, teachers of being disinformed and being a vocal minority. If it wasn't

for this NDP team getting in the way, bill 64 would be law right now.

So, the government cut health care, and now they want to cut education.

Will the minister finally commit to not cutting—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Ewasko: It is absolutely laughable when a member of the NDP side talks about anything in regards to team.

I'm not sure which of the 17 or 18 teams—separate teams he's talking about over there, Madam Speaker. Maybe it is even the Leader of the Opposition, one of the ones that had his hand on Selinger's shoulder and a knife in the back. I'm not sure which team he's talking about over there.

But, Madam Speaker, on this side of the House, we're going to continue to make sure that—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: —we're working collaboratively with our education partners, stakeholders, across this—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: —great province of ours, Madam Speaker. That's why we are collaborating with our stakeholders, partners, about the funding review and making sure that we are providing fair—

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

Order.

PNP Applications from Ukraine Funding for Resettlement Services

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): Madam Speaker, there's not enough people evaluating applications through the Provincial Nominee Program.

They do good work, but given the current demands from Ukraine and around the world there's nowhere near enough to keep up. This government should know, situation's getting more dire in the Ukraine by the moment. Three million Ukrainians have fled, mostly women and children. We need more resources to ensure nominees are processed as soon as possible.

Will the minister and the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) commit to additional staff dollars so we can get these nominees here sooner?

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): Our thoughts are with Ukraine and Manitobans with Ukrainian family and friends.

Here in Manitoba, our government is working closely with the federal government and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to implement recently announced special measures for Ukrainian citizens, and we are committed to welcome as many Ukrainians as possible to stay in Manitoba temporarily or permanently.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wasyliv: Obviously, we are thankful for this government's thoughts and prayers, but women and children and innocent civilians are dying by the thousands.

There's now over 3 million who have been displaced. We need more than thoughts and 'crayers'. We need action from this government. We're seeing Saskatchewan take action. We're seeing Alberta take action.

Where is this government? Will the minister and the Premier announce substantial additional funding for resettlement services today?

Mr. Reyes: We look forward to working with Manitoba's Ukrainian community, local businesses and stakeholders to ensure Manitoba can welcome as many Ukrainians as possible who have been displaced by this brutal war.

Our government is already prioritizing applications through the Provincial Nominee Program. And we continue to work closely with the federal government as they assess the international commitments to this evolving humanitarian crisis.

I also want to thank my department for last year's record number of nominations processed last year. A record number of just—6,300 applications, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wasyliv: While people are dying, this minister wants to pat himself on the back.

Manitobans want action. They are demanding action from this government. That means making the nomination process easier. It means increasing staff to process applications. It means waiving application fees.

What it doesn't mean is virtue signalling in this Legislature.

Will the minister and the Premier announce funding for the Ukrainian resettlement services through the Ukrainian Canadian Congress today, and why not?

Mr. Reyes: I was proud to stand alongside our Premier when she did announce the additional \$500,000, now totalling \$650,000, in funding to support the Ukrainian Canadian council Manitoba provincial council and its organizations in the effort to assist families.

Madam Speaker, with the global situation that we are in with respect to the situation in Ukraine, a deputy steering committee has been formed for initial planning on the best ways to accommodate those affected by this unfortunate situation.

As well, I'm very happy that a Ukraine special measures draw in our Provincial Nominee Program's website has been updated and is in place to expedite those wishing to come to our province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker—you can find that at immigratemanitoba.com.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hydro Rate Increases Cost of Living Concerns

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Madam Speaker, Manitobans are struggling to pay their bills. The cost of everything is going way up: tuition, food, housing, gasoline. All of it is causing real distress to so many people.

Yesterday, we learned that arrears to Manitoba Hydro are growing fast: 2,000 more people are in arrears over just a few months. Manitobans just can't keep up with this hydro rate increase.

Will this government take action today? Will they stop raising hydro rates?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Well, Madam Speaker, this government welcomes any question from the NDP on the subject of affordability and standing up for Manitobans.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Friesen: So, while they chirp from that side, I will remind all Manitobans that we just last year reduced the educational property tax credit and returned almost a quarter of a billion dollars into the hands of Manitoba families and business owners and agricultural families and companies. *[interjection]*

* (14:20)

Madam Speaker, that is real relief, now more than ever, for the Manitobans who need to more effectively be able to meet their own obligations at the end of the month. So, while the NDP continue to yell and scream from their seats, we'll continue to stand up for Manitobans.

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

MLA Marcelino: Madam Speaker, decisions of this government are leaving hundreds of thousands of Manitobans behind.

This government directed wage freezes. They gave just a nickel to the minimum wage, but inflation is over 5 per cent. The amount in arrears at Hydro has grown by \$5 million in just the last few months: 2,000 additional Manitobans can't pay their hydro bill.

Action is needed for the many Manitobans struggling to get by.

Will this government take action and stop raising hydro rates like Brian Pallister did?

Mr. Friesen: Well, I—it seems like there are changes on the other side, Madam Speaker, so I want welcome the new Hydro critic to her role, and then I'd like to respond by saying it is a complete disconnect that the former NDP, who knows they meddled in the construction of Keeyask and Bipole III and the Minnesota-Manitoba transmission line.

These projects were billions of dollars over budget and, Madam Speaker, now it's every Manitoban who holds the obligation to be able to continue to help Manitoba Hydro be stable.

So, while that party continues to stick its head in the sand all these years after, Manitobans know the truth and we'll continue to work towards low rates for Manitobans and stability for Manitoba Hydro.

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

MLA Marcelino: Madam Speaker, 2,000 additional Manitobans have gone into arrears on their hydro in the last few months. They're behind a combined

\$5 million. Far too many Manitobans are falling behind on gas to get to work, tuition to graduate and get a better job, and food to put on the table. And now this government is literally making it harder for Manitobans to keep the lights on.

This government is not doing anything to address the current affordability challenge faced by Manitobans.

Will they change course and stop raising hydro rates today?

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, our record on affordability is clear. We lowered the PST. We've sent back a quarter of a billion dollars to Manitobans in respect of this education property tax decrease. We've lowered vehicle registration fees. We've narrowed the scope of the PST.

But on Manitoba Hydro, we know that customers who experience a difficulty in paying can simply contact Manitoba Hydro. They can discuss payment options. There are flexible payment plans, suspension of—late—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: —charges can be suspended. Madam Speaker, there is help out there for people who need to be able to have—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: —that relief.

But let's be clear: they have no plan. Our plan will continue to be to stick up for Manitobans who need someone on their side when it comes to affordability.

International Student Health Care Request to Reinstate Coverage

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): This weekend, my colleague from River Heights and I met with the family and friends of Tevin Obiga, a fourth-year U of M student from Kenya who recently died of a fungal infection. Our hearts go out to his family.

This PC government stopped covering health care for Manitoba students from abroad in 2018. Now, in their grief, Tevin's family are facing a bill of over \$500,000 from Shared Health. The insurance program that was cut, that used to cover all students who were from other countries, cost \$3.1 million.

We're asking the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) to reverse this mistake today, to waive the fee for Tevin's family and others facing these outrageous bills and

immediately reinstate health coverage for students in Manitoba from abroad so this never happens again.

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): Post-secondary education is a critical component in ensuring that we have skilled and talented individuals who can help restart our economy as we move forward through the pandemic.

Our government will continue to work with the leadership of colleges and university students, including international students, to provide one of the best post-secondary educations while keeping the tuition one of the lowest in Canada, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Lamont: It's easy not to care and it's cheap. But for the people being written off, it has a terrible cost.

All these so-called international students have one thing in common: they're Manitobans. They live here. They work here. They pay taxes here. Many have family and community, and they certainly have friends here. These students are the single biggest pool of future immigrants to Manitoba, and they want to live here as Canadians, not as a profit centre for Shared Health.

Will this government accept the challenge, in honour of Tevin, immediately reinstate health insurance for Manitoba students from abroad so not one more Manitoban and their family has to endure the threat of crushing debt being added to the burden of their grief?

Mr. Reyes: Madam Speaker, the stream from coming here as an international student and then applying to our successful Provincial Nominee Program has been a very common theme for many of them who come here to Manitoba. Many of them bring talent and skills and are making Manitoba their home.

Manitoba is the home of hope, and we will continue to welcome people and—around the world, including—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Reyes: —international students. The reason why they come here, I met with—I was in Providence College just this weekend, and they're very happy that we keep one of the lowest tuition fees in western Canada.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

International Student Health Care Request to Reinstate Coverage

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, the government eliminated health-care coverage for international students. As a result, students often delay getting care, the condition gets worse and it's less easy to treat. Tevin Obiga, a healthy seven–25-year-old athlete died from blastomycosis, which is treatable if diagnosed and treated early.

Will the government reinstate coverage for international students under Manitoba Health and name a new program under—after Tevin Obiga?

I also ask the government to develop and announce a more robust program for prevention and early treatment of blastomycosis, so people like Tevin will live instead of dying and Manitoba will no longer have bad international media coverage about international students dying here.

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, I rise today to extend my deepest condolences to the family member that was referenced here today that passed away. And we know how difficult it is during the grieving process for families, and I want them to know that their government is here for them.

Madam Speaker, I want to share in the House today, because I know the members opposite were very concerned for our Red Cross nurses to leave the province, and I want to thank the three Canadian Red Cross nurses that completed their term at the Health Sciences Centre. The last nurse completed her shift today. And I thank those nurses, as well as all our nurses in this province that have come to the aid of Manitobans during this very difficult time.

Reopening Manitoba's Economy Decrease in Unemployment Rate

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): Madam Speaker, Manitobans have been concerned about job numbers, considering the impact the pandemic has had on many industries, and I'm aware of a recent announcement with WestJet about returning local jobs, as well as a positive February '22 job market survey.

Can the Minister of Economic Development, Investment and Trade inform the House on the impact that the reopening efforts have had on the unemployment rate, and how does Manitoba compare to other jurisdictions?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Economic Development, Investment and Trade): I want to thank my colleague for the question.

I want to report to the House, as of the end of February, Manitoba's unemployment rate stood at 4.8 per cent, our youth employment rate at 8.7 per cent. Both of these rank third lowest in Canada.

* (14:30)

And, most significantly, Madam Speaker, these rates are below pre-pandemic levels. This is the lowest number of unemployed people in Manitoba since 2013. Month over month, to the end of—to end of February, total jobs have increased 6,400; Manitoba's labour force increased 5,000; and part-time employment is up 10,000.

We have much more work to do, and we're going to be committed to make sure every Manitoba has a chance to prosper.

Drug Overdose Death Reporting Request for Publication of Data

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): We know that in order to tackle the addictions crisis in this province, everyone needs access to shared data openly and transparently. But this PC government does not, and it's impacting shareholders' ability, including the City of Winnipeg, to help tackle the addictions crisis that this government is refusing to address.

