

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
AL TOMARE, 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
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	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>	Thompson	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 11, 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

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services): I'm pleased to table the Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba annual report for 2021, as well as the Appeal Commission and Medical Review Panel annual report for 2021.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Health—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 her statement.

Indigenous Nurses Day

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize and

honour our First Nations, Métis and Inuit nurses and care providers across Manitoba, who improve the health-care system and the health and wellness of Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous Nurses Day celebrates the bravery and contributions of the Indigenous nurses in our province, who serve in many communities across the province, Madam Speaker: rural, remote communities right here in Manitoba and, of course, throughout our regional health authorities.

This year's theme of National Nursing Week is We Answer The Call, and Indigenous nurses are at the forefront of this call.

Over the last two years, they have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 response. The pandemic significantly impacted Manitoba's Indigenous population, and I was humbled to see how so many answered the call to help keep communities and loved ones safe.

I want to especially thank Dr. Marcia Anderson, who led Manitoba's First Nation Pandemic Response Team. Alongside Indigenous health experts and leadership, the response team developed a vaccine rollout that protected all Manitobans, including the creation of Indigenous-led immunization clinics.

We are proud of the work done in co-operation. This partnership was true reconciliation and action, and saw Indigenous nurses administer over 200,000 vaccinations to their communities and ensured that over 85 per cent of those on reserve are now fully vaccinated.

And I just want to say that your jobs are not easy. They're never easy. They're both physically and emotionally demanding and require great sacrifices of your time.

Please know that by your care and expertise you improve the quality of life of your patients and their families. Your invaluable leadership is key to the strength of our health-care system. Your contributions to the health and safety of all Manitobans, as well as your work on the front lines of this pandemic are admired and appreciated by myself, our government and people across Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, I also want to share that—to all Indigenous nurses: know that today and every day we

celebrate your dedication, achievements and your commitment to caring for others.

On behalf of all Manitobans and all your nurse colleagues, I want to say thank you to Manitoba's First Nations, Métis and Inuit nurses for your tireless advocacy and your work to promote the health and well-being of all Manitobans.

Thank you.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise to speak about Indigenous nursing day. Throughout the province, Indigenous nurses are central to Manitoba's health-care system and have been for a very long time.

One of the first Indigenous nurses was Ann Thomas Callahan, a residential school survivor who began her career at HSC in 1958 and would go on to create the Indigenous language interpreter program for patients. Another trailblazer, Jocelyn Bruyere of Opaskwayak Cree Nation, co-founded the Canadian Indigenous Nurses Association.

When last reported in 2016, 9.2 per cent of nurses in Manitoba were Indigenous, up from 7.2 per cent five years earlier. Today, Indigenous nurses like Stephanie Van Haute continue to play prominent roles in our health-care system. Nurses like her provide quality health care to all Manitobans, but they also provide culturally sensitive care to First Nations people and help inform how all health-care professionals can do so.

We need to take steps to increase representation in our health-care system and address barriers, including systemic racism.

Today we thank and honour all Indigenous nurses, past and present, who have worked in our province. We also need to take concrete steps to ensure that they are supported in their work.

Nurses have made it clear that this government's actions just don't line up with the words the minister has put on record. Our members are drowning, Manitoba Nurses Union President Darlene Jackson reported last week. They need to know that retention and recruitment help is on the way. But, instead, this government continues to make cuts to our health-care services; they continue to let nursing positions go unfilled, and they are spending more than ever on private for-profit nurses rather than investing in our nurses in our public health-care system.

On Indigenous Nurses Day, the Manitoba NDP reiterates our commitment to support them at every

step of their careers by: investing in post-secondary education and enhancing supports so that every Indigenous person who wants to be a nurse can attend school and achieve their goals; by investing in public health care so that nurses can give all of their patients the attention they deserve; and by respecting their work-life balance so that nurses can spend time with their families and friends and have time to unwind.

Thank you to all Indigenous nurses across the province for all that you do.

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

* (13:40)

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to allow the member to address the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, Indigenous Nurses Day, today, is a vitally important day for our province. I've been to many First Nation and Métis communities in Manitoba and met many Indigenous nurses. I recall, as an example, visiting Cross Lake-Pimicikamak and meeting four nurses there running a very busy health clinic.

When Judy Klassen took us to visit a community on the east side of Lake Winnipeg—I believe it was Berens River—the MLA for St. Boniface and I met a nurse who was trying to do an almost impossible job. In St. Theresa Point, we visited a health centre where the power had been out for many, many hours and staff had to meet challenges beyond what most health professionals would have to deal with.

Yesterday, I gave a ride to an Indigenous nurse who currently has to use a wheelchair. Her initial injury resulted from an accident at work at a location not covered, so far, by workers compensation. I'm also concerned, from her story, that with her, sometimes the health care being provided to her in Winnipeg may not be as good as it could be because she's Indigenous. Part way through her healing, she was assaulted on the street and reinjured. Are there still residues of the attitude we saw towards Brian Sinclair? I hope not, but I fear so.

We need to be sure that all Indigenous people are treated well. The Indigenous nurse I met yesterday is absolutely dedicated to her profession and very much wants to be back working in her home community as soon as possible. Indigenous nurses in Manitoba are making a tremendous contribution, in particular with respect to ensuring culturally appropriate care, in their visibility and their connections to community.

We salute them together, today, but we need to remember that they're making their contributions every day, every week, every month, every year.

Speaking on behalf of Liberal MLAs, I say miigwech. Thank you to all Indigenous nurses for all you are doing for Manitobans, for our province and for communities throughout our province.

Merci. Miigwech.

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

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

Flooding Update

Hon. Doyle Piwniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): Madam Speaker, the rain system that occurred this past Monday brought around 25 millimetres of rain to much of the Red River basin, around 30 millimetres to the Whiteshell area, and around 10 millimetres to the rest of southern and central Manitoba. A second system is expected tomorrow, which may bring an additional 20 to 40 millimetres of rain to these areas.

The water levels at the Red River tributaries may start rising again, depending on the amount and intensity of the precipitation received this week. Water levels at the Red River main stem from the Morris and downstream continue to increase. Water levels across the Red River basin are expected to remain high for an extended duration, potentially into the month of June.

Water levels on the Assiniboine River are rising gradually at most locations, and water levels on the rivers and streams are rising in northern Manitoba. However, thanks to our government's critical water control structures, a low risk of spring flooding remains in these areas.

There is also now been 28 RMs and four First Nations communities in states of local emergency, with RM of Clanwilliam-Erickson and RM of Reynolds are—being the most recent additions. MTI and EMO staff supplied this RM of Clanwilliam-Erickson with 20,000 sandbags yesterday to support their floodfighting efforts. In the RM of Dufferin, 'vacuees' have 'beengun'—begin to to return to their homes.

Our government will continue to support First Nations communities whenever possible. However, we recognize that Indigenous Service Canada continues to be the lead in these events.

A resource request from tiger tubes from Waywayseecappo First Nation has recently fulfilled by our staff, and provincial crews worked quickly to repair and re-open Sherridon Road on PH 10.

The Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), my colleagues and I will continue to commend our dedicated staff who are working around the clock to fight this flood. To our hydraulic forecasting team, our water engineers, road maintenance crews and emergency management staff, we are deeply grateful. Their service does not go unnoticed.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, as always, we thank the minister for his updates to the House. We continue to be concerned about the incoming additional precipitation and reiterate our support for all Manitobans facing hardship throughout this extended flooding season. We know that workers are exhausted after working for three weeks around the clock, but we also know that with the crest on its way, the worst hasn't yet arrived in the south Red River basin.

In 'particulul'—in particular, we note how tough the past few weeks have been on food producers. Cattle numbers in this province are already at their lowest numbers that they've been in 30 years before 6,000 more animals were lost over the past few weeks. And farmers, who experienced the worst drought in 15 years in 2021, are now growing increasingly concerned when they'll be able to start seeding. Ron Dreger, a farmer near Morris, said that he usually plants wheat, oats, corn, soybeans and canola by mid-April, but now may not be able to get seeds in the ground until June, the first time that's happened since 1997.

As we continue to support farmers and rural municipalities with their immediate needs, we also look to the coming months when the losses that it looks like Manitoba farmers will face because of the flood. That's why the Manitoba NDP reiterates our support for enhancing the AgriStability program and listening to the needs of Keystone Agricultural Producers and other advocacy groups in this province as they look to protect farmers not only from water damage today, but from financial hardships tomorrow.

As always, we express our gratitude to all the volunteers, the local officials and provincial staff who are protecting Manitoba land and lives. As bad as the situation is now, we can only imagine how much worse it would be without those men and women, like the Deputy Reeve Ike Friesen in the RM of Stanley who has helped organize relief efforts, and Lee-Anne Reddekopp who has helped her neighbour pump out three feet of water from her neighbour's basement in Morden. To them and to so many others across our province, we say thank you.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Madam Speaker, I seek leave to speak to the ministerial statement.

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

Mr. Lamont: I thank the minister for the updates.

Clearly, this is an emergency, and if I can, I'd like to suggest that in this emergency, as in the pandemic, it's entirely appropriate for the government to ramp up communications, including purchasing advertising with radio, TV and newspapers, as well as on social media, in order to inform Manitobans of flood risks, where they can go to get help, what they can do to provide help. And the communication should happen in a way that's strictly non-partisan; in other words, inform Manitobans with public interest advertising.

In the past, one of the roles of Emergency Measures Organization to be the recruitment and co-ordination of volunteers.