Will the minister begin sharing data on drug use and overdose deaths openly and transparently today?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): Appreciate the question coming from the member opposite.

And the member will know that the information that comes out of the office of the medical examiner is made public, but it goes through a process. And it will go first to the Department of Health, and then it will come to my office, as it pertains to overdose deaths. And we have always been transparent and open with those numbers; we will continue to be so.

Madam Speaker, in terms of our investments in harm reductions: \$2.8 million for a sobering centre in Thompson in 2020. We have de-scheduled 'naloxolone' so it can now be distributed by retailers and bought without a prescription.

Madam Speaker, we have also invested \$428,000 in a Klinik Community Health mobile withdrawal—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Point Douglas, on a supplementary question.

Mrs. Smith: The investment the minister speaks about is not enough.

The numbers in this province are continuing to rise. In 2020, we saw a 87 per cent increase in overdose deaths. Just this year—or last year, Arlene Blast-Kolb [*phonetic*] had to get those numbers from the medical examiner, which revealed 199 deaths in just six months.

So the minister has access to number—those numbers and this government can actually put those numbers on a website like the federal government does. It's shameful to look at that database and to see that Manitoba is the only province that doesn't put those numbers out there.

So I'll ask the minister again: When will she begin being transparent on those numbers and putting them on a website, and letting the public know what drugs people are overdosing in this province on?

Mrs. Guillemard: Really, what the member is stating is that we have been transparent. What she's asking for is a different method in order to share information.

Madam Speaker, I'm happy to sit down with the member and talk about all the different aspects that we can work on together to help those who are dealing with mental health and addictions issues, and I have offered that to the member. I hope that she takes me up on that offer to sit down and have a discussion.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Smith: I don't know why we're the only province that is blank on that federal database. This minister is saying that that's a different way of, you know, being transparent. Why is all the other provinces reporting that data but we're not?

And, unfortunately, you know, families are having to get that data. They're being transparent.

Our City of Winnipeg is working together and being transparent. They've actually asked this PC government to work together with them to make sure that community is aware of how many deaths are going on, and how—what drug people are overdosing on, so that people can make informed decisions and front-line

workers can give those people that are coming in, that are known drug users, the information that they need.

So I'll again ask: Will this minister publicly report on overdose deaths and the drug being overdosed—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mrs. Guillemard: I'm happy to hear that the member opposite agrees with me that we should be working collaboratively with all levels of government in order to tackle the mental health and addictions issues that all jurisdictions are facing.

Madam Speaker, I would say that Manitobans would have said that nothing, or not enough, has been done in the 17 years that the member opposite's party was in government.

We introduced RAAM clinics here in Manitoba. There wasn't a single RAAM clinic in 17 years under the previous government. There are six now, and we will continue to make investments to support—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: —Manitobans through their difficult times.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Manitoba Public Insurance Diversion of Revenue

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): There's still time to change the course. Fifty-three million is scheduled to transfer from MPI to government at the end of this month. In total, \$113 million is being taken away from MPI to pay for the government's responsibilities. That's not right.

The minister needs to reverse this decision and give the money back to Manitobans.

Will he do so today?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister responsible for the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation): I know that the way that the former NDP government established and put the driver's vehicle portion into MPI was a challenge, and we continue to deal with that challenge.

But I am glad to say that MPI had a good year because drivers had a good year, and they've done well over the last couple of years, and that is why Manitoba Public Insurance was able to return \$300 million to drivers in Manitoba. Madam Speaker, I know that that is money that was well-received and

it was welcome in this difficult time, and we look forward to more good news from Manitoba Public Insurance in the future.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

Speaker's Ruling

Madam Speaker: And I have a ruling for the House.

Following the land acknowledgement on March 7th, 2022, the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) raised a matter of privilege alleging that the honourable Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon) deliberately misled the House on March 3rd, 2022.

Specifically, the member alleged that the minister stated that the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force would be providing an update on March 4th, 2022, but that update did not occur. The member concluded their remarks by moving, and I quote, "that the Minister of Health be called on to apologize to this House, and that the matter of the surgical and diagnostic backlog and the failure of the government to set a deadline to clear the backlog, to be moved to a committee for immediate consideration." End quote.

The honourable Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) and the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) both spoke to the matter before I took it under advisement.

As members know, two conditions must be satisfied in order for a matter raised to be ruled in order as a prima facie case of privilege: (1) was the issue raised at the earliest available opportunity, and (2) was sufficient evidence provided to support the member's claim that their privileges or the privileges of the House were breached?

On the issue of timeliness, the honourable member for Union Station indicated that this was their first opportunity to present the matter in the House after reviewing Hansard from the previous sitting day, March 3rd, 2022. Given that the member raised this immediately following the land acknowledgement on the next sitting day, I would agree that the member met the test of timeliness.

On the second condition, the honourable member for Union Station asserted that the honourable member—the honourable Minister of Health deliberately misled the House by stating on March 3rd, 2022, that the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force would provide an update on their work on Friday,

March 4th, 2022; however, that update did not occur on that day.

The member further asserted that, due to this sequence of events, the minister had deliberately misled the House and therefore violated the privileges of members as well as the House itself.

First on this point, noted parliamentarian authority Joseph Maingot advises on page 241 of the second edition of *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* that, and I quote: To allege that a member has misled the House is a matter of order rather than privilege. End quote.

* (14:40)

Second, previous Manitoba Speakers have consistently ruled that, in order to prove allegations that a member deliberately misled the House, it is necessary to prove that there was clear intent involved to purposely mislead the House by knowingly making statements that would mislead. Speakers Walding, Phillips, Rocan, Dacquay, Hickes, Reid and myself have all ruled that the burden of proof to demonstrate the intention to mislead is placed solely on the member raising the issue.

To quote Speaker Hickes on this point from a 2011 ruling, and I quote: A burden of proof exists that goes beyond speculation or conjecture but involves providing absolute proof, including a statement of intent by the member involved that the stated goal is to intentionally mislead the House, as it is possible members may have inadvertently misled the House by unknowingly putting incorrect information on the record. End quote.

In 2007, Speaker Hickes also ruled that providing information showing that some facts are at variance is not the same as providing proof of intent to mislead. Also, Speaker Dacquay ruled, in 1998, that without a member admitting in the House that they had stated the goal of misleading the House when putting remarks on the record, it is virtually impossible to prove that a member had deliberately intended to mislead the House.

In this case, the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) did not provide evidence that the minister deliberately intended to mislead the House, nor have they made it clear how the House has been obstructed or impeded in the performance of its functions, nor how members have been impeded in the discharge of their duties.

Accordingly, I am ruling that a prima facie case of a breach of parliamentary privilege has not been established in this case.

PETITIONS

Foot-Care Services

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

(4) The northern regional health authority, N-R-H-A, previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions required; (5)—retired—sorry.

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: (8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1, 2022.

This petition has been signed by Abigail Church, Mark Church, Aaron Vott *[phonetic]* and many other Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with our rule 132(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

Abortion Services

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Manitoba women, girls, two-spirit, genderqueer, non-binary and trans persons deserve to be safe and supported when accessing abortion services.

(2) Limited access to effective and safe abortion services contributes to detrimental outcomes and consequences for those seeking an abortion, as an estimated 25 million unsafe abortions occur worldwide each year.

(3) The provincial government's reckless health-care cuts have created inequity within the health-care system whereby access to the abortion pill, Mifegymiso, and surgical abortions are less accessible for northern and rural individuals than individuals in southern Manitoba, as they face travel barriers to access the handful of non-urban health-care professionals who are trained to provide medical abortions.

(4) For over five years, and over the administration of three failed Health ministers, the provincial government operated under the pretense that reproductive health was not the responsibility of the Minister of Health and Seniors Care and shifted the responsibility to a secretariat with no policy, program or financial authority within the health-care system.

For over four years, the provincial government—
(5) For over four years, the provincial government has refused to support bill 200, The Safe Access to Abortion Services Act, which will ensure the safety of Manitoba women, girls, two-spirit, genderqueer, non-binary and trans persons accessing abortion services, and the staff who provide such services, by establishing buffer zones for anti-choice Manitobans around clinics.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately ensure effective and safe access to abortion services for individuals, regardless of where they reside in Manitoba, and to ensure that buffer zones are immediately legislated.

Signed by many Manitobans.

Miigwech.

Foot-Care Services

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background of this petition is as follows:

The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

The northern—the regional health authority previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

There is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1st, 2022.

And this petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Thank you.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

(4) The northern regional health authority, the N-R-H-A, previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1, 2022.

And this petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

* (14:50)

(4) The Northern Health Region authority, N-R-H-A, previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes has continued—has only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1st, 2022.

This petition has been signed by Barbara Henderson, Kevin Henderson and Johnathan Goluski [*phonetic*] and many other Manitobans.

Diagnostic Testing Accessibility

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

The background of the petition is as follows:

(1) Until recently, diagnostic medical tests, including for blood and fluid samples, were available and accessible in most medical clinics.

(2) Dynacare blood test labs have consolidated their blood and fluid testing services by closing 25 of its labs.

(3) The provincial government has cut diagnostic testing at many clinic sites, and residents now have to travel to different locations to get their testing done, even for a simple blood test or a urine sample.

(4) Further, travel challenges for vulnerable and elderly residents of northeast Winnipeg may result in fewer tests being done or delays in testing, with the attendant effects of increased health-care costs and poorer individual patient outcomes.

(5) COVID-19 emergency rules have resulted in long outdoor lineups, putting vulnerable residents at further risk in extreme weather, be it hot or cold. Moreover, these long lineups have resulted in longer wait times for services and poorer service in general.

(6) Manitoba residents value the convenience and efficiency of the health-care system when they are able to give their blood samples at the time of the doctor visit.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately demand Dynacare maintain all of the phlebotomy blood sample sites existing prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency, and allow all Manitobans to get their blood and urine tests done when visiting their doctor, thereby facilitating local access to blood testing services.

Petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Vivian Sand Facility Project— Clean Environment Commission Review

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Contamination of the aquifers and the environment is irreversible and there are many surface

sources of high purity silica that can be extracted without endangering two essential regional aquifers.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

Signed by Christina Kane, Diane Graham, Tess Fontaine and many, many other Manitobans.

Health-Care Coverage

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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

(1) Health care is a basic human right and a fundamental part of responsible public health. Many people in Manitoba are not covered by provincial health care: migrant workers with work permits of less than one year, international students and those undocumented residents who have lost their status for a variety of reasons.

(2) Racialized people and communities are disproportionately affected by the pandemic, mainly due to the social and economic conditions which leave them vulnerable while performing essential work in a variety of industries in Manitoba.

(3) Without adequate health-care coverage, if they are ill, many of the uninsured will avoid seeking health care due to fear of being charged for the care, and some will fear possible detention and deportation if their immigration status is reported to the authorities.

(4) According to the United Nations Human Rights Committee, denying essential health care to undocumented irregular migrants is a violation of their rights.

(5) Jurisdictions across Canada and the world have adopted access-without-fear policies to prevent sharing personal health information or immigration status with immigration authorities and to give

uninsured residents the confidence to access health care.

(6) The pandemic has clearly identified the need for everyone in Manitoba to have access to health care to protect the health and safety of all who live in the province.

* (15:00)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to immediately provide comprehensive and free health-care coverage to all residents of Manitoba, regardless of immigration status, including refugee claimants, migrant workers, international students, dependant children of temporary residents and undocumented workers.

(2) To urge the minister of Health and seniors care to undertake a multilingual communication campaign to provide information on expanded coverage to all affected residents.

(3) To urge the minister of Health and seniors care to inform all health-care institutions and providers of expanded coverage for those without health insurance and the details on how necessary policy and protocol changes will be implemented.

(4) To urge the minister of Health and seniors care to create and enforce strict confidentiality policies, to provide staff with training to protect the safety of residents with precarious immigration status and ensure that they can access health care without jeopardizing their ability to remain in Canada.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Foot-Care Services

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

The northern regional health authority previously provided essential medical foot-care services to

seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, and then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

There is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

The implications of inadequate or lack of 'podiatric' care can lead to amputations.

The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1st, 2022.

This has been signed by Deborah Hamilton, Beatrice Benson, Leon Benson and many other Manitobans.

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) The population of those aged 55-plus have—has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

(4) The northern regional health authority previously provided essential medical care—medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also reserves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need for foot care extends beyond just those living in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1st, 2020.

And this has been signed by Cheryl Davies, Trista Jensen, Madelaine Perla and many other Manitobans.

Road Closures

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Manitoba Infrastructure has undertaken the closure of all farm-access roads along the North Perimeter Highway, forcing rural residents to drive up to six miles out of their way to leave or to return to their property.

(2) The provincial government's own consultations showed that closing the access of some of these roads, including Sturgeon Road, was an emerging concern to residents and business owners, yet the North Perimeter plan does nothing to address this issue.

(3) Residents and business owners were assured that their concerns about access closures, including safety issues cited by engineers, would be taken into account and that access at Sturgeon Road would be maintained. However, weeks later, the median was nonetheless torn up, leaving local residents and businesses scrambling.

(4) Closing all access to the Perimeter puts more people in danger, as it emboldens speeders and forces farmers to take large equipment into heavy traffic, putting road users at risk.

(5) Local traffic, commuter traffic, school buses, emergency vehicles and commercial traffic, including 200 gravel trucks per day from the Lilyfield Quarry, will all be expected to merge and travel out of their

way in order to cross the Perimeter, causing increased traffic and longer response times to emergencies.

(6) Small businesses located along the Perimeter and Sturgeon Road are expecting to lose business, as customers will give up on finding a way into their premises.

(7) Residents, business owners and those who use these roads have been left behind by the provincial government's refusal to listen to their concerns that closures will only result in worsened safety and major inconveniences for users of the North Perimeter.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Infrastructure to leave residents access to the Perimeter Highway at least every two miles along its length, especially at intersections such as Sturgeon Road, which are vital to local businesses.

(2) To urge the Minister of Infrastructure to listen to the needs and opinions of the local residents and business owners who took the time to complete the Perimeter safety survey while working with engineers and technicians to ensure their concerns are addressed.

This petition, Madam Speaker, is signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Can you please call for debate this afternoon Bill 12, 16, 15 and 19.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider the following bills this afternoon: debate on second reading, Bill 12; second reading, Bill 16; second reading, Bill 15; and second reading, Bill 19.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 12—The Peak of the Market Reorganization Act

Madam Speaker: I will therefore call on debate on second reading of Bill 12, The Peak of the Market Reorganization Act.

I would indicate that the minister has already spoken on this so we move right into question period.

Mr. Andrew Micklefield, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

* (15:10)

Questions

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

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): First of all, I thank the member opposite for introducing this bill for the second reading, and I would like to ask, who was involved in the consultation process of this bill?

Hon. Derek Johnson (Minister of Agriculture): Yes. Actually, this has been in consultation for a long time.

Producers like Crampton's and Schriemers, for example, raised this issue with the previous NDP Agriculture minister, Minister Kostyshyn, in 2014.

Small Scale Food in Manitoba presented the report to Honourable Ron Kostyshyn, the minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, on January 14th of 2015. We had Small Scale Food Manitoba working groups, and it was chaired by Wayne Lees of Direct Farm Manitoba.

And other groups were consulted in '18 and '19.

And Peak of the Market also brought forward the idea of deregulating the potato and root crop industry in the fall of 2020 to the then-minister—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I'd like to ask the minister, what is the risk, following this—I'd like to ask the minister, what is the risk, in his judgment, that Peak of the Market following this change could, at some point, be taken over by a multinational?

Mr. Johnson: Peak of the Market has evolved over the years. It started in 1942—80 years ago—and it started—the Gardeners Sales Ltd. was established as a co-operative of market gardens and they were produced and selling vegetables by independent growers in the Winnipeg market.

They changed again in 1962. The company purchased a cold storage distribution here in Winnipeg; 1966 Peak of the Market sales was 'incorporated'—incorporated and—by the Gardeners Sales Ltd. in 1977. The Gardeners Sales Ltd. gifted all of its shares and assets to the Manitoba vegetable board.

This is an evolve—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): So, during the briefing the minister already pointed out that this industry is already very consolidated, and he pointed out that as a reason as why it makes sense to make this change and do away with the quota system.

Did the minister consider other ways to actually expand on an industry and grow the number of producers in this industry instead of focusing on just the consolidated number of potato and root vegetable producers we have in Manitoba right now?

Mr. Johnson: Yes. I'm sure the member would be aware, like, under a quota system, the quota is regulated under Peak of the Market and the current regulation that you have to be five acres or smaller if you're outside Peak of the Market and—or one acre for other root crops or smaller. This will change it to be more inclusive and people can grow whatever size acreage that they choose and market to whom they choose.

Mr. Brar: Will this bill inevitably lead to higher food prices for Manitobans?

Mr. Johnson: I think everybody in this Chamber can agree that when you introduce competition it actually lowers prices.

So, through the growers that can now grow more than five acres, they can be more efficient, therefore their cost per pound of potatoes will be reduced. And whether they choose to mark them at a farmers' market or with Peak of the Market, that's up to them, but competition drives down prices, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Thank you.

Mr. Gerrard: I would like to ask the minister, with the change in the marketing of vegetables, are there opportunities for vegetable-processing operations in Manitoba?

Mr. Johnson: Well, currently, under the Peak of the Market, even if you're a small producer of five acres, you cannot get together with your neighbour and form

a co-operative to buy a potato-washing machine, for example, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So, through collaboration, there's other co-operatives that can be formed so every single producer doesn't haven't to buy their own processing equipment, and that'll be a huge step forward for agriculture and for Manitoba, and consumers as well.

Mr. Moses: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to find out from the minister if he did any research onto what this bill's impact would be on the security and the quality of our supply chain here in Manitoba, our food supply chain, not just now, with the recent change, but in the long term.

Would this change in the ability for Manitobans to grow and then sell and then eat our own root vegetables, or will this introduce other players into—and change our food security in Manitoba?

Mr. Johnson: I'd like to thank the member for that question.

Currently, under Peak of the Market, they sell Canada-wide, but right now producers can—from out of province—can come and sell in Manitoba currently. So, if the—if he can maybe clarify his question a little bit, I can elaborate on an answer a little bit more.

Mr. Brar: Mr. Deputy Speaker, as the minister says that when there is competition, the prices come down, but we should recognize that it would be a competition between a big farmer who is producing 900 acres versus somebody who is producing just seven acres of root vegetables.

So, in the light of the open market and weaker negotiation power, is the government planning to offer some support for small producers to survive in competition?

Mr. Johnson: We're doing that through this bill. The small producers have asked us so they can increase their production over five acres into seven acres, maybe, like the minister suggested—the member suggested, I mean. And this will be better for those members, as well. They've asked for it along with Peak of the Market and other producers.

Mr. Moses: Yes, so to clarify my question, my question is about the food security in Manitoba with—as a result of the changes of this bill. Will there be out-of-province producers selling into Manitoba with more frequency after this bill?

And, furthermore, will another competitive entity, organization, come and compete with Peak of the Market in Manitoba, if maybe owned and—outside of

the province, and then, therefore, purchase, you know, their grain from farmers or from down south or from Saskatchewan to be sold in Manitoba with more frequency and therefore lessening the food security in Manitoba and bringing in competition that isn't already in our system for root vegetables in Manitoba?

Mr. Johnson: Well, I'm sure as the member goes—when he goes into a store, he doesn't just see Peak of the Market here in Manitoba. The concern with potatoes is that they are very, very heavy for the amount of price that you can sell them for, so it's very, very hard to transport potatoes a long period of distance because it's just not economically feasible.

But, currently, there are other sellers in the province. If he—next time, maybe, he's in the grocery store, he can look, and not every single bag has Peak of the Market on it.

* (15:20)

Mr. Brar: As we all know, that land consolidation of grain farms in Canada is happening as—at a fast pace.

So does the minister think that this change would encourage further consolidation of the root crop farms as well, and it would lead to monopoly in the market?

Mr. Johnson: I'm sure the member is familiar with his meeting with Peak of the Market, where originally there was over 100 producers that would sell to Peak of the Market and produce for Peak of the Market. Currently, we're down to under 14 and a handful of them are left producing potatoes.

So the quota system is now pretty much a monopoly. This will loosen the restrictions and allow smaller growers that have been pushed out of the market to increase their market space of—to more than five acres of land, was regulated by land area rather than poundage that their—that they can produce. So—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Moses: I'd like to give the minister an opportunity to further expand on an answer that I think he ran out of time on, and the question was regarding: Is there a possibility that Peak of the Market might be taken over by another multinational company or another entity as a result of this change?

Mr. Johnson: Peak of the Market's membership is made up of the current board and it'll go into Peak of the Market not-for-profit and so today—or whoever's in there today will be a member of Peak on the new not-for-profit 'enterty.'

Like all other not-for-profits regulated in The Corporations Act, the board of directors at the Peak of the Market sets out direction and develops bylaws that are voted on by members, and all current members will be in the new entity.

Mr. Brar: Again, asking the minister about the position of the small farmers, here.

Currently, Peak has a provision to set aside some quota for new producers. So this bill would take that opportunity away, for sure.

What does the minister want to say about this and creating some opportunities for small producers to have access to the market with some government support?