We have seen a substantial PR campaign, with the government purchasing billboards, buying ads in newspapers and delivering mailers to people's houses to promote a budget that has already passed. I will say that as someone who's worked in marketing communications, that the whole point of advertising is to get people to do something. They—and public interest advertising should be about promoting citizen engagement or encouraging people to take action in ways that will make their lives better.

In the case of advertising around the flood, we could be giving people updates, directing them to websites, phone numbers or locations for help, printing ads with projections of road closures, how to help, how not to help, where to sign up to donate or volunteer.

And exactly the same could have been done—and still should be—in the pandemic, to encourage people to take basic precautions like wearing masks, or get

booster vaccines since the last wearing—last ones are wearing off, and how to access them.

The ads for the budget, unfortunately, like all ads for budgets, don't do that. They are government spend of an exercise in self-promotion.

Manitobans are not really—it's not clear what they're supposed to do with advertising about a budget because they can't take action in any way, especially since it's already passed.

I know there's a saying that, you know, that if you show me your budget, I'll show you your priorities. Public interest advertising should be the focus. The priority needs to be on informing and empowering Manitobans through public interest advertising, not self-promotion.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mother's Day

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): Madam Speaker, this past Sunday, constituents in Borderland and people across the country celebrated Mother's Day.

It's a big day in the constituency and it becomes evident when you are trying to take your wife and family out for Sunday lunch without have made a reservation beforehand. But this is the way it is in southern Manitoba where the constituency of Borderland is the youngest in the province, and the RM of Stanley in particular is one of the youngest areas in the entire country.

* (13:50)

Mother's Day is a special day set aside to recognize the sacrifices mothers make in raising their children and maintaining the home. It is a time to celebrate our moms, to thank them for all those things they do for us that often get overlooked and taken for granted, but that they nevertheless do each day with love and care. Our mothers are often there for us when we are at our low points in life, and they are there for us when we celebrate our personal triumphs. They set an example for us to follow, teach us valuable life lessons and support us as we make life decisions. They mould little hearts and minds, and ultimately influence and shape our future.

It may be a difficult day for some, and I want to recognize those who spent the day remembering their

mom, or those who may not have had a chance to get to know their mom.

I also want to thank my mom, who gave her children the best childhood she could and who has done so much for me, and I especially want to recognize my wife Alicia for being an amazing mother to our three children, Jack, Scarlett and Olivia.

Madam Speaker, to all mothers in the constituency, I thank you for everything you do: for supporting your family, for raising your children in the best way you know how, for loving and giving and sacrificing. We love you, we thank you and we honour you.

Thank you.

Flood Volunteer Acknowledgements

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Thank you, flood fighters. Merci à tous qui luttent contre les inondations. [*Thank you, flood fighters.*] Miigwech gakina awiya ji-anokiiwaad mooska'aaning. [*Thank you, flood fighters.*]

Manitoba is facing major flooding this year, and Manitobans are stepping up to help. Volunteers are using boats to deliver supplies and take kids to school in the Red River Valley. Morris looks like an island. The effort of volunteers and public servants tirelessly working around the clock to sandbag, pump water and do all the myriad tasks necessary to keep Manitobans safe and to protect homes and infrastructure is inspiring.

Natalie Chow is feeding volunteer sandbaggers in St. Adolphe. Mayor Chris Ewen is overseeing evacuations in Ritchot. Folks are pumping water in Fisher Branch.

The entire Legislature salutes you.

Last week, I had a chance to visit some flood-hit regions and speak to local leaders, both municipal and First Nation. In Peguis the water was many feet deep on the highway, on the provincial road. There were dozens of homes with water surrounding them. I was able to lend a hand for a few hours and shared some laughs with a few of the flood-fighting crews as they worked to keep each other's spirits high.

Late in the afternoon, I was speaking to one of those folks who was taking a break after some 30 straight hours of work. He stopped talking. When I looked over to see what was going on, I could see that he was shedding tears. Seeing his family

threatened, his truck damaged, his home on the brink, finally got to him.

To him and to all the others fighting floods in Manitoba right now, I say thank you. We appreciate you. We've got your backs. It's your hard work. It's your sacrifice for our communities, for our lands and for our province that make Manitoba great.

Royal Manitoba Winter Fair

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services): Madam Speaker, I was very pleased to be joined by many of my colleagues at the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair at Brandon's Keystone Centre during spring break. After missing the last two years due to the pandemic, it was a thrill to see many old and new friends as they gathered to celebrate agriculture, compete, browse the displays and, of course, sample fair food—well, maybe more than just sample.

Madam Speaker, the fair board planned and prepared and were tremendously successful in holding the 2022 winter fair. It was quite something to see the smiling faces of old and young alike coming through the Dome Building for the kick-off breakfast early Monday morning. The MLA from Brandon East joined me and many volunteers to serve for several hours and we never tired of seeing the excitement as people came through the doors.

Madam Speaker, the petting zoo is always a very popular spot to learn about the various farm animals and how they are cared for and to stop to touch and pet a young calf or horse or sheep and so on. Visiting the owners, riders and drivers who care for the show jumpers, heavy horses, hackney ponies and quarter horses is a highlight of the show.

Madam Speaker, congratulations to President Kathy Cleaver and the fair board for their hard work and planning. There are countless volunteers who come back year after year and are joined by new volunteers who spend countless hours making sure that everything is in place for a successful fair.

It was very special to hear a new announcer for the show. Past president Greg Crisanti—Greg did a fabulous job all week, making us all very proud.

Madam Speaker, the plans are already well under way for the summer fair, the Manitoba Ag Ex, and, of course, next year's Royal Manitoba Winter Fair. I suggest you all start planning your trip to Brandon and book your rooms now.

Housing and Homelessness Crisis

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): As the snow fades from sight, the litter that lay beneath it comes into view. Winnipeg isn't just full of potholes, it's full of garbage as well. Much of this waste comes from members of our homeless community—largely due to a housing crisis that this PC government is doing nothing to address.

We have more homeless folks than ever before, due to them selling off social housing, failing to repair existing social housing, cutting people off of disability and regular EIA benefits, raising hydro rates year after year and, of course, making piddly increases to the 'mimumum' wage that have led to ours being the lowest in the country by the end of this year.

Manitobans are struggling financially under this PC government, and the fact that some Winnipeggers are having to live in these encampments, even in the middle of winter, shows that this government isn't doing enough to meet their housing needs. Simply opening up more shelter beds is not a sustainable solution.

Now that the weather is getting nicer, we will see more encampments popping up and surely, more garbage. Housing is a human right and this government has a responsibility to provide it. Manitobans are calling on this PC government to address this housing crisis and get people housed in dignity.

One of my constituents, Jeff Monk, has been vocal in his concerns about the litter strewn around the South Point Douglas area. In response, I'm calling on the City to speed up the clean-up process, but I'm also calling on this PC government to address its root cause of homelessness and develop a real plan that includes actions and not just more empty promises.

A real plan would be to transition these communities out of shelters and encampments, invest in more detox beds, open safe consumption sites, create more flexible entry points into supportive housing and quit kicking people off of EIA, raising the hydro rates and, of course, raise the 'mimumum' wage to \$15. That's a real plan, Madam Speaker.

Miigwech—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Flooding in Southern Manitoba

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): Recent weather events have brought considerable moisture to southern Manitoba. The precipitation has been welcomed

to replenish drought-stricken soils, water reserves, creeks, rivers and lakes.

Flooding is now occurring across the Midland constituency with many highways closed, including highways 75 and 2. Many secondary provincial roads and municipal roads have considerable damage. Some homes have been flooded and access to some yard sites have been cut off.

While spring floods are not new across my constituency, there has been considerable preventative steps taken to at least minimize the effects of flooding. Among the improvements are the ring dikes and raised yards. Highway 246 and 200 bypass route has now allowed trucks—truck access to the town of Morris and when Highway 75 south of Morris is completed, access will be maintained from the south. The town of Carman Diversion project completed in 1991 for \$6 million has saved the town from extensive damages 11 times in its 30-year existence.

Many thanks go out to our local municipal governments, fire and EMS responders, the highway department and countless volunteers in every community who are there to assist in what can be a rapidly evolving situation.

Our agricultural sector has seen three years of drought. Seeding will be delayed this year, but our farmers will continue to produce high quality grains, oilseeds and meat products.

Again, thank you to everyone in the Midland constituency for your help and perseverance during these difficult times. Together, we will come through safely.

And, Madam Speaker, I will include the eight municipalities in the Midland constituency in this statement.

Thank you.

RM of Dufferin, RM of Grey, RM of MacDonald, RM of Morris, RM of Roland, RM of Thompson, Town of Carman, Town of Morris

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: I would like to introduce members to some guests that we have in the gallery today.

I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery, where we have with us today grade 4 and 5 students and their teacher from Buchanan Elementary School, including Daniele Gubernachuk, McKenna James, Kierra Gaskin, Lilly Compeau and their teacher, Scott Templeton, who are

the guests of the honourable member for St. James (Mr. Sala).

On behalf of all honourable members here, we all welcome you to the Manitoba Legislature.

* (14:00)

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hip, Knee and Cataract Surgery Impact of Wait Times on Seniors

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to welcome our friends from Buchanan School to the people's building, the Manitoba Legislature. I hope that you know that you are always welcome here, and I hope some day some of you will consider a career that brings you to this place.

You know, Madam Speaker, it gives me no pleasure to say this, but I'm compelled by the release of information from the Canadian institute of health information to bring attention to the fact that Manitoba is faring among the worst in the nation when it comes to hip, knee and cataract surgeries.

Now, this is a bad situation and it impacts tens of thousands of Manitobans who are waiting, who are suffering in pain. We need to fix our health-care system. It's wrong that six out of 10 seniors right now are waiting longer than the medical recommended time to get a cataract surgery.

Why is the Premier and this government failing to get seniors the surgeries that they need when they need them?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): I, too, want to welcome the students to the gallery today and hope they enjoy this time during question period, Madam Speaker.

What I'd like to say to the Leader of the Opposition and to all Manitobans is that we are making the largest investment in the history of our province in health care in the recent budget that was introduced in this Manitoba Legislature: \$7.2 billion; that's a significant commitment. Out of that, \$110 million is earmarked specifically for surgical and diagnostic backlogs, Madam Speaker.

We will continue to work with our diagnostic and surgical task force, Madam Speaker. They are professionals. They are the professionals that know how we are going to tackle this very important issue. We will take their advice moving forward.

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

Surgical and Diagnostic Backlog Cap on Surgeries and Staffing Levels

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, the concern that we're hearing from the experts is that there's no vision for how to improve health care in our province.

We know that the PCs, for the past six years, have closed emergency rooms, and they've made it harder for nurses to work at the bedside, but now they make new announcements without actually changing the direction.

Doctors Manitoba said it clearly, and I quote: Physicians are looking for a concrete plan from the Province in addressing the shortage of nurses, technologists and other professionals needed to catch up and keep up with testing and surgeries. This is the biggest barrier to clearing the backlog. And I end quote there.

They simply haven't seen that vision that's needed to fix health care in Manitoba. One step would be to lift the cap on these surgeries and to invest in the staffing to meet that increased volume.

Will the Premier do so today?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Well, in fact, we are doing so today.

Madam Speaker, we have invested significantly in this budget with respect to a—400 new nursing seats in the province of Manitoba to start to tackle the nursing shortage, which is nothing that is unique to Manitoba. We know that provinces right across this country are having challenges and, indeed, around and on—in North America.

We recognize that there is a challenge out there. We are committed to doing that, and I will remind the member opposite that those investments are made in this budget that members opposite voted against.

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

Health-Care System Nurse Staffing Levels

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, I will remind the Premier and her Cabinet that there was a time in Manitoba where we had more nurses working at the

bedside, and then they went and deleted hundreds of those nursing positions.

When a nurse's position is deleted, that means—that's an HR term for them no longer having that job. The jobs were eliminated. Nurses were then forced to rush into the basement of HSC and other facilities to try and compete with one another to reapply for those old jobs. We saw photos of this process. It was a very disrespectful approach for the nurses that we're now begging to help us resolve the surgical backlog.

When will the PCs change their approach when it comes to health care, starting by respecting nurses?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, we have outlined our plan to deal with the challenges that Manitobans are facing, particularly as a result of two years of a pandemic.

We recognize that that has created significant challenges within our health-care system and we are committed to dealing with that, Madam Speaker. We recognize that there's a challenge with respect to a nursing shortage. We recognized that some time ago. That's why we're making significant investments and creating more seats for nurses—nursing seats at our post-secondary institutions. That's why we're making those investments in this budget that is before this Manitoba Legislature now.

Members opposite have voted against that every step of the way so far, Madam Speaker, but it's not too late. They can still change their mind and vote in favour of those nursing seats that are much needed in the province of Manitoba.

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

Northern Manitoba Communities Highways, Health Care and the Economy

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): You know, Madam Speaker, the people of Thompson and the surrounding region are hard-working folks who are looking for reasons for optimism right now.

They want to see their highways fixed. They want to see their health care improved. They want a more affordable quality of life. They know they'll get that with the NDP. But for the past six years, they've been let down by this PC government that keeps making life less affordable and that keeps hurting health care in Manitoba.

Things were bad under Brian Pallister. They seem only to be getting worse under this Premier.

Northerners want a government that they can trust when it comes to health care and highways and an affordable quality of life.

Will the Premier tell this House why her government continues to fail the North?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in the House today to remind members opposite and, indeed, all Manitobans—the significant investments that we are making in Thompson. In fact, just the other day, I made an announcement of \$15 million across many—all municipalities in Manitoba. That's more than \$150,000 to Thompson alone to help fix their roads.

I know my colleagues were up north just earlier this week, Madam Speaker, announcing a new pool for the community as well. There are many investments that we will continue to make in Thompson to ensure that those citizens in Thompson have the tools that they need moving forward.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, when hundreds of jobs were lost in Thompson, the PC government was missing in action. When health-care vacancies led to hospital and clinic closures, the PCs refused to help. And when northerners asked for investment in highways in Manitoba, what did the PCs do? Well, within the budget year, they cut the spending on highways by some \$60 million.

Now, everyone driving down a highway, driving down a road in Manitoba, can see the impact of this government's cuts: it's potholes, it's unsafe driving conditions.

Northerners are looking for hope. They're looking for a new approach.

Will the Premier just acknowledge that she's failed northern Manitoba?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, the member opposite talks about investments in infrastructure, and that's why in this budget we announced \$1.5 billion towards that—those—the infrastructure improvements that are needed in the province of Manitoba over the next three years. That's almost \$600 million this year alone, Madam Speaker, and Thompson will definitely benefit from that as well.

I announced earlier this week, Madam Speaker, \$15 million—the member opposite mentioned pot-holes. I just announced \$15 million this week that will go towards specifically to help with potholes across this province. That's \$150,000 to Thompson—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: I know the members opposite don't want to hear this, but these are the facts, Madam Speaker. These are the facts.

We announced a new—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —pool up north. We will continue to make investments in northern Manitoba, including Thompson. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order. I would ask to call order to all members.

There is an increased amount of heckling that just occurred, and I will tell you again and remind you again that I'm very sensitive to that, especially when there are little children in the gallery, students that are learning about this process. And that is not a good example to show them.

* (14:10)

So I'm going to ask for everybody's co-operation, please.

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

Mr. Kinew: Thank you kindly, Madam Speaker, for your learned intervention there.

I want to thank the Premier. I want to thank the Premier for confirming for the House today that the City of Thompson will get less money for their roads than her government gave to the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan): \$150,000 for Thompson and their streets; \$500,000 for their own political friends, Madam Speaker.

Again, we know what this government has done: they've failed northern Manitoba. They failed them when it came to the pool closure, when it came to jobs, when it's come to the economy, when it's come to health care and when it's come to the roads.

And then, only the day before the writ drops for a by-election do they show up to try and make amends.

Will the PCs simply admit that they have failed northern Manitoba and they've failed Thompson?

Mrs. Stefanson: I know that the members opposite don't like the facts, Madam Speaker, but the facts are that we are making investments in Thompson.

I know right now we're investing in a courthouse in—the courthouse in Thompson. We invested in a healing lodge in Thompson as well. We're investing in roads, Madam Speaker. We're—invest in a pool.

We're making all sorts of investments in Thompson, Madam Speaker. We're also making all sorts of investments right across this great province of ours. It's \$1.5 billion over the next three years in infrastructure projects right across this province, and Thompson will be a part of that, as well.

COVID-19 in Personal-Care Homes Public Reporting on Outbreaks

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, Manitobans deserve greater transparency on COVID-19 outbreaks in personal-care homes. Families and friends of residents have been left in the dark since this government stopped reporting personal-care-home outbreaks on April 1st.

There's absolutely no reason why this province can't provide that information.

They want to know what their family members are experiencing in personal-care homes. People want to know that their loved ones and their friends are safe, Madam Speaker.

Can the minister commit to providing this information today?

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): I thank the member for the question.

I can assure the member that every effort is made, when there is an outbreak of COVID or there is infections existing in personal-care homes, that individual family members are notified by the personal-care home to ensure that everyone is aware, and certainly, all the precautions are taken.

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

MLA Asagwara: Husband and wife Gail and Mike Dobbin both passed away from COVID-19 at personal-care homes. Their son, John, says that he feels Manitobans are being left in the dark because, quote, you don't know how other care homes are being affected. You don't know if there's an incident. End quote.

This is unacceptable, Madam Speaker. Families and friends of residents should not be left in the dark. They want to know how and when outbreaks occur, and how many staff and residents are affected.

Will the minister commit to consistent reporting on personal-care-home outbreaks?

Mr. Johnston: First and foremost, my condolences to the family that the member references. Very difficult circumstances.

Again, the reality is, is that family is notified by personal-care homes. We also, too, publish a weekly update on outbreaks within the province, including personal-care homes.

So, in answer to the member's question, is there consistency? Yes, there is consistency, Madam Speaker.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, outbreak statuses should not be hidden from Manitobans. After the tragedy at Maples Personal Care Home, where 56 residents passed away, this government should have committed to greater transparency. However, they've gone in the other direction, even though COVID-19 is still very much here in Manitoba.

Being left in the dark creates a lot of stress and anxiety for family and friends of residents. For John Dobbin, the solution is simple. Quote: All they have to do is provide information. A dashboard shouldn't be that difficult to operate. End quote.

Will the minister commit to releasing detailed information on outbreaks at personal-care homes consistently, regularly and transparently?

Mr. Johnston: As I'd indicated earlier, that there are—there is information that is related to families as well as made public through the informational methods that we proceed to ensure that everyone is notified.

In regards to the overall support for seniors, Madam Speaker, the Stevenson report was developed based on the strategy of Maples, which was actually initiated by our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson). And we have continued to proceed adopting all 17 recommendations, and will continue to protect seniors in this province.