Mr. Johnson: Well, I'm not sure if the member didn't maybe read the bill, but this does allow access to the market for small producers. Right now, they are not allowed to participate, to sell to the Peak or anywhere else if they're above five acres. So right now they are limited under the current legislation.

This legislation will change that to allow the small producers, so they can expand and they can sell, whether they choose to sell to Peak of the Market or somebody else, including farmers' markets, and it gives the opportunity for farmers to create another brand and we support that on this side of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Moses: I don't think the minister very clearly, you know, definitively, yes-or-no sort of a thing, answered my last question when it came to: Is there a possibility of Peak of the Market being purchased or bought over by a multinational company?

I think it's a—you know, an answer the minister should be able to give pretty directly, so I want to give him the opportunity to do that, and also ask if he's considering putting an amendment in place to ensure that Peak of the Market, which we all—I think we all appreciate as a Manitoba, locally producing company, stays Manitoba-owned.

So I want to know if the minister's looking at putting in an amendment in this bill to ensure that it stays Manitoba?

Mr. Johnson: Potatoes in Manitoba are Manitoba potatoes.

I just wanted to talk a little bit on the Canada Free Trade Agreement and the New West Partnership Agreement as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Currently, Peak of the Market—its current regulatory powers are deemed a trade barrier and they have been given an exemption in the Canada free trade agreement and the New West Partnership Agreement. And Manitoba is the only province to regulate their potato and root crop industry.

Mr. Brar: The situation in Manitoba is that just a few producers control 90 per cent of the market for these root crops.

So after bill—this bill passes, small producers would produce more quantities, for sure, but how would they have access to the buyers already well-connected to the big producers?

Mr. Johnson: Peak of the Market has indicated that they would be more than happy to market these smaller producers—five acres and under—which will now be expanded. They will be more than happy to market their potatoes as well as Manitoba-grown potatoes.

Also, Peak of the Market, they continue to 'support'—support Harvest Manitoba and other food banks. I think that's important for people to know. They support across Canada. They continue a commitment to research in fresh potato production here in Manitoba, which is also important to see what works and develop in that front.

And they continue to manage and run the farm and school fundraising program in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Peak of the Market has you know, wants to continue to—an active role in the national and international associations and councils—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

The time for questions has closed.

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): This gives me an opportunity to talk about food, land, our producers who put the food on our table every day on a regular basis.

So this bill is called The Peak of the Market Reorganization Act. For those who do not know much about Peak of the Market, it's a non-for-profit organization here in Manitoba for over 70 years, working successfully marketing root crops for all of us not just in Manitoba, not just in Canada, also in the US and sometimes overseas.

So this organization is incorporated under The Farm Products Marketing Act. And this is an organization that is very important for our economy in Manitoba, and its annual revenue is around \$120 million, which is huge. And it also generates employment for Manitobans—not just Peak of the Market as an organization, but Peak and the growers associated with this organization, they provide employment to more than 1,000 people in Manitoba.

So this organization was regulating the quota system and checking the number of acres of root crops a particular grower associated with the Peak is growing, and during this journey they have been recognized as a successful organization. They have done a good business. They have contributed a lot to the economy.

They have also donated to some community organizations. For the last five years they donated produce worth equal to \$15 million, and that's a good initiative by this organization and we all appreciate that.

This organization was also named one of the top 100 Canadian food and beverage companies in 2017, which is an honour not just for this organization but for all Manitobans.

* (15:30)

Just for the information of those who are listening, that Manitoba farmers—they grow equal to 9,000 acres or more potatoes and more than 600 acres of carrots for Peak. And there are so many other producers who are not associated with Peak, but they're still growing these root crops.

So, currently, anybody who wants to grow more than five acres of root vegetables, root crops, they need to get a quota from the Peak. Otherwise, they have to limit their production under five acres. What this bill does is it opens up and it removes the cap for those small producers.

This bill opens up the market for everybody to produce as many acres as they want in Manitoba. They may like to market their produce through Peak or directly. So this organization would continue as a non-for-profit organization, but not under The Farm Products Marketing Act, it would be under The Corporations Act, so there would be no supply management. It would be clear-cut competition between the producers.

There could be a possibility of this organization changing the way it works for future years. It would be up to the board members of the Peak of the Market

not-for-profit organization, which would continue under The Corporations Act. There could be some provision or possibility of other organizations coming up in Manitoba and compete with this organization. That's a possibility.

Previously, there was a reason for the producers to market their produce through Peak, because they were getting quota by this organization. But now, other than this established brand, which is Peak of the Market, I don't see any reason for many producers to market their produce through this organization. There could be some changes.

So this bill totally ends the supply management. This bill totally repeals all the regulations related to Peak of the Market. I'm just thinking about those producers who are currently, for example, growing four acres of potatoes or one acre of carrots. They can go up to eight acres of potatoes or three acres of carrots, and they would be competing with somebody who is producing 800, 900 acres of the same crop in the market.

So, then, we think about the negotiation power. Obviously, the bigger producers would have stronger positions in the market. And what it could lead to would be kicking out of the small producers out of the market and further consolidation of root vegetables, root crops production in Manitoba. We would be leading to a scenario where there would be one or two corporations or individuals controlling the whole market.

So, what would that look like? That would lead to a situation of monopoly.

Even now, if you look back, last 70 years the number of producers associated with Peak of the Market—they are becoming less and less and less. Currently, maybe, it's around 10 producers who are controlling this market. And let's imagine a situation where there's only one corporation or two corporations controlling the whole market. That would be a tough situation.

While I discuss this bill, I would want to share a few more thoughts with you regarding the contribution of the farming community.

The farmers have always played a critical role in Manitoba history and economy. When we talk about the immigrant farmers, for example, farmers who came in hundreds and thousands from Ukraine, historically, they cleared the land, they developed the farms and they built Manitoba. We want to thank all those farmers who did that for us, who have been

feeding us for years and continue to do so. They're putting food on our table, and we should thank every farmer every day before we eat for their hard work for all of us.

The farmers have knowledge and skills to produce food for us, to take care of the land, to take care of the environment and adopt sustainable practices so that we can continue producing food without exhausting our natural resources because they love land, they love animals, they care for water and other natural resources.

But this PC government, they don't have a track record of supporting the farmers because in Manitoba, if you think about the situation Manitoba producers are in currently, it opens our eyes. COVID-19, supply chain disruptions—that happened, that disrupted the marketing of their produce, especially cattle. They put them in a tough situation, selling their cows way lesser than what they expected, but, at the same time, consumers were getting the food not at cheaper rates but at expensive prices.

So the middlemen, or the corporations, or the businesses, they made money on that. So we need to put the things in context when we talk about consolidating this market or making changes to Peak of the Market or the marketing system that what scenario we are in right now and what are the hardships that our producers are currently going through.

During the drought period in 2021, the producers had no hay. They got together at Woodlands in the Interlake where two of the members opposite, they represent most of those producers. They wanted to share their pain. They wanted to get together and discuss the options to survive their businesses during that drought period. None of these two members showed up to that meeting, and they were upset.

Rather than supporting these producers, this government, they cut staffing in Manitoba Agriculture. So now these producers have nowhere to go to talk about their problems, to have technical information, to have agronomists—agronomic advice to handle their lands and cattle in a better manner.

And, on top of that, land prices, they're going up. These Ag ministers—I'm dealing with the third Ag minister since 2019—all of them have been unapproachable—unapproachable—to the producers. Producers tell me that they won't get any response to their emails, to their requests.

And we need to understand that these producers that we are talking about today, they are dealing with

high fertilizer prices, and there's a lack of initiative from this government for any business support programs.

* (15:40)

These producers are facing labour shortages and these producers are losing revenue at the farm. Research tells us that as we go, as less as 5 per cent of the revenue these days stays at the farm in Canada. And we all know that the farm size is getting bigger and bigger, and the small farmers, their debt level is increasing. So these changes in Peak of the Market marketing system, they are going to impact small farmers a lot.

During the question period, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Johnson), they failed to express that there was a proper research done before bringing in these changes. All they talk about is freedom. It's not just about freedom of market, it comes as a package.

While the bigger producers, they would be free to market their produce anywhere, but how about the non-Peak farmers? The farmers who used to have a quota, they have been gifted with the positions on the board of the Peak of the Market, which would be a new organization. But what about the producers who are having their caps removed? They want to get into the market and they want to sell their produce to the same buyers that Peak of the Market producers are doing.

The real situation is that those producers, those are—those would be on the board of the Peak. They would be having—they already have, actually, good connections with the buyers, and this situation prevents the new producers and the small producers to get on board and be able to sell their produce to these buyers, who are big buyers.

What they used to do as small producers, used to just sell their produce to small restaurants. Now, in this scenario, if the big producers are producing even more than what they produced before, they could get into that market that used to be—used to serve these small producers. Then where would they go?

It's hard for a small producer to ship their produce east or west of Manitoba because they cannot afford. If somebody likes to start a new business producing root crops today, the investment is huge. It's not economically feasible for them to buy all the infrastructure, all the machinery required to start that business, so it puts them on a weaker position in the market.

So I don't think the government is thinking to support these small producers. They don't have any suggestion or provision in this bill that encourages or supports those small producers to be on the board of the Peak so that their voice could be heard. This is not social justice. This is biased.

And, going forward, it's a possibility, when we were discussing this bill during the bill briefing with the minister, a point came up: what if this organization very soon becomes a for-profit organization? So, what would happen? Would they need to legislate those changes or not? Unfortunately, that organization would be independent and it would be—it would just take a general body meeting and a good voting in favour of making this organization a private entity.

So, then again, when you are moving towards a situation where, from 80 producers, where we are getting to 50 and then 35 and then 13, then eight, and now you would see a situation where there is only one corporation or two producers who are controlling the whole market.

So, just think of the scenario, how it would impact the consumers. We see this in our telephone companies. There's no competition. When there's no competition, there is a monopoly; and when there is one big player in the market, they control everything. So not just marketing; there are so many issues and concerns in agriculture. I've been indicating this since long that our farms are being consolidated.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know what we are heading towards in Manitoba? We are heading towards a scenario where there could be as less as just 200 farms, 50,000 acres each. That would be the scenario. Now, think about those producers who are ranchers, livestock producers, small producers, greenhouse vegetable producers, these root vegetable producers—just think about those. Somebody who is farming on just 500 acres, 1,100 acres, they would all be eliminated; and if they all are eliminated, it's not just impacting agriculture. It's impacting the whole landscape of Manitoba.

What about the rural towns? There would be no farming families in rural towns. The people who own those farms would be sitting away from our towns and controlling—remote controlling those farms.

And when we talk about youth, we are talking about bringing youth into agriculture. How would that happen? If it's just open market, they need deeper pockets to compete with the big producers and buy some land, which is not possible.

And we're talking about bringing more people on the land. We are talking about tailoring our immigration programs in a way that brings in skilled people from overseas who can manage the farms, who can work on the farms, who can work on marketing positions or specialist positions in agriculture.

And the data tells us that by 2025 there would be 4,900 jobs which could be unfilled just in Manitoba. So in 2014, 1,800 jobs, they were left unfilled. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know how much damage that has done to our economy? Two hundred and eighty-two million dollars.

So we should be talking about bringing in young producers, immigrants on the land. We should be talking about establishing small farms. We should be talking about bringing in—involving the next generation in agriculture and telling them where our food comes from.

Our workforce is aging. Sixty-one per cent of the workforce in Manitoba—in agriculture, I'm talking about—is 45 years or older, and this data is 2011 numbers. So when those folks retire, who would be working the land up? By 2025, 30 per cent of the workers on the land would retire.

So, current policies, may it be Crown land policies, may it be business support programs in Manitoba, it's pushing us into a situation where small producers are being kicked out, livestock producers are being kicked out. There's way less livestock in Manitoba than previous years. But the ministers in the PC government, they have stated that they want to encourage more number of animals on the land. That's not happening because what they are saying is not what they intend.

* (15:50)

We used to have 500,000 farms in Canada in 1960. And then what happened? In the 1990s, we came down to 280,000 farms only, and currently, it's under 200,000. So that's the direction we are headed towards.

Let's talk about Manitoba. In the 1980s, we had more than 27,000 farms. Mr. Deputy Speaker, now we only have around 14,000 farms in Manitoba. That means we lost 46 per cent of the farms. So where is the youth? Where are the ranchers? Where is the government who is supposed to bring in more people into farming? Only 10 per cent of the farmers are young farmers, which are less than 35 years of age. And 52 per cent of the farmers in Manitoba, they are over 55 years of age.

The focus of this government is just money, money, money, trade and export. They don't care about the ranchers. They don't care about the land. They don't care about the sustainability. They don't care about the resiliency. They don't care about the natural resources.

I got a chance to sit together with some Crown land ranchers this weekend. We had discussions about the Crown land changes brought forward by this PC government in 2019. First of all, they say that they consulted with the people who are Crown land leaseholders. They actually did not, because I've met hundreds of producers around Ste. Rose and Interlake; they say that we were not consulted. I don't know what was the method of consultation by this government, but they just brought about the changes and they didn't disclose their intentions to make these changes until after we heard the results of 2019 provincial election. That was like deceiving, betraying those people on the land who have been managing that land for years.

And the changes they brought about, they are that they used to lease Crown lands for 50 years. Now it came down to just 15 years. So somebody who is unsure about retaining that piece of land in the 16th year from now, would they invest money, energy, emotions, sweat, blood into that land they want? So they are clearly upset about this change of reducing the lease period.

Then unit transfers. Those producers tell me that—they were sharing an interesting example. They said, well, just imagine a situation. There's a restaurant, and the owner of the restaurant, they want to sell that restaurant to somebody. Do they just sell pots and pans, or they also sell the value that restaurant holds because it's located in a particular neighbourhood because there are clients associated with it, there are contracts in the market, there is business connections in the market? There are so many factors that make that restaurant successful.

So now think about somebody who has been planning their retirement for the last 45 years, improving that land, creating dugouts there, improving the quality of the land, quality of the pasture and fencing the land. Now this land would be auctioned out to a third person, or if they planned to sell their piece of land, which is 200 acres, along with 1,800 of Crown land that they're cultivating since the last 45 years, they are not allowed to transfer that unit.

So their retirement plan is messed up. It's comparable to somebody who has been serving the government for the last 45 years, and in the last year when

they are about to retire, they are told: you're not getting any pension. How would they survive? That's the situation. They are basically cutting the heart to fix the liver. That's the situation.

And those producers, they are upset about these Ag ministers and their representatives—especially in the Interlake, Dauphin—not listening to them. They are talking to the member from Dauphin, writing a letter complaining about the situation, and you know what, Deputy—Mr. Deputy Speaker?

The member from Dauphin says: I would arrange a meeting with the Ag Minister. And the situation's like, okay, the Ag Minister has a secretary in the office. MLA Dauphin has something else to do: speak for the constituents. They fail to speak. They fail to speak for their constituents. So that's the situation.

I have a lot more to say about AgriStability, grain drying and lack of support from this government for our producers. But I wish this bill would have been a better one to support everybody, not just a few producers who control the market. I am sad for the small producers.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to put some words on the record in respect of Bill 12, The Peak of the Market Reorganization Act.

I want to thank the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Johnson) as well as his two predecessors, the Agriculture minister, who was the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) and the member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen), who were both in that chair. I know that this work began under the leadership of those two ministers and their departments, with the support and partnership of Peak of the Market, and it continued to this bill. I got to be privy to some of the ideas that were in previous iterations of this bill and I believe we've arrived at a good place and a bill that can be supported by all parties.

I listened intently to the member of—from Burrows, the Agriculture critic's comments. He had a lot of concerns and complaints that did not concern this bill, but he had remarks he made in respect of this bill, and I thank him for the ability for—to put some corrections on the record, and I hope he'll also listen to my remarks.

He ended his remarks by saying that he did not believe that this is a good approach—a good approach, he said, for Manitobans, for small producers. And I

take strong exception to that, but I know that Peak of the Market growers also would take strong exception to that, respectfully.

I know that, as the MLA responsible for Morden-Winkler, some of these Peak of the Market farmers, they headquarter right in my area in the city of Winkler. They grow in the surrounding areas. Certainly, the member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter) knows many of these people himself. I know that later this afternoon, we're hoping to hear from the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart): also a big area, as well, for Peak of the Market activities.

But I can tell you that in my constituency office, going back a number of years, I would get in constituents who were small and market gardeners, and they would talk about the Peak of the Market organization, indicate that it was a very generous organization, very generous to our own community, very philanthropic across the province of Manitoba; a great brand, one that Manitobans trust. They like the root vegetables and potatoes. They choose them. They select them, self-selecting over other brands.

But at the same time, they would complain that the quota system that was formerly in place acted as a disincentive, or it would prevent them from being able to take to market their own vegetables. That they—is—there was essentially a threshold above which they were unable to compete.

* (16:00)

And what those constituents continued to say to me is that there was the ability, there was the interest and there was the capability for other farmers to be able to bring potatoes and other root vegetables to market, but that this former system was preventing that. And so the member for Burrows (Mr. Brar) will know that this plan is a plan to actually throw off those thresholds that formerly acted as a deterrent for others to become involved.

So, where the member for Burrows says he thinks this will not be good for all Manitoba growers, I think the opposite. Having listened to Peak of the Market, having known that the minister has undertaken very significant consultation across this province for two years, we believe—and it is Peak's belief, as well—that this new structure will allow new entrants into this Peak of the Market system: a non-quota-based co-operative, whereby people will choose and select whether they sell their vegetables to this organization for marketing.

I believe that this is good for Peak, in that this finally also throws off those prohibitions that didn't allow Peak to more effectively compete across Canada. Right now, of course, as we know, that if you are in this Peak group, you can't own property outside of Manitoba under this structure. And so you have this disincentive; you have this barrier that is preventing you from more broadly marketing, and we believe that these vegetables can be broadly marketed.

We believe that there is an appetite, figuratively and literally, for these products beyond the borders of Manitoba. And I think that Peak is—they are very positive about their ability to compete on a wider scale in other jurisdictions. We know that here in Manitoba, of course, that there is that very significant 65,000 square foot receiving centre, storage and processing centre, and we have some storage, I believe, for Peak in—they have some storage in Alberta, but this would provide a footprint for them to be able to more significantly go and market otherwise.

Mr. Brad Michaleski, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

So I want to say just a few things. First of all, I believe that it's good for all Manitobans. I believe that it helps those who are, right now, within Peak but it helps to invite new players in, regardless of size. But remember, it also creates the conditions in which those small players, those market gardeners and small producers—some who are in my area, some who are in the member for Borderland's (Mr. Guenter) area, some who are in the member for Portage's area—to be able to go and knock on the door of those restaurants and gardens and other places where they can directly market.

And I believe that people are very creative. There's a lot of, you—farm food-to-table-types of thoughts out there these days. There's a lot of desire for restaurants to be able to be in possession of a local grower's produce, and so I believe there's every reason to expect that small and medium-sized growers may gravitate to these opportunities that are created by this bill, and they find markets that they didn't otherwise know about, or may choose to collaborate and come inside the Peak of the Market organization.

I want to indicate—and I know others have, as well—that this has been an effective collaboration, an effective working with government, and I would want to stress that this plan has the buy-in and support of Peak of the Market. They believe this is the path forward and it has the buy-in and support of our government.

I'm hoping it also has the buy-in and support of opposition parties, and I believe that it was just last week that Peak of the Market was here at the Manitoba Legislature, that CEO, Pamela Kolochuk, and the board chair, Peter Loewen, was here, meeting with the opposition parties; both the NDP and the Liberal parties. So I certainly hope that the member for Burrows (Mr. Brar) availed himself of the opportunity to direct these questions right to Peak of the Market and I would trust that he was given good answers by those organizations.

There's no reason to believe here that somehow this is a group that's going to become less competitive. Every time this approach has been described to me and others, it's been an approach that is seen to be opening the doors, finding a more efficient way, reducing red tape but allowing new entrants into these markets, throwing off those artificial quotas that were formerly holding some growers down and pushing other growers out.

I noted that in the words of the chairperson, Peter Loewen, who happens to be from the Morden-Winkler area—I know his land very well, where he and his family have farmed. I think—Peter will correct me if I'm wrong on this, but I think it's third generation now. But he said these changes are designed to make it easier, and to allow Peak to keep up with the times and with the needs of consumers. So I think he said very well what the aims of this is.

Let's remember, as well, that as these—as this organization grows, and as these farms grow in their operations, this means they're employing Manitobans. This means that they are adding to our local economy. That means that the province of Manitoba is in receipt of taxation incomes through corporate taxation, individual taxation, the PST, fuel tax and other taxes.

But I would want to stress, as well, even though those are excellent investments, and it is exactly farms and other small business that are driving our economy forward, I would also want to flag to this House the incredible philanthropy of groups like Peak of the Market.

And for those of you in this Chamber who have had the opportunity to join Peak of the Market at their annual winter celebration—they usually have a Christmas banquet. They have a good band in to come and play, and there might not be a lot of dancing because there's a lot of Mennonites but, even so, there's a really good band that plays and a few of us are brave enough to get up on that dance floor, and

there's many non-Mennonites who are in that place, as well.