COVID-19 in the Maples PCH Health and Safety Updates

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): I recently wrote to the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon) expressing my concern for the well-being of staff and the residents of the Maples Personal Care Home.

A recent outbreak has led to 19 residents and 10 staff being infected. Manitobans have not forgotten about the tragedy at the Maples last year, where 56 residents lost their lives from COVID-19. The minister should take action now to ensure that it won't repeat.

Will the minister commit to doing so today?

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): I thank the honourable member for the question.

There's no question that the outbreak in Maples was a tragedy and certainly needed—changes needed to be identified, which the Stevenson report certainly does.

In regards to the outbreak the member is referencing, protocols were in place to address the problems that were existing, and also two WRHA staff was on-site monitoring the situation to ensure that all protocols were taking place to secure the safety of the residents in Maples.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Madam Speaker, deaths in the personal-care homes are not, I quote, unavoidable, end quote, as the previous ministers claimed.

The government has an ability to step in to ensure that Maples residents receive the care they needed. They can ensure there are enough staff on site, and they can commit to releasing regular updates so that Manitobans know what is happening at the Maples.

Will the minister make this commitment today?

Mr. Johnston: To address the member's question, protocols were in place at Maples. Staffing levels were—did meet those protocols, as per my office's inquiry.

So, this is a very unfortunate situation. But were the essentials in place to be able to address these issues? Yes, they were.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Since the recent—most recent outbreak was announced last week, there haven't been any updates.

Manitobans should not be kept in the dark. Families and friends of residents at the Maples Personal Care Home are worried about their health and safety. They want to know that the terrible tragedy where 56 residents passed away from COVID-19 will never repeat again.

The minister can step up and commit to taking action.

Will he do so today?

Mr. Johnston: As I'd indicated, yes, we are taking actions. We're—I—we're implementing the recommendations, all 17, of the Stevenson report.

* (14:20)

Madam Speaker, there was—\$15-million expenditure took place on infectious control, as well as allied health, as well as housekeeping. We are taking the initiatives to do so. Plus, there's \$32 million that's associated for the spend on Stevenson, longer term, as well as there's \$20 million for seniors that we've identified for the seniors strategy.

My department will be spending \$54 million on seniors in a budget that the NDP voted against.

Post-Secondary Education Tuition Costs for the Year

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): The cost of living is going up for regular Manitobans. The cost of post-secondary degrees or diplomas is also increasing.

The PCs budget is hiking tuition by millions of dollars for students and families, but they refuse to tell Manitobans by how much. We know tuition is going up next year, but we don't know by how much; their minister refuses to say. It's a simple question, Madam Speaker, and the PCs should stop hiding the answer.

Will the minister tell Manitobans how much tuition for colleges and universities will go up this September?

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): Madam Speaker, during the 17-year reign of the member opposite, we inherited an NDP mess of higher taxes, unsustainable spending commitments and higher and higher deficits—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Reyes:—every single year. Their philosophy was pay more and get less.

I want to remind the member opposite, there are more—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Reyes:—students accessing scholarships and bursaries in Manitoba today than under the NDP government or at any time in Manitoba history. Almost 22,500 students received over \$33 million in 2021, the most ever.

Our government is committed to match and exceed this commitment by providing more than \$33 million for bursaries this year. These are record investments for students and as a result, it's making life more affordable for post-secondary students in Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Advanced Education Amendment Act Request to Repeal Bill 33

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): It's sad the minister won't tell Manitobans the answer.

Madam Speaker, we know that the PCs failed; bill 33 will only make this situation even worse. It will mean even higher tuition for families, even higher fees for students and more interference from this PC government, and that's simply wrong.

Manitobans know it's important for university and college to be more affordable for regular Manitobans so that they can get a good job and stay right here at home. The first step to doing that is for this government to repeal bill 33 that simply failed.

Will the minister listen to students and their families and faculty, and repeal bill 33?

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): Madam Speaker, I don't know where the member has been, but our government has been consulting with our post-secondary partners, and we were working collaboratively to implement the Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy, which focuses on four high-level objectives: anticipate skills needed for the future; align post-secondary and training and immigration to labour market needs and help students and newcomers succeed now—into the future; foster entrepreneurial and innovative skills; grow, attract and retain talent.

Madam Speaker, our government will continue to support our post-secondary partners to strive, unlike the NDP who took an ideological approach to post-secondary education in Manitoba. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: No, I haven't recognized the member yet. I was waiting for members to settle down.

The honourable member for St. Vital, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Moses: On this side of the House, Madam Speaker, we actually listen to students and their families, and that's why we would repeal bill 33.

Bill 33 was another failed idea of Brian Pallister that this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and her whole team are continuing to force on universities and their students. This is simply not the right approach. Students are paying thousands of dollars more each and every year because of the PC government's decisions. It's wrong.

Will the minister take a stand, listen to students and their families and repeal bill 33?

Mr. Reyes: Madam Speaker, the member talks and no action as usual.

They talk about their supposed 'cousultations'. Let's talk about the NDP record on 'cousultations', Madam Speaker, when they were in government.

They jacked up taxes, increased the PST without consulting a single Manitoban. They feel Manitobans have forgotten about the mess they left back in 2016, but Manitobans remember that the NDP is nothing more than the tax-and-spend party.

Our government wants to make sure that Manitobans know what they are getting in over \$1 billion of their taxes that directly support higher education. We want to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are used wisely and provide a good return on investments for Manitobans.

That's why students under our government will study and stay in Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Manitoba Hydro and Public Utilities Board Request to Withdraw Bill 36

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Madam Speaker, this government doesn't seem to have any concern for how inflation is impacting Manitobans. Groceries, gas and more are all going up, yet this government is making our affordability problem worse.

They've introduced the hydro-rate-hike Bill 36, which would allow them to increase hydro rates by as much as 5 per cent per year without oversight from the Public Utilities Board.

The last thing Manitobans need right now are bigger hydro bills, Madam Speaker.

Will the minister commit to—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sala: —withdrawing Bill 36 and backing away from their plan to legislate hydro rate increases on Manitobans?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Well, Madam Speaker, the NDP just doesn't get it.

We've introduced a bill that is designed to protect affordability for Manitobans when it comes to hydro rates, to help Hydro get on a better and more stable track and to give the Public Utilities Board more tools to be able to stop boondoggles in the future like the ones that the NDP perpetrated on Manitobans when they overspent on Keeyask by \$4 billion.

But, Madam Speaker, what's important—and now more than ever—is that we are focused on affordability, and this afternoon the NDP have a chance to express their concern about affordability and stand with us to pass these measures and this bill this afternoon.

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

Mr. Sala: Since taking office, this government has raised hydro bills on Manitobans by hundreds of dollars. In 2017 alone, they tried to raise rates by 7.9 per cent, and the PUB stopped them.

Bill 36 would strip the PUB of its rate-setting power and hand it over to their Cabinet.

It's clear why they want to remove the PUB's oversight: they want to raise rates on Manitobans with no oversight or accountability. This is not what Manitobans want, Madam Speaker.

Will the minister reverse course and withdraw Bill 36 today?

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, the facts are these. The NDP have tried these tactics since we introduced Bill 36 in the House. They missed the Free Press article that called their strategy bad strategy, bad messaging and cynical politics designed to stoke fear, ratchet up anger like the kind that the Leader of the Opposition is exhibiting right now, and anxiety.

When will that member actually express a true interest in affordability for Manitobans, stand with us, pass Bill 36 and stand today in the Legislature and support our plan to bring tax relief to Manitobans?

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

Mr. Sala: Madam Speaker, Manitobans do not trust this government when it comes to Hydro, end of story. Tens of thousands—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sala: —of Manitobans are behind on their hydro bills. They're struggling to keep up with rising inflation and the cost of living. Raising rates further would only increase—*[interjection]*

* (14:30)

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sala: —the number of Manitobans in arrears. In times like these, governments should work to make life more affordable, not the other way around.

Will the minister, today, commit to withdrawing Bill 36?

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, I feel like tabling a copy of the Free Press so the member could read it and see that, instead of doubling down, he should actually go back and consider his arguments. The Free Press actually said about that opposition Hydro critic: undeterred by actual facts.

But, Madam Speaker, we are guided by the facts, and the facts are these. Manitobans—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: —do not trust the NDP when it comes to Hydro. Manitobans do not trust the NDP when it comes to tax relief, and Manitobans do not trust the NDP when it comes to assuring that Manitobans have more of their own money left in their own pocket at the end of the day.

That is our plan. What is their plan? Or do they even have a plan?

Privatization of Air Ambulance Services Quality of Service Provided

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Madam Speaker, the government has issued an RFP for air ambulance services. In 2020, the doctors who ran that service warned that selling it off would result in longer trip times, growing backlogs for the tens of thousands of Manitobans who may only have a nursing station

and depend on Lifeflight for emergency medical service.

Dismantling a public air ambulance system was a downgrade in service for Manitobans in dozens of communities across the province. That's not ideology; it is evidence, because we've heard there are days when dozens of people are stuck waiting for air ambulances in Manitoba.

Is this RFP an admission the government broke the air ambulance system by selling it off?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, I'm disappointed to hear the fear mongering that's coming from the Leader of the Liberal Party in terms of the request for proposal for air services.

A contract is about to expire, and it's commonplace to issue an RFP to be able to replace those services. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: Madam Speaker, we are going to ensure Manitobans continue to receive transportation services so that they can access health services, whether that's by air, by road, through ambulances. That is what Manitobans elected us to do.