And what I wanted to say is this: it's on those evenings that I'm reminded of the incredible reach of the generosity of Peak of the Market. I understand that, at this point in time, Peak donates 1.5 million pounds of produce to organizations right around the province of Manitoba.

This may mean like a local food bank in the town of Altona. It could mean Siloam Mission. It could mean Winnipeg's—the food harvest right here in Winnipeg. Right across the province, this group is donating produce, potatoes, root vegetables, so that people who are in need have something to eat.

That's an incredible amount of generosity, and Peak of the Market has been clear. No matter what structural differences take place as a consequence of these changes, should they be passed, they will continue to focus on being generous and giving back to Manitoba.

So, my last exhortation would be one to all of us as legislators. Sometimes in this House, we have legislation that is introduced, and it is debated and is sent to committee, and we find a way to find agreement and pass these things by June.

In this case, we are up against some other challenges, and one being the start of the growing year. And the member for Burrows (Mr. Brar) will know well that, you know, even though right now we got all this snow on the ground, with these forecasts, that snow is about to turn into water, hopefully seep into the land and not just flow into the ditches. And we need that water in the land, and then we're going to see a growing season start.

It would be incredibly advantageous for this House to be able to pass these provisions into law to support these growers, to support the farm industry, to support farmers and all that they are doing in respect of these changes.

So knowing that the—knowing that Peak has been here to represent their views to government, to the opposition parties, I'm confident that we will be able to work together as parties in this place to be able to pass this afternoon this bill to the committee stage, to have it come back for third reading and royal assent as quickly as possible because it is needed now.

Once again, I just want to end by saying I thank you—I thank Peak of the Market for their partnership. I thank them for being at the table to help design a

better regime to be able to support the production of fine products in our province: vegetables that we are proud of. Vegetables that we believe can be marketed even beyond Manitoba's borders, but vegetables here in Manitoba that create jobs, grow the economy, support our local communities.

And for those reasons, I and the members of my government will be standing in support of Bill 12.

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Happy to put some words on the record today in respect of Bill 12, Peak of the Market Reorganization Act, but I want to begin my remarks this afternoon by first noting and speaking with regards to the timing of this bill.

* (16:10)

And the timing that we're debating this bill, this week—a week which is Canadian Agricultural Safety Week. It's a week that we know. We acknowledge and make awareness of the safety that's needed to farm and to be a producer in our country and in Manitoba.

And so I want to give a shout-out, not just to all the producers in Manitoba, but for all those who put in work to make it safe. We know that this week is, you know, is Canadian Agricultural Safety Week and we know that that is around making sure that the lives of producers and the lives that they—the lives they put into doing the work of making food products in our country and in our province, that they can do so in a way that they'll always return back home at the end of the day and that they'll return home in one piece.

I know from my experience working in agriculture, and I can imagine that, sadly, almost anyone who knows people who's worked in agriculture knows people who have suffered injury or knows people who have, unfortunately, lost their lives as a result of the work.

And so we need to have safe work in Manitoba, specifically in the agriculture sector, which, as we know, can be one of the most dangerous industries in Canada. I personally know former colleagues and friends of mine who have lost limbs and fingers due to their experiences on and working in agriculture, living on a farm setting, and those incidents and those tragic events, we should be putting all in—the effort—the needed effort to minimize those events, making farms better, making farms more efficient, more environmentally friendly, but all while making sure that they are safe.

So, I want to take just that minute there, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, to put those words on the

record about how we must, at the same time, make efforts to make our agricultural system better and, at the same time, making sure that it's safe.

So, it's a good timing for us to be debating this bill this week on agricultural safety—agricultural safety week in Canada.

And I want to also talk a little bit about agriculture in general before I get to the meat of Bill 12 here. And, you know, I just want to talk a little bit about my own experience in agriculture, having gotten an agribusiness degree from University of Manitoba myself and having worked with wheat and barley producers across Western Canada.

I just want to put a few word records on about the optimism that it requires you to have to be a producer in Canada; the hope, ultimately, that you need to farm and to do that work, to put that in. And I think all producers and all farmers in general are—have to be optimistic and hopeful people. That's part of the job. If you could imagine that your livelihood, your family's livelihood starts with you putting some seeds in the ground in the spring, right? You imagine you go through a long winter, especially like the winter that we've had here and you stake your entire year's salary and income and your family's value on putting some seeds in the ground.

Well, when you're able to do that, you're also able—it requires you to have a sense of hope, a sense of optimism that the work you're putting in now in the springtime—hopefully springtime, if we ever get there with the amount of snow that we have—that that work that we put in in seeding will amount to something later on. And, of course, farmers need that hope and that optimism. They seed in the spring.

But that's not just it. Imagine the risk that a farmer in Manitoba has to go through and has to experience during just one crop year, from hoping that the seeding conditions are good, that it's not too wet, that they can get their equipment onto their fields and it's not soggy, that the—that we don't get a flood in the spring to damage our fields, that we don't have, you know, things in the spring that would prevent us from getting our equipment onto the field, that once we actually do our seeding and as we approach the warmer weather in the summer, that we actually get the warm weather, the sunlight hours that it requires to help our crops grow.

That all requires hope and optimism. And so I commend any farmer, any producer in our province, who makes those efforts to produce food for our

sustainment in our province and puts that seed in the ground to one day grow into something that can sustain not only all of us in Manitoba, but that individual farmer as well.

And, of course, we know the difficulty that farmers experience in our province. And you could only just look to this past summer with the drought that we experienced. Weeks—weeks—without rain that not only hurt people in my constituency—St. Vital—in our own way, but even more so, producers who are depending on that rainfall for their livelihood and to sustain their operations. Those having that ability to tolerate that risk, you know, depending on literally their—clouds in the sky to produce some rain for you to sustain yourself is something that is tremendously difficult, and so I commend all producers in our province for being able to take that risk each and every year to help all Manitobans have the food that we need, have the food security that we need and give us all a better quality of life in Manitoba.

And so I'm very appreciative of that, having known farmers and producers myself, first-hand having the opportunity in the past to make those farm visits and see what it's like, you know, to get up a grain silo or to, you know, store your equipment and get it out of your shed onto the field and do that work and look at some of the new technologies that farmers have whether it's through some of the GPS guiding systems or other technology that we're seeing farmers do these days. I'm just simply in awe of the work that our farmers in Manitoba do—in Manitoba do to produce their crops every year.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, now I'll turn my attention specifically to Bill 12 and The Peak of the Market Reorganization Act.

And so, when we look at this act, we look—first look at the fact that we have had—we have such a tremendous organization in Peak of the Market that has done fantastic work in our province for over—for approximately 80 years. And when we look at that, when I say peak to—Peak of the Market to any Manitoban, the first thing they're going to think of is, you know, locally produced and grown vegetables. It's simple; that's the branding of Peak of the Market. People know it, people trust, and we're grateful for the work that they do. And they've done this for many years in this quota system where producers are asked to produce a certain quota of vegetables and supply to Peak, who markets that here in Manitoba.

This quota system has worked well, we've seen how (a) the—how successfully branded our vegetables

are through Peak of the Market. We also see the success, obviously, of vegetable producers in Manitoba. And so when a bill comes forward like this to change and—to change the way farms are run here, we obviously have to look at it very critically, not because we are necessarily uncertain of whether they'll lead to successful outcomes in the future, but because we want to ensure that there are and will continue to be successful vegetable farmers in our province and a successful Peak of the Market, moving forward, in the long term.

And so we, again, are looking at the ways to strengthen this bill and to ensure that farmers, young and old, large and small, have opportunities to be in the market, to find success in the market and to assure that we are looking at the best ways to grow, sell and enjoy Manitoban vegetables. And I know my—one, for myself, enjoy vegetables and try to feed my kids as much as I can, you know. Every once in a while I indulge a French fry or something. I think the member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare) can probably recommend me a spot, member from Flin Flon, perhaps as well. But I think what—*[interjection]* No, he can't, not able to.

But I think what we're getting at is that want to ensure that we have Manitoban-grown vegetables in the long term here and that any changes we make to Peak of the Market, to vegetable production system is going to be looked at through a long-term lens, and that's what we want to ensure on this side of the House.

* (16:20)

Now, we look at the specific changes that this bill is going to bring. And, you know, this bill calls for some changes. Yes, that's right. So it calls for some changes here.

You know, currently with this system, you know, we say that we hear that with the quota system being removed, that it'll open the door specifically looking at smaller farmers, you know, the ones that are under the quota system. It will allow them to produce more than they have previously been allowed under the quota system, and I think that gives them an advantage; gives them an advantage to, perhaps, branch out and maybe supply—you know, instead of supplying the one or two farmers' markets with their acreage, now supply maybe three or four farmers' markets, expand the options for those small farmers who are maybe—market—are selling only to farmers' markets or selling only to individual restaurants or locally sold, you know, on the side of the road or on

different single events. You know, these small farmers might have the option to sell a little bit more and to more opportunities.

And so as we look at these options for small farmers, we see that this bill may allow them to have more opportunities.

At the same time, you know, we share the concern that, as we've seen in the, you know, vegetable industry over the last many years where it's consolidated down from several hundred producers down to, you know, under 14, as the minister mentioned, that that consolidation might happen with the smaller producers.

We don't know exactly what happened, but I—one of our questions to the minister is, has he done research to—shown us whether that might be a likely outcome? Has he done the work to show whether that is something that might happen, or whether he can tell this House and put our fears aside, that he's done the work to show that that is not a likely outcome? That's why we question the minister on that section of the bill: the impacts for small farmers.

And so we ask the minister to do a little bit more research and to find out that and provide that information for the House. He wasn't able to do that in question period.

We also want to know that—you know, what the implications of this bill look like down the line and what they'll look like down the line for Peak of the Market itself. We want to ensure that Peak of the Market is—stays in Manitoba, remains a Crown jewel, a gem of Manitoba that Manitobans can trust—the benefits that Peak of the Market are providing for us, and we want to do that not just in the short term, but in the long term as well.

And so that's why we ask the minister, if he's considered possibilities of what this means to Peak of the Market long-term. Are there, you know, worries about further competition to Peak of the Market? Are there concerns around any, you know, private interests taking over Peak of the Market, or outside-of-the-province interests taking over the market?

And so these are the questions that we have for the minister, again, not because we think these are necessarily things that are directly spelled out in Bill 12, but there often and sometimes can be down-the-stream impacts of this type of legislation. And we've seen this type of legislation in other jurisdictions and that are, perhaps, in other industries; what things, you know, generally get deregulated or there

are quota systems that are removed or other supply-management-type things, you know—Wheat Board monopolies, these type of things—get removed and it has impacts.

But to be fair to the House, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, all those implications should be discussed, should be researched, should be discussed in this House so we can all talk about it, debate it fairly and openly so that it can be done above board, consultation can happen properly and that all Manitobans know exactly what they're going to get when we're looking at Bill 12.

So, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, I want to just move on to talk a little bit about—and, as I've talked about Bill 12, I think there are many benefits to changing the system. As the minister mentioned in the past, there were several hundred producers in the agriculture—in the—sorry, in the vegetable-producing sector. Now it's down to, you know, 10 to a dozen, less than 14. That consolidation has already happened and we know that approximately 10 or so producers are producing approximately 90 per cent of those vegetables, those potatoes in Manitoba. That has a real impact. That is a significant amount of vegetables that are produced in Manitoba by such a small number of producers.

And so, you know, while we applaud these producers for the very hard work that they're doing, and we know that we—that their work is valued, incredibly valuable for our province—not just for the enjoyment of our province but the huge economic boost for our province—we also want to ensure that we open the doors for either new producers coming in, and that perhaps, I would say, we don't see further consolidation into the—in the vegetable market.

You know, there are efficiencies to be gained in every industry all the time but, you know, as we get down to even less than 10, you know, there are concerns about whether is that a healthy state for any market to have such few people producing such a large amount of vegetables for our province. And so, we just want to make sure that our market stays healthy for all Manitobans to enjoy in the short term and in the long term.

And so, I'll shift topics a little bit when it comes to Bill 12 and shift it to talking a little bit about the agriculture in general in Manitoba.

And when we see farmers in our province, you know, get treated in a certain way by this government, it makes us question their intentions when they come

forward with an agriculture bill, when we see that this government has a track record of making life a little bit harder for producers, harder for small farmers, harder for ranchers.

We see that there are a number of small, you know, locally based farms simply, you know, disappear, go under because of the challenges that they've been facing. We know that sometimes these small farms go under because of the challenges they face by large corporate farms and corporate operations in agriculture. And we also see that, you know, this PC government has a tendency to favour those large farmers and put forward legislation that would benefit them at the expense of others.

And so this is a concern that we have. You know, for example, Manitoba's beef producers saw a 3 per cent decline in their herd in 2019, and 2020 was obviously even worse with those dry conditions, and it led to many departures from the market.

You know, there are obviously, you know, issues with our agriculture sector that we ought to solve, in many ways. We know that our agriculture sector—the demographics in our agriculture sector is skewing a little bit older than other industries. And so, as a government, we ought to be looking at ways to employ and engage younger farmers in the industry.

And, you know, while this isn't specific to Bill 12, I'll say that it is very specific to agriculture as a whole in our province. And some of those issues ought to be addressed and ought to be looked at sincerely, as how do we engage younger farmers to get into this business.

Because as we grow as a province, we will always need food. We will always need vegetables. And I say that it's always better for those vegetables, that food to be grown here in Manitoba than for us to be getting it from anywhere else. Let's make sure that we look to buy local here in Manitoba first before we look to import vegetables from other jurisdictions. And that's why it's so important that we really look at ensuring the long-term health of organizations like Peak of the Market and our vegetable-growing producers in Manitoba.

You know, we know that when we look at the long-term longevity of producers in our province, that there's more to be done, that there's more to be done to ensure that those producers are sustainable, have the financial, you know, risk-tolerance mechanisms so that they are not taking all the risk of their farm on their own. And that, as a government of Manitoba, we

are looking at the long-term health of this industry from the long term.

So I want to just conclude by saying that Bill 12 has many aspects that are—that would benefit producers in our province. We question the government to see if they can do more to ensure that this bill will be helpful for vegetable producers, large and small, in the short term and in the long term.

Thank you very much, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker.

* (16:30)

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): It's a pleasure to get up and put a few words on the record and in support of Bill 12. I know that when the members opposite get looking at the details of this, that they'll find that they're very much in support of a bill that will lead to an evolution in the industry, that will encourage smaller growers to come into—back into the industry.

The trend, as has been noted, it's gone from several hundred when it was put together down to a relatively small number. And it has discouraged a number of smaller growers. And, in fact, it's discouraged some new crops, I suspect, as well, because people experiment with the crops and find, yes, we can grow them. We can grow them commercially, but there isn't enough market here. We need access to other markets in other parts of the country, and this way, as we move forward with this bill, this—creating a not-for-profit—will actually allow them to do that.

Over the years, I've been to many provinces in this wonderful country, and I have an interest in the vegetable industry, of course, because Portage la Prairie is the centre of a number of these vegetable operations. So I have a look not only at the production side in some other provinces, but also at the marketing side.

And I happened to be in BC one time and they had just spent—over the last five years, they'd spent about \$10 million a year trying to develop a brand in BC for their local vegetable production. And they'd—they had to have some limited success, but when they surveyed consumers as to what brand they preferred and which one they were familiar with, most—actually, the No. 1 brand was Peak of the Market.

Peak of the Market in BC has about 11 per cent of the marketplace. It has continued to grow and, as has been mentioned, they actually have a distribution warehouse in Calgary that's—was originally put in

place to help serve the Alberta market and now sends a lot of its product to BC. But that grew up over time because at one point in time most of the vegetable purchase for retail in western Canada was actually done in Calgary. That has evolved.

And what we're doing with this bill and the marketplace in general is we're following what the market is doing. There was a time when, for producers, the problem was even getting in the door at supermarkets.

Now, we've certainly established through Peak of the Market and other methodologies that we can produce a product that is what the consumer wants, and the supermarkets have now turned around and they're coming to many of the growers. And you do see some individual grower products in the supermarkets here with labels that you may or may not be familiar with. But many of them are Manitoba products. This is very positive. And they—through that, they've grown their export markets: asparagus, for instance, in any Costco in western Canada comes from Manitoba during the production period.

And I just wanted to touch a little bit on the range of crops because many people don't know how big a range of vegetables are produced in Manitoba, often by the same people that, you know, some are producing potatoes which is the big volume crop without a doubt. Some are producing carrots which are seasonal in the spring and the fall, you know, when the most work is done with them. And they produce other things over the summer or well into the fall.

I'll just touch on a few. Everything like parsnips, which are similar to carrots but have a very specific market—the carrots I mentioned—red beets, 40 acres of red beets is enough production for all of western Canada. We don't need a lot because they're very easy to grow in the household garden, and people will not buy them if they can produce them themselves. Cauliflower and cabbage, it's quite an interesting thing to see a cabbage field with seven different colours of cabbage all planted in various rows for the different markets and, of course, they store well into the fall and so they're not harvested until very late; pumpkins and squash, seven different kinds of onions, which are grown in Manitoba. Some are never put on the table here in Manitoba. They are exported to Europe, which is another big market that they're—we're tapping into as we grow going forward.

Literally, we have from asparagus to zucchini, A to Z here in Manitoba—and I love that line, so I had to use it.

Concern was expressed about food security as we grow—as we encourage more growers to enter the market, and I know that this will. I know a number of smaller growers—smaller farmers now that will certainly take a good look at opportunities in the vegetable market. There are—already have some of the hardware that would be required to get into the marketplace because some things can serve dual purpose. Sometimes it's the tractors, for sure it's the irrigation equipment and you need well-drained—in some cases, tile-drained—land to produce many of these vegetable crops, and we're going to see a number of young entrants looking into this.

And I know concern was expressed about the average age of the farmer and what has been happening in the aging in the farm population in Manitoba and in Canada as a whole, frankly. But you need to look at it by sectors. You need to examine which sectors are attracting the younger farmers, and you will find the vegetable industry has been extremely successful at that.

I know in our own case in the Portage la Prairie area we have a number of Peak of the Market growers and other people that are in the vegetable industry. They are quite obviously the younger portion of the farm population. They farm less acres than some of their neighbours, but they handle way more dollars.

But the big challenge for many of the—in the vegetable industry has always been and continues to be finding enough labour. Some have tied into various government programs. There are temporary foreign workers that work on farms in some situations. There's also a program that actually goes back about 40 years called Seasonal Agriculture Worker Program. It's a federally run program which bring workers regularly to—Manitoba is one of the smaller users; Ontario, Quebec and BC are the big recipients of these folks. And those workers mostly come from Jamaica or Mexico. Some of them have come on a long-term basis, come every year, for anywhere from five to nine months, and they work on farms. Housing is provided, insurance is provided for them, flights are prepaid. It's all very structured and has been a very good program.

And I know I sat down one day and figured out, with all of the benefits that are part of that, what their hourly salary would come to, and it seems to be in the \$19-to-\$20 per hour range. So they're certainly well paid for the work that they're doing here. They certainly have a skill set that is very hard to find in Manitoba workers, and so they have made a major contribution, and I know we regularly see them on

their days off, on the streets in Portage la Prairie, taking advantage of the local business opportunities, and they're a great factor to have in the community.

People mention food security. And if you have more people growing a wider range of crops closer to home, you've shortened the value chain, you've expanded the width of that value chain so that we'll get a wider range of crops available to us from local production here in Manitoba and we get more people in the industry.

And I'm very confident that this bill will do that. It will encourage people that are already doing some form of agriculture to add this type of production to their value chain, to their operations, to diversify, create better opportunities. I know many of them have been using the market garden system right now, but, of course, it's very limited and very time consuming to do your own marketing at the market gardens and getting some access to the supermarkets, which are now expressing a lot of interest in local production. I would call it maturity of the retail marketplace.

There was a time when just having the vegetable was enough. Now you want to have a local vegetable or a specialty like the small potatoes or the coloured carrots or something like that, that consumers want, and that's a maturity, a diversity in the marketplace, and we will see that.

I know our big competition isn't each other when we're in the vegetable industry. Our big competition is some other producer, often in the US and sometimes even in Mexico. You know, we all see the Bunny-Luv carrots, which are almost entirely produced in California. Not a very great quality product by the time they get here; they've had a long ride and do not compete well in terms of quality factors against local production. But there are times when we can't produce carrots here even with proper storage; nine months of the year is all about all you can get out of them, and they can produce basically 12 months of the year down there and bring their product in here, so there are times—and getting a presence in the marketplace, because the buyers want something that they know is going to be on their shelf every day with the same qualities. And so that's our challenge, is to make sure that we can do that.

* (16:40)

New technology has come into the storage sector, and Manitoba has adopted it very quickly. Field scale refrigeration, you know, bringing them in very

quickly and cooling them out. If you're going to produce cabbages or 'cauli' or anything along that line you have to be equipped with slush ice production and all of these things to cool that—take the field heat out of them as quickly as you can so that you can get the consumer the best quality product as quickly as possible.

So, as we move forward I know that we will see greater diversity, greater food security come from this sector if we move in this direction. I think Bill 12 is a logical evolution.

The philanthropy of Peak of the Market was also mentioned, and I do want to touch on the great things that they have done. They are regular suppliers of food banks all across this province. I've talked to lots of food banks in the past that depend a lot on them at certain times of the year when, you know, when we have production or harvest surpluses.