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

Norway House Cree Nation Power Outage Coverage for Evacuation Costs

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): One of the communities being affected by the medevac changes is Norway House Cree Nation.

In March, a power surge at the Manitoba Hydro substation fried the circuits of hot water tanks, sewage processing and laundry at a local nursing home, and it has made living there for elders impossible. They have to evacuate the entire home, which will require four medevacs plus multiple charters that can handle people in wheelchairs. Norway House should not have to cover the costs for Hydro's mistakes or this government's failures on air ambulances, which are both one hundred per cent provincial.

Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) commit today to covering the cost of flights to get elders from Norway House to a place of comfort and safety?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): Again, we've issued a request for a proposal. We will accept those proposals. They will be reviewed.

Contracts will be signed and agreements that ensure the safety and health of Manitobans that will use those services all across this province, Madam Speaker—in the North, rural communities, here in Winnipeg—and we will continue to do what is necessary to ensure Manitobans receive the services that they need and, yes, in the North.

Personal-Care-Home Regulations and Funding Stevenson Report Recommendations

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, violence in personal-care homes, as described by Gretchen Marasigan-Esteva, is occurring in part due to a shortage of staff.

The Stevenson report called for staffing levels and salaries to be appropriate to the complexity of current and future residents. This means Manitoba needs to move from 3.6 to a minimum of 4.1 paid hours of care per resident per day, as the March report demonstrated.

Though this deficit has existed for many years, the NDP did not act and the government of today has not yet implemented the changes, even though it was a Stevenson report recommendation.

When will the Province ensure that changes needed in regulations and in funding are made?

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): I appreciate the member's question.

The member is accurate. This government has adopted all 17 recommendations of the Stevenson report, and it is our intention to initiate all of those 17 reports. Staffing is part of that. Bedside service is part of that.

However, there is going to be a process of negotiation to be able to accomplish that, and that's exactly what we are proceeding with. Good news will come.

Thompson Aquatic Centre New Facility Announcement

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): Madam Speaker, our government recognizes the important role recreational facilities play in our communities. Investments to build and upgrade community and recreational infrastructure help Manitobans access the services and the networks they need to stay connected, share experiences and build healthy, inclusive and vibrant communities.

Can the Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services share our—how our government is working with all levels of government to make this possible for the residents of Thompson?

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services): Thank you to my colleague from Swan River for that great question. He's a great representative.

On Monday, I was very pleased and proud to stand with my colleague, the Deputy Premier, and Mayor Colling [*phonetic*] Smook to announce the Thompson aquatic centre, funded through \$15 million in investments from all levels of government. We're very pleased to partner with the federal government and the City of Thompson.

This Thompson aquatic centre will stimulate the economy, improve the quality of life and contribute to the health and well-being for so many of the communities in and around the Thompson area.

Safe Consumption Site Request for Facility

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Yet again, I am asking this government to listen to the experts. Listen to the community advocates. Listen to the loved ones of those who have passed away from drug addictions.

Safe consumption sites save lives. If a safe consumption site was in place, maybe some of the 407 Manitobans who lost their lives last year would still be here.

More and more Manitobans are losing their lives each year under this PC government. These are preventable.

Will this government commit to opening a safe consumption site that has been proven to save lives?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I do want Manitobans to know that the NDP government—for 17 years, the government of the no did little or nothing to help individuals suffering with mental health and addictions.

But our government, Madam Speaker, the government of the yes, established the Mental Health and Community Wellness Department. We staffed it with an array of individuals who have extensive backgrounds in addictions and mental health.

We, the government of the yes, also descheduled naloxone. Our take-home naloxone program has distributed over 25,000 kits.

We, the government of the yes, ensured that Klinik Community Health Centre—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

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

Mrs. Smith: Safe consumption sites are an investment that works for all Manitobans. They save countless lives, and they save taxpayers millions of dollars.

The minister herself agreed that they would work when used in conjunction with other services. Even RAAM employees are speaking out against this government's lack of resources and saying that it is costing Manitobans their lives. This government needs to understand that this isn't an ideological issue. Implementing a safe consumption site makes sense on all levels.

* (14:40)

Will they commit to implementing a safe consumption site and give the front-line workers the resources that they need to help save Manitoban lives?

Ms. Gordon: Our government, the government of the yes, has invested in a wide array of harm reduction strategies, Madam Speaker: \$2.8 million for the Thompson Sobering Centre, \$428,000 to Klinik—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: —Community Health for their mobile withdrawal management services.

Madam Speaker, I know the members opposite are shouting me down. They don't want Manitobans to hear about our investments to help individuals struggling with mental health and addictions. We will continue to support Manitobans in their time of need through their journey to recovery.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Health-Care Coverage

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

The background for this petition is as follows:

(1) Health care—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Lamoureux: —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—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Lamoureux: (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—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker, I can wait for the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew).

Thank you, Madam Speaker, I'll start again.

(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) Private health insurance is not a substitute for public health insurance. Private insurance plans available to most migrant workers and international students are paid for by the worker or student. They do not provide coverage for all of the potential health needs covered by public health coverage. Individuals are required to pay up front for health expenses without a guarantee that they will be covered and wait weeks for reimbursement.

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

(4) Without adequate health-care coverage, if they are ill, many of those without provincial health coverage 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 authorities.

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

(6) 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.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to immediately provide comprehensive and free public-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 residents.

(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 senior care to inform all health-care institutions and providers of expanded coverage for those without public health insurance and the details on how necessary policy and protocol changes will be implemented; and

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

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

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

Foot-Care Services

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

The—(1) The population of those aged 55-plus have 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 the positions retired.

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes only—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —continues 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 care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1st, 2022.

Miigwech. Thank you.

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

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

The 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, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order, please. *[interjection]*

If the member could just hang on one moment.

There are several conversations going on here and I cannot hear the member so I'm going to ask for everybody's co-operation, please, that if you want to have conversations, either take it to the hall or to a loge so that Hansard can properly hear and I can properly hear.

Mr. Brar: 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 many Manitobans.

Thank you.

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): 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.

* (14:50)

(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 retired.

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

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and the 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.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): 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—and also living on low incomes.

(4) The northern 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 these 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 centres.

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

Number 7—oh, I already—No. 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 this 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, many fine Manitobans.

Ekosi.

Louise Bridge

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) Over 25,000 vehicles per day cross the Louise Bridge, which has served as a vital link for vehicular traffic between northeast Winnipeg and the downtown for the last 110 years.

(2) The current structure will undoubtedly be declared unsafe in a few years as is—has deteriorated extensively, becoming functionally obsolete, subject to more frequent unplanned repairs and cannot be widened to accommodate future traffic capacity.

(3) As far back as 2008, the City of Winnipeg—City—has studied where the new replacement bridge should be situated.

(4) After including the bridge replacement in the City's five-year capital budget forecast in 2009, the new bridge became a short-term construction priority in the City's transportation master plan of 2011.

(5) City capital and budget plans identified replacement of the Louise Bridge on a site just east of the bridge and expropriated homes there on the south side of Nairn Avenue in anticipation of a 2015 start.

(6) In 2014, the new City administration did not make use of available federal infrastructure funds.

(7) The new Louise Bridge Committee began its campaign to demand a new bridge and surveys confirmed residents wanted a new bridge beside the current bridge, with the old bridge kept open for local traffic.

(8) The NDP provincial government signalled its firm commitment to partner with the City on replacing the Louise Bridge in its 2015 Throne Speech. Unfortunately, provincial infrastructure initiatives, such as the new Louise bridge, came to a halt with the election of the Progressive Conservative government in 2016.

(9) More recently, the City tethered the Louise Bridge replacement issue to its new transportation master plan and eastern corridor project. Its recommendations have now identified the location of the new Louise bridge to be placed just to the west of the current bridge, not to the east as originally proposed. The City expropriation process has begun.

(10) The provincial budget due in mid-April 2022 is the Province's opportunity to announce its portion of funding for this long-overdue vital link to northeast Winnipeg and Transcona.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Premier to financially assist the City of Winnipeg in her new 2022 provincial budget to build this three-lane bridge in each direction to maintain this vital link between northeast Winnipeg, Transcona and the downtown.

(2) To urge the provincial government to recommend that the City of Winnipeg keep the old bridge fully open to traffic while the new bridge is under construction.

(3) To urge the provincial government to consider the feasibility of keeping the old Louise bridge open for active transportation in the future.

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Health-Care Coverage

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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 a year, international students and those undocumented residents who have lost their status for a variety of reasons.

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.

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, deportation if their immigration status is reported to the authorities.

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

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 confidence to access health care.

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.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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 residents.

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

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.

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

* (15:00)

Signed by Gisèle Hutchinson, Dennis Mager, Olivia Macdonald Mager and many others.

Thank you.

Foot-Care Services

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): 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 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 therefore 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 is signed by John Rolsky, Lori Hamilton and Mike Aminotte [*phonetic*] and many more Manitobans.

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

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, 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 many Manitobans.

La Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Madame la Présidente, je désire présenter la pétition suivante à l'Assemblée législative:

Le contexte de cette pétition est la suivante:

La Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library a été avisée par la division scolaire vallée de la rivière Rouge de libérer des locaux actuellement situés dans l'auditorium de l'École Héritage school d'ici le 31 mars 2023.

(2) L'auditorium a été construit dans les années 1960 par le célèbre architecte—[interjection]

Translation

Madam Speaker, I'd like to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly. The context for this petition is as follows:

The Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library was notified by the Red River Valley School Division to vacate premises currently located in the auditorium of the École Héritage school by March 31, 2023.