And even individual growers that make donations—we have a couple in my own community that set up every fall and give away free potatoes to anyone who wants to roll up to their door and provide them with. They come into town with a truckload of potatoes and give them away during the day and come back the next day if the demand—if the line wasn't—you know, if they weren't able to meet the demand. And so it's really great to see people like that, and they're all Peak of the Market growers.

And so we're going to see more people enter this industry and they're—I know the ones that have shown interest in it and have questioned me about it in my office are all younger people. I think this is a sector where we can actually see a renewal come into the industry, get younger folks in there with more open—in their skill set and more interest in doing those things.

So I would encourage all members in this House to support Bill 12. I think it's the right bill at the right time and we will see positive impacts from this moving forward.

Thank you very much, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, a few words on this bill on Peak of the Market.

Peak of the Market has been around for 80 years. It has an incredible reputation. I think of all the corporations in Manitoba, it's probably one of the best known as a Manitoba corporation which Manitobans buy product from every day of the year, and it's been

well-supported. It's not just potatoes; the carrots are amazing. I have family who makes sure that when they go to the grocery store that they get Peak of the Market carrots because they're far and away better than any from anywhere else.

But squash, pumpkins, beets, asparagus, parsnip—all really good products which do very well here in Manitoba and are sold in many other places, not only across Canada, but in the United States.

Peak of the Market has an amazing track record and a phenomenal reputation for contributing to charitable causes in Manitoba. Annually and regularly, they contribute produce to Manitoba harvest areas and has been for many years, except perhaps the last two years with COVID, an annual Peak of the Market dinner. Larry McIntosh, when he was the CEO, came with his carrot microphone and mini quiz on questions of minutiae of vegetable production and sales in Manitoba. I've been to many, many of the dinners, and one of the special characteristics is that every bit of food on the table comes from Manitoba, and any MLAs who have not been there need to go to a Peak of the Market dinner. They are excellent and a real tribute to the produce that—in the variety of produce that is grown here in Manitoba.

The changes which are in this bill will allow for an open market for vegetables in Manitoba. It holds great promise for the future of Peak of the Market with the potential for new markets and for new products. It also holds the potential for significant risks, which it's important to acknowledge, but I believe that with Peak of the Market's track record and the personnel, that they will manage to make sure that Peak of the Market does well.

As a caucus, we met with Pamela Kolochuk and Peter Loewen, CEO and chair of the board of Peak of the Market. We appreciate the time that they took to meet with our caucus. We understand that Peak of the Market has not only been consulted but that they've been very involved in developing this legislation and involved in the design of the changes and support these changes, and think that it is time to make these changes.

We in the Liberal party are supporters of this legislation. We believe in Peak of the Market, and we believe that the leaders in Peak of the Market have taken good care to have a close look at the legislation, and they believe that they will prosper and do well and that Manitoba will prosper and do well.

We have an excellent climate for growing vegetables and excellent soils for growing vegetables; excellent conditions we will need in the years of climate change—warming in the years ahead—to make sure that we've got the water for irrigation and water storage and that we continue to manage water in ways that allows growers from—vegetable growers in Manitoba to do well.

We also anticipate that these changes will not only benefit the existing growers—Peak of the Market, who have signed onto this—that they will also benefit small and large vegetable producers, new as well as old, and that vegetables, of course, are seen as increasingly important both for improvements in health as well as to decrease the overall production of greenhouse gases when meat is substituted for vegetables and vegetables are consumed to a greater extent.

So I look forward to many, many more annual Peak of the Market dinners and a very successful venture in vegetable production in Manitoba by many, many growers and many good sales in the years ahead from Peak of the Market.

Thank you, merci, miigwech, dyakuyu. All the best for the Peak of the Market in the years to come.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Thank you for the opportunity to put a few words on the record in regards to Bill 12, The Peak of the Market Reorganization Act.

First, before I begin, I guess I would like to say a couple of different things about my memory, or my—one of my fondest and my more heart—hurtful memory, I would say, about farming.

Being from a northern, central community with very limited farming activity in the area, when I was a young boy, I remember coming down to go to a local farm in the Stead area—Stead, Manitoba—and going to a farm to go and purchase, actually, potatoes with my parents. And we walked into a farm—a farmhouse, and the farmer and his wife met us at the door. They invited us inside.

So I went inside and I was just a young boy; I'm not going to age myself and say how old I was at the time, but I was young enough to recognize and acknowledge what was going on. And we went inside and my dad was talking business with the farmer about how much potatoes were going to cost, how much he wanted to get, you know, whether or not we were going to come back at some point in time.

* (16:50)

And I remember seeing the food that was available and that they were eating, and it was simply just potatoes and ketchup. And that was all they had. That was—they grew that, so that was what they had. They didn't have other vegetables because that's not what they grew on their farm.

But it stuck with me, and it stuck with me, that inability and that—that inability to be able to afford to go and purchase other food items from other farmers, whether it be trading or to go to the grocery store, which for them, I guess, would've been either Pine Falls or Selkirk. And they didn't have that ability.

So it stuck with me about that difficulty that farming has, and we—when we—we've heard members opposite, members on this side talk about kind of recruitment and retention for farmers, for young farmers, whether it be in growing crops, or beef, or what have you.

And those kind of things that are in the history and in the farming families are difficult. It's very difficult to be able to say, I can make a living doing this, when you go to your cupboard and it's just simply potatoes and ketchup. And that's a sad reality, and that's across—and I mean, I'm sure that was a number of different governments ago but it's—reminds me of exactly what that was, and the difficulty that farming has.

Which then gets me to the other story that I remember simply and—Chorney's. And for those of you that are from my area, Chorney's, they had a farm on Highway 59 and 4. And always stopping there as a kid and going into the garage, and the mother and grandmother Chorney always had full vegetables there for sale. All kinds. Every kind of vegetable you could think of was for sale there. And she was well into her 70s and 80s when she was still the storekeeper, the farmer.

So I remember that. And I remember being able to say that—and I'm sure that that farm has now been passed down to other families.

So my problem with some of these issues is—*[interjection]*

The Acting Speaker (Brad Michaleski): Order.

Yes, just tell the members of the House, the level of conversation is getting up and we're right in the middle of debate of a very, you know, important bill.

So, please have respect for the speaker.

Mr. Bushie: And it just kind of brought to my mind the difficulty that farming has, and more importantly, the difficulty that small farm has, and small producers have.

So, when I see any kind of restructuring and where somebody else is going to come in and say, I know what's best for you, this is going to help you, trust us, this is going to help. When it talks about a small producer, I kind of relate that to, for my area, for fishing and the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation, which again, it was supposed to be meant to help the little guy, help the producer, help the small, individual, independent producer to bring their product to market, and to get them a better price and to be able to say, now we have a stronger, a bigger, a louder unified voice.

But, I see a lot of comparisons in this where that structure is not working. That structure doesn't seem to be helping. For example, quotas that are unrealistic, quotas that are now meant to drive you out of business; consolidation, that this bigger voice that's going to come and say, we're going to speak for you, and in this case, with Bill 12, the farmers will now have a bigger voice.

While that may be true in the beginning, it's also a selling tactic to be able to say, this is what we're going to make your life better. But in reality, is that voice truly going to be there? You know, is that voice now going to say—and going to approach an individual producer and say, we're going to give you a voice on this now-corporate board.

And that's fine. I'd love it. And maybe that's a sales pitch that would work, to say, we have this—you now have a voice on a corporate board, and to be able to say you have it, here, but then again, your voice is now one-to-1,000. So is your voice as strong as it should be, is your voice as strong as it could be?

And that's a real dilemma and that's a real concern to be able to say, now, the small producer and the small farmer in this case will not have his or her voice heard anymore. His or her voice will now be 'drowned' out by corporations.

So when—we've heard many, many times over the course of years and years and multi-generations of farmers to say that, you know what, you're important, you matter. Well, let's truly make that—let's have that voice and give our farmers that voice in a strong, unified way, not just here, not just on paper.

Because you've also had those farmers—and I'm sure every member opposite, every member on this

side of the Chamber has heard those voices loud and clear—to be able to say, we want our voice heard. And when you have that, that could be one of the strongest recruitment and retention factors there is, to say you matter. Your voice matters. What you produce matters. The work you put in matters.

And how is that going to be rewarded? It's going to be rewarded by having a strong voice, whether it be in this Chamber or whether it be across Manitoba or whether it be on the international market. That's truly where that has to be.

And when we talk about producing, whether it be in my situation—fresh water, for example; in this situation Peak of the Market being able to say that we're a non-for-profit. Obviously, everybody wants to generate revenue, to support their families, to support themselves, to grow. So that's a question, and my colleague from Burrows asked that question, what happens now? We're talking about not-for-profit. What happens when that model now turns to a for-profit? What happens to the little guy?

And those are the questions that I really want to ask, and if I could only ask one question of this, it's truly this: Is this truly speaking up for the small farmer? Is this truly speaking up for the small voice that doesn't necessarily come and knock on doors and send out emails and repeated phone calls. Does this work for the farmer that's just simply at home working, producing, trying to make a living?

That is the one question I would have, and with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would conclude my comments and—oh, sorry.

Maybe, 'perhaps' there is something that's kind of slipping my mind is the—

An Honourable Member: It's coming to mind now.

Mr. Bushie: They—it's coming to mind now, and it's simply coming to mind because I have to make that purchase today, and I have to make that purchase on my way home—is the cost. Right?

We talked about being able to do these kind of things to reduce cost for the consumers, to increase productivity, to increase generated income for the producer, but at the cost. And I've always made my relations and a number of different issues, including Bill 12, to be able to sit here, and what does this do for my community? What does this do for my constituency?

And sometimes those answers aren't that easy to come across. And it's not relatable, and maybe some

members in southern Manitoba and central Manitoba don't relate that in that way, to be able to say this is what this cost.

For example, you could go out to, whether it be a wholesale here in the city, or Safeway, or Superstore, or wherever to be able to go, and then say I'm going to buy a five-pound bag of potatoes for a few dollars.

Well, now you flip that into a remote community, now you're paying \$25 for that same bag. And that's the realistic issues that need to be addressed here, is the cost of living.

So, with that, that's truly my final words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I appreciate the chance to share these few comments.

The Acting Speaker (Brad Michaleski): Are there any other speakers?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Brad Michaleski): Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Brad Michaleski): The question before the House is second reading of Bill 12, The Peak of the Market Reorganization Act.

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

We will now move on to—*[interjection]*—sorry.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Deputy Government House Leader): There are—will to see the clock as 5 p.m.?

The Acting Speaker (Brad Michaleski): Is that the will of the House, to call it 5 o'clock? *[Agreed]*

The hour—*[interjection]* Order.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, March 14, 2022

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