(2) The auditorium was built in the 1960s by famous architect—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Sala: —Étienne Gaboury et B-R-G y a été installé—[interjection]

Translation

—Étienne Gaboury and the JRL was established there—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order.

I'm going to ask members that, in order for translation to work, everybody around the speaker needs to remain silent so that the translation can actually work.

So, I'm asking everybody in the House if we can please respect that translation needs silence from us in order for this to work—[interjection]—on all sides, yes. [interjection] Whoa.

Mr. Sala: Merci, Madame.

(2) L'auditorium a été construit dans les années 1960 par le célèbre architecte manitobain Étienne Gaboury et B-R-G y a été installé depuis 48 ans.

(3) Une photo de l'auditorium intitulée la bibliothèque régionale est publiée dans le document de 2008 intitulé: bâtiments patrimoniaux des—monsieurs—Salaberry [phonétique] et Saint-Pierre Jolys. Il est indiqué qu'il s'agit un bâtiment moderne important qui pourrait atteindre le statut du site patrimonial.

(4) B-R-G et DSVRR ont prospérés grâce à un protocole d'entente mutuellement bénéfique pendant 54 ans.

(5) Leur collection commune compte plus de 50 000 livres et possède la quatrième plus grande collection de littérature de langue française dans les régions rurales du Manitoba.

(6) Les élèves qui sont transportés par l'autobus des municipalités voisines qui n'ont pas de bibliothèque publique comme Niverville, Grunthal et Kleefeld, ont accès gratuitement à la bibliothèque publique et à sa quatrième plus grande collection de

livres en français dans les régions rurales du Manitoba pendant l'année scolaire.

Nous présentons à l'Assemblée législative du Manitoba la pétition suivante :

(1) De demander au ministre du Travail, de la Protection du consommateur et des Services gouvernementaux d'envisager de concéder l'auditorium à la B-R-G d'ici le 1er mars 2023.

(2) Demander au ministre de l'Éducation de reconnaître la valeur que la B-R-G apporte à la population étudiante de l'ÉHS ainsi qu'aux communautés du Village de Saint-Pierre-Jolys et de la MR De Salaberry.

(3) Demander au ministre de l'Éducation et au ministre des Affaires francophones de reconnaître qu'un protocole d'entente entre la RRVSD et JRL est mutuellement bénéfique, financièrement et culturellement.

(4) Demander au ministre du Sport, de la Culture et du Patrimoine de reconnaître le potentiel patrimonial de cet important bâtiment et son statut au sein de la communauté.

(5) Demander au ministre du Sport, de la Culture et du Patrimoine d'empêcher toute rénovation de l'auditorium qui détruirait et dévaloriserait l'intégrité architecturale du bâtiment.

Cette pétition a été signée par Monique Lepage, Robert Forest et Melanie Beamish.

Translation

Thank you, Madam.

(2) The auditorium was built in the 1960s by famous Manitoban architect Étienne Gaboury. The JRL has been there for 48 years.

(3) A picture of the auditorium titled the regional library was published in 2008 document titled Significant Heritage Buildings of De Salaberry and St. Pierre Jolys. It is pointed out that it is an important modern building that could reach heritage site status.

(4) The JRL and the RRVSD have prospered by means of a mutually beneficial memorandum of understanding for 54 years.

(5) Their common collection has over 50,000 books and has the fourth biggest French-language literature collection in rural Manitoba.

(6) Students transported by neighbouring municipalities buses that do not have public libraries, such

as Niverville, Grunthal and Kleefeld, can access the public library and its fourth biggest French-language literature collection for free in the rural regions of Manitoba during the school year.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services to consider conceding the auditorium to the JRL by March 1, 2023.

(2) To urge the Minister of Education to recognize the value the JRL brings to the student population of the ÉHS, as well as to the communities of the town of St. Pierre Jolys and the RM of De Salaberry.

(3) To urge the Minister of Education and the Minister for Francophone Affairs to recognize that a memorandum of understanding between RRVSD and the JRL is mutually beneficial, both financially and culturally.

(4) To urge the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to recognize the heritage potential of this important building and its status within the community.

(5) To urge the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to prevent any renovation of the auditorium that would destroy and depreciate the architectural integrity of the building.

This petition was signed by Monique Lepage, Robert Forest and Melanie Beamish.

Foot-Care Services

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Madam Speaker, 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 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 1st, 2022.

And this has been signed by Robert Blair Schell, Greg Hillier [*phonetic*], Evelyn Spence and many Manitobans.

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

* (15:10)

(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 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 service—medical foot care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1st, 2020.

And this has been signed by Sharon Pankratz, Carlee Monias, Mervar Yehia and many other Manitobans.

Health-Care Coverage

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to 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 with—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—sorry—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.

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 residents.

(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; and

(4) To urge the minister of Health and seniors care to create and enforce strict confidentiality policies and 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.

And this petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Foot-Care Services

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity.

The background—I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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.

(4) The northern regional health authority, the N-R-H-A, previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and to 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 in the city of Thompson effective April 1st, 2022.

And this petition, Madam Speaker, is signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Could you please call for debate and hopeful passage this afternoon the appropriation bill, school tax rebate?

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider The Appropriation Act, 2022 (School Tax Rebate) this afternoon.

Messages

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I have a message from the Lieutenant Governor as well as the appropriation document, which I would like to table.

Madam Speaker: Please stand for the reading of the message.

To the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the Lieutenant Governor transmits to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Estimates of sums required for the services of the province for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2023, and recommends these Estimates, School Tax Rebate, to the Legislative Assembly.

You may be seated.

* * *

Madam Speaker: The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply to consider the resolution respecting the appropriation bill, school tax rebate, 2022.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

* (15:20)

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Supplementary Supply

Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

We have before us for our consideration a resolution respecting the appropriation bill, school tax rebate.

The resolution pertaining to part A of the Estimates reads as follows:

RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$349,800,000, as set forth in part A of the Estimates, School Tax Rebate, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Does the minister have any opening comments?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I simply want to indicate that we are here this afternoon in debate seeking passage of this appropriation bill which will make possible rebates to Manitoba homeowners in respect of the school tax that they pay.

It has been our government's solemn commitment that we are concerned about affordability. We are concerned because Manitobans are concerned with rising prices, a hyperinflationary environment that we are well into, and every government should be always concerned with the ability of citizens to be able to make payments and to raise their families and to be able to thrive in their jurisdiction.

We know that Manitoba has been traditionally a very, very high-tax jurisdiction, especially under the 17 years of the NDP government. It's why, as a government, we have been committed to bringing forward

these proposals for tax savings and tax reductions and seeing them through.

So, this afternoon, we are inviting the debate. We are inviting all members to support our government's plan to provide back 37.5 per cent rebates to all Manitobans, their households and farmland, off of their education property tax.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): No, we do not.

Mr. Chairperson: The floor is open for questions.

Is the committee ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the resolution pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Mr. Chairperson: The resolution is accordingly passed.

This concludes the business before the committee.

Committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Committee Report

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has considered and adopted a resolution respecting the appropriation bill, school tax rebate.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Concurrence Motion

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, that this House concur in the report of the Committee of Supply respecting the resolution relating to the appropriation bill, school tax rebate, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Motion agreed to.

Supplementary Supply Motion

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister for Seniors and Long-Term Care, that there be granted to Her Majesty on account of Certain Expenditures of the Public Service for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023, out of the Consolidated Fund, sums not exceeding \$349,800,000 as set out in part A of the Estimates.

Motion agreed to.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 39—The Appropriation Act, 2022 (School Tax Rebate)

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister for Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, that Bill 39, The Appropriation Act, 2022 (School Tax Rebate); Loi de 2022 portant affectation de crédits (remboursement de taxes scolaires), be now read a first time and be ordered for second reading immediately.

Motion agreed to.

* (15:30)

SECOND READINGS

Bill 39—The Appropriation Act, 2022 (School Tax Rebate)

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 39, The Appropriation Act, 2022 (School Tax Rebate), be now read a second time and be referred to Committee of the Whole.

Motion presented.

Mr. Friesen: It is my pleasure to rise in the House this afternoon and to put some words on the record in support of Bill 39, The Appropriation Act, 2022, that we are debating this afternoon.

Madam Speaker, as I indicated at the committee stage, this is the bill that is the mechanism by which our government will fulfill its promise to all Manitobans to bring badly needed tax relief at a time when Manitobans are focused on affordability. I know that I do not have to paint the picture for my colleagues in this Legislature. As a matter of fact, since we resumed session this spring, we have been in debate on a daily basis about the concerns that Manitobans are expressing about rising prices. The rationale for these increases are a few.

First of all, we all know the geopolitical situation. We know the terrible and tragic invasion of Ukraine by Vladimir Putin in Russia. We want those hostilities to cease forthwith. But in the meantime, we know that it is disrupting the way our world trades. It is—I mean, first and foremost, disrupting life for Ukrainians, and we—and our hearts go out to them. But also, the impact, we have learned, makes our world much smaller. Global supply chains have been affected by this and other factors, and so we know that that causes prices domestically to increase. It disrupts world markets. It disrupts our import and export frameworks.

We know that even now the global pandemic continues to ripple through our own economy. I saw mapping of the Port of Shanghai last week that showed the extent to which shipping has been disrupted because of a new resurgence of the virus and a sub-variant in that jurisdiction. And it's shocking to see that you can have shipping—you can have global shipping so disrupted and you have freighters that are hundreds of miles, hundreds of kilometres off shore, waiting to load or unload, but essentially floating in the ocean and unable to do that. We know that—even that is a long ways away from Manitoba—we know that those are the materials that our manufacturers, that our exporters and that those who create jobs need those things will be disruptive.

We know that here at home fuel costs have risen as a consequence of some of the things that I have mentioned. Right now, we know that gas prices are approaching a 40 per cent increase from where they were a year ago. We know that household goods and groceries are going up, and indeed, as the Minister of Finance, but also as a local MLA, I know that I and my colleagues continue to hear these concerns from Manitobans—real concerns about their ability to make their obligations, to meet their mortgage and their car loans, to be able to continue to put their children in sports and arts and activities, to be able to live.

Madam Speaker, our budget documented, on page 39—when I had the pleasure of tabling those documents a month ago—that nearly half of residents are not confident they can cover their living expenses this year; that four in 10 are concerned about their current level of debt; that less than a quarter are confident in their ability to cope with unexpected events without increasing their debt; that two in 10 believe their current debt situation is worse than it was one year ago; and four in 10 say it is—they're finding it even harder to pay down debt.

Now, Madam Speaker, these things—despite the fact that our government has brought record tax relief to Manitobans—we are the party who ran on a commitment to be able to bring tax relief to Manitobans after years and years of increasing taxes under the NDP—Manitoba continues to be the highest taxed jurisdiction in Canada west of Quebec, with one of the most uncompetitive personal income tax regimes, one of the most uncompetitive corporate income tax regimes.

We know, Madam Speaker, it was our party who reduced the provincial sales tax from 8 per cent to 7 per cent to be able to save Manitobans money on everything. We know it was our party who scoped in—or, who brought in that PST. It had been widened under the NDP to apply to whole other areas of the economy, things like will preparation and legal services and accounting fees and haircuts over \$50 and personal services that—which we continue to say was, in many respects, a tax on women. I know that that's been repeated often; it's not exclusively, but often, because those services are differentially priced, often.

So we know, Madam Speaker, that tax relief matters. It has been our government that has been keeping its word on tax relief. And I just wanted to take, for a few minutes, the opportunity this afternoon to remind Manitobans what that looks like under our government.

It was our government who increased the basic personal amount. That is the base level at which a government starts to assess tax on an income earner. And in Manitoba, the NDP previously did not allow that basic personal amount to increase. They held it flat artificially, thereby taking in more money every year—but not just more money, more money by the people who could least afford to pay that tax. That is a tax on the poor, Madam Speaker, and so it was our government who committed to raising the BPA and did so. We have already left \$162 million in the pockets of Manitobans by this one mechanism alone, simply through that indexation, the annual and cumulative effect of raising that amount.

But we've done much more, Madam Speaker. I already indicated a principal pledge of ours was to reduce the PST after the NDP raised it in 2013 after promising in an election that they would not raise the PST. They said that the notion that they would raise the PST was nonsense; they said it was poppycock; they used other words that I can't all remember this afternoon; they said it was ridiculous.

And so, when they raised it, it was not just the raising the PST, they had increased the scope of the PST the year before. That already took in about \$200 million more for their provincial coffers. Then, next year, when they raised it, they of course raised it on that widened PST. Manitobans knew that they had been hoodwinked. Manitobans never forgave the NDP for breaking their word when it came to that fundamental breach of trust with Manitobans.

Far more, though, to say, Madam Speaker. Just, in a nutshell, of course, we have brought in this province, a new renter's tax credit in this budget: \$525 to all renters who qualify for this credit. But better than its former credit, because this one now is made eligible for people who live in social housing and people who are in non-EIA Rent Assist. Those two categories of renters under the NDP were prohibited from claiming this credit. This new credit scopes in 45,000 additional and new renters who were previously ineligible.

We know that we're bringing changes to help employers who have said for years that the health and post-secondary education tax levy is uncompetitive and actually dissuades businesses from hiring workers. We have met our pledge of raising that basic threshold amount, and the higher level as well, essentially to a \$2-million and a \$4-million level. By lifting those levels, we're essentially removing employers who were formerly paying that tax. We're providing relief to over 600 businesses, and we're removing entirely almost 200 businesses from paying the payroll tax.

But, Madam Speaker, there's more of course, and I can't go into all of it, but I would like to say we kept our promise on reducing vehicle registration fees over three years. We gave back hundreds of millions of dollars to Manitobans to be able to reduce by 30 per cent that fee on Manitobans. Like I said, we narrowed the PST and what it would apply to. We eliminated probate fees. We eliminated the retail sales tax on personal services, and there's a helpful chart on page 45 of the budget.

* (15:40)

And so, for those Manitobans who I know are all watching and who—many of whom will in posterity look back years later—on page 45 there's a helpful chart. It's a coloured chart there that actually shows our government's progress on tax relief by the category of the promise that we made. And it's really interesting to see that breakdown in sales tax reduction, basic personal exemption, elimination of probate

fees, the sales tax exemptions, the vehicle registration fees and today discussing the historic reduction of education property taxes in the province of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, to make a long story short on this, we know the debate. We know the context, that in many other provinces provincial governments don't fund education to the extent that Manitoba does through property taxes. It creates unfairness in outcomes. It creates distinctions within school divisions, some of whom have an easier ability to raise revenues. We have on our benches former school division trustees who spent years grappling with these very issues, like the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care (Mr. Johnston). And I know that he knows these issues well when it comes to the distinctions that that overreliance on education property tax to fund education created within our system.

Madam Speaker, I know that there are others in this Chamber who have been trustees in Winnipeg School Division who would know these very issues. And I know that the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) would understand that that overreliance on education property taxes creates distinctions that are often unhelpful in terms of the delivery of education in our province. That is why our government made the pledge to say: we don't fund roads this way; we don't fund health care this way; we don't fund infrastructure this way; we should not be funding education this way. We made the pledge in 2019 and we said, if elected we will immediately work to move down that burden on all homeowners, on farmland taxation and also on commercial and other classifications of properties.

And we kept our word in last year's budget, and we reduced the education property tax burden by sending a—rebates to all those Manitobans by 25 per cent, hundreds of millions of dollars for—of tax savings to Manitobans. And we are here this afternoon because of the pledge of Budget 2022, which says we will go even further and we will increase that rebate to 37.5 per cent, and that would essentially mean that the rebate would go to \$581. It means that, when fully implemented next year at 50 per cent, that rebate will be almost \$700 to homeowners. We know that that this is welcome tax relief.

Madam Speaker, I want to just mention, even the Leader of the Opposition has been—in question period, in this session of the Legislature—talking about the necessity of focusing on affordability. As a matter of fact, on April 22nd the Leader of the Opposition said Manitobans are confronted with a cost-of-living crisis.

He said it is impacting families when they go to the grocery store, when they go to the gas station. And who said that? It was the Leader of the Opposition. And what did he do on that day, April 22nd? He asked our government to take action to respond to the Manitobans who were expressing their concerns on affordability.

We have happy news for the Leader of the Opposition and all members of the Legislature, and that news is that this government is keeping its promise. It is going forward with a bold plan to provide relief to Manitobans at a time when they most need it.

Madam Speaker, we know that in the last number of weeks the Bank of Canada has raised its prime lending rate by 25 basis points, and then 25 basis points again. That means that all loans are going up. Your ability to service your own debt, there's pressure on that. We know that many Manitobans are looking at their end-of-the-month income and saying we have less wiggle room, we have less maneuverability than we had before. This is why we are bringing these very significant tax measures: to be able to meet Manitobans at their point of need.

So our commitment on tax savings to Manitobans is effective. It has been a promise that we made and delivered on, unlike the NDP, who promised Manitobans they wouldn't raise taxes and then did.

I was, at one time, the Finance critic, in probably the years 2014, 2015, and I remember at that time, Madam Speaker, looking at that array of tax increases, and at one point in time I think we referenced it as the NDP having raised 15 taxes in 16 years. That was our record as a Province.

I remember reading the bond rating agencies' reports on the NDP budgets, and they said things, like Moody's in 2014, saying about—the NDP fiscal strategy and fiscal policy and fiscal record continues to disappoint. I think Standard & Poor's said: fails to hit the mark again and again.

Credibility matters when it comes to financial management, but financial management is not on one side of a dialectic from investment in social programs, and I want to make this clear this afternoon, Madam Speaker. It has been our commitment to fiscal discipline, it has been the better commitment to controls at the Treasury Board, it has been the more—the better conversation that central government has been able to strike with departments and government reporting entities, it has been the changes to The Financial

Administration Act that increases accountability from entities back to the taxpayer—these have been the mechanisms by which, yes, we eliminated the budget four years ahead of schedule, but it's also been the method by which we were able to make historic investments in health care, historic investments in education, historic investments in infrastructure.

Because, the NDP will get up and say, you are balancing the budget instead of doing those things. But what our government has proved since 2016 is that we can do both; that actually more than doing both, it is 'exactly'—exactly the lack of expenditure control under the NDP that threatened Hydro, threatened health care, threatened education, threatened infrastructure. We are restoring that balance. We are building Manitoba forward. It is why our budget this year is actually called Recover Together: Strengthen. Invest. Build; strengthening health care, investing in communities, *[interjection]* building our economy.

So even now, when NDP members across the hall are trying to shout me down, what they're really doing is trying to drown out the voices of those Manitobans who are saying we're focused on affordability. We have an opportunity this afternoon that transcends partisanship. We have an opportunity as legislators today to not obstruct a plan to bring relief to Manitobans who need that relief. Outside of this place—and we sometimes joke, Madam Speaker, when we talk about dome-itis: spend too much time in the Legislature and you lose those connections to where Manitobans are. It's why all of us MLAs have that sacred responsibility to get out in our communities, to remember that we are representing our—*[interjection]*

Well, I think I just found a point of agreement with my—one of the members across the way, because we both agree that this is the work of a legislator, to reflect the voices of those who put them here. And when I'm in my constituency office these days, what I hear is a concern about affordability.

So, today the NDP have a choice. They can either represent their communities, they can represent their own constituents, their voters who are saying we want you to support affordable measures for us to have more monies in our pockets. That's the choice today. The NDP either blockade or they support this government plan to bring affordability and relief to all Manitobans.

This is our plan: building our economy, strengthening health care and education and investing in our communities. Madam Speaker, we commend this bill

to the Legislature. We are increasing to thirty-five–seven-point-five per cent—that residential and farm property rebate. Other properties will continue to receive 10 per cent. It's a stand-alone appropriation. Why brought now? Because it's now the point of need, but also now will allow us to send those rebates to Manitobans when they're receiving their property tax bill.

We've already heard the amounts read into the record and when the bill reaches committee stage this afternoon, I hope I can provide members with a section-by-section explanation of the bill. I look forward to answering questions we have in this bill. I look forward to all legislators supporting this broad plan for affordability for all Manitobans.

* (15:50)

Madam Speaker: Do members wish to ask questions of the bill?

Questions

Madam 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. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): I wonder if the minister can provide a breakdown of the Education Property Tax rebate for residential properties other than primary residence. So I'm wondering if he can give us the numbers of how many are cottages that are receiving this rebate and how many are second residences.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): We're proud to be bringing this bill, as I said, that provides this relief, this tax rebate to all principal residences, to farmland properties, to commercial classes. I believe that that information even last year was presented in the Public Accounts, but I'm going to confirm with my officials to see that, indeed, it was presented with a breakdown by category.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Just for clarity, if—I know that the maximum last year was \$5,000. Is it the case that if somebody owns, say, 20 commercial properties that all hit that \$5,000 level, would that

mean that we're sending out \$100,000 to one property owner?

Mr. Friesen: So, the member will remember that this plan to expand to 37.5 per cent applies to principal residences, so it is for residential properties. He will also remember that it is for farmland properties.

There is a 10 per cent rebate that has not been increased in today's bill. The Budget 2022 did not reference an expansion of that commercial and other categories of property. Those remain at 10 per cent, which is welcome relief for those entities.

Mr. Wasyliw: So, I wonder if the minister can tell us, is there a cap on the amount an individual will receive through the rebate and, for example, what would be the highest amount an individual is receiving for a residential property in Manitoba.

Mr. Friesen: The member will remember that it is a municipal function to assess that property tax bill and that property tax bill—even the budget shows an example of that, how it breaks down your property tax and your education property tax. So that—the member knows how those calculations take place, and then, based on your total amount owing, there is that portion of your bill that is education property tax. This rebate applies to that portion of your property tax that is indicated as education.

Mr. Lamont: Again, just for clarification, if one company owns or one person owns 20 properties, do they get 20 cheques?

Mr. Friesen: So, if the member who's asking the question owned an apartment block, then, of course, he would have a rebate for that property. If he owned two apartment blocks, then he would have a rebate for the second one. But the member should also recognize there's a difference between corporate-held property and privately held property.

Mr. Wasyliw: Can the minister provide a breakdown of how much of the Education Property Tax rebate for farmland is going to those who don't reside in Manitoba or don't file their taxes here?

Mr. Friesen: First of all, I'd like to say that this is very welcome relief for farmland and we won't be able to get into debate in the time allotted to me, but we must remember that, especially for farm families on a small acreage, that differential, the amount of education property tax you are paying as opposed to, let's say, someone residing in a urban area is very very real. This is an important area of relief for farm families,

but that member should remember this is for farm families who reside and have a residence in Manitoba.

Mr. Lamont: As the minister mentioned, interest rates are going up. We're running a deficit. This is all going to be borrowed money. So how is the government going to pay for this?

Mr. Friesen: I appreciate the question.

How does the government pay for it? Exactly by the means I said. The important and essential work that a government does each and every day with a myriad of a—decisions that it undertakes to build a budget, to hold departments for account, to make good investments, to stick to the financial plan, to not post deficits with—of a billion dollars, like the NDP did when there was no exogenous events taking place in the province.

Those are the ways that a government is able to grow the economy, provide low taxation that gives confidence for others to build businesses and put capital to work. And on the basis of that, we return that to Manitobans in the way of tax savings.

Mr. Wasyliw: I wonder if the minister can tell us how much rebate money is going to leave Manitoba via corporate landlords that are headquartered in other provinces.

Mr. Friesen: I want to correct the record because some of these questions get complex.

I want to say there—so, there is the ability for someone who is non-resident to receive a cheque, but non-residents can include people who pay on behalf of someone in Manitoba. So I want to make that clear.

People get one cheque for all property in a local government, though. I want to make that clear. It's one cheque. It's not like multiple cheques going out the door because remember, there's a municipal entity that is basically sending the notice of tax owing. One cheque—one rebate cheque comes back to the individual.

Mr. Lamont: Yes, just for clarity, I mean, we've already had interim supply, we've already voted on the budget. Is it really the minister's contention that if this were to not pass, that this government would be unable to send out its cheques?

Because I don't understand, and I would truly like it to be explained to me how it is that it's supposed to be impossible to send out these rebates if this bill doesn't pass.

Mr. Friesen: Yes, I wish I had more time to explain to the member that, actually, this is an issue of supply, and the issue is that this is the most historic tax rebate in Manitoba history. So, the member is saying, well, why doesn't the budget, and why doesn't the government's plan, include provisions to pay for this? It does, but we have not passed the budget yet.

So, if the member would like to give his support to the budget, we wouldn't have to have this additional appropriation. We could pass the budget today, and on the basis of that, we would have full authority to be able to fund these amounts.

The member should also keep in mind, though, that we're not seeking the whole amount of what this actual rebate will be because some of this, we expect would come in the earlier part—January, February, March—of next year.

Mr. Wasyliw: In Budget 2022, it carries forward a 10 per cent education property tax rebate for owners of other properties, including railway companies and other institutions.

I'm wondering if the minister can break down how much rebate is going to railway companies.

Mr. Friesen: It's challenging to be responding in these very short segments we have, but I do want to respond to the member's previous question.

I can tell him 42,000 cheques were sent out to farmers. The total value of those cheques were \$41 million. I know that that was a question that he asked previously, and I can answer his next question in a moment.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen), the money will be borrowed money because there's a debt and a deficit.

What is the interest rate that the government is currently paying on borrowed money that is new borrowed money, and what term will the government be mostly borrowing money on?

Mr. Friesen: The member is only partially correct. It's not one term when the government goes to market to structure its financial obligations, so the member knows that governments work to place—to issue bonds in domestic markets and international markets.

Of course, in Manitoba, we don't hold in foreign currencies. We issue in foreign currencies and swap back immediately to Canadian dollars.

I can indicate to that member that what we do is we have a strategy and Treasury Division by

which we defray risk by entering into vehicles that are matched against our obligations, including two-, five-, 10-year issuances, and some amount that is kept for liquid.

Mr. Wasyliw: I wonder if the minister could tell us how much rebate is going to oil extraction companies?

Mr. Friesen: So there's very little in terms of the ratio of monies that are actually going to these kinds of entities, but the member asked a question previously—he was asking about how much money out of these rebates would actually be going to things like a railroad company.

* (16:00)

So I want to mention to the minister that in the total of what's being sought today almost at \$350 million—I believe that's the amount we have got before us today, but I can indicate to him that less than \$1 million is actually going to railway companies. I'd be happy to answer his other questions at a time allotted later on.

Mr. Lamont: Could the minister provide the amount of money that's going to commercial and corporate landlords?

Mr. Friesen: Yes. I'd be happy to provide that information in a moment. I've got it in my documentation here. But, again, I just want to make clear that the commercial is not actually under debate today. Those measures were passed a year ago and they're unchanged in this particular framework.

So we brought relief of 10 per cent, and those commercial categories receive a 10 per cent rebate off of their total education property tax paid. This extension to 37.5 from the previous 25 per cent applies to both residential homeowners and also to farmland tax.

Mr. Wasyliw: So we know that this rebate is at 37.5 per cent this year on residential and farm properties. It's going to 50 per cent next year. We also know that there's no residency requirement.

So how much of this money is leaving the province to out-of-province property owners?

Mr. Friesen: I'm just going to answer the previous question of that member.

I want to indicate that the total out of all of this being sought and, of course the total annual cost is larger than today's request for appropriation, but even

today, at 300 and almost-50-million dollars, commercial represents just around \$56 million of that, and—sorry—\$37 million of that total aggregate amount.

And I'd be happy to answer the member's other question in my next response.

Mr. Lamont: And just to be clear, I don't understand.

I mean, this was a long-standing promise. Why did it—why are we breaking it out of the budget? Is it that the budget wasn't adequate, or that this is an afterthought? It clearly wasn't a—shouldn't have been an afterthought, so I need to understand why this is being presented separately from the budget.

Mr. Friesen: So the member misunderstands the legislative process.

This is the reason why we bring interim appropriations when we enter into a new fiscal year, because we don't have the authority to spend, as a government, even though we have a budgetary policy. We are—we always seek, from the Legislature, the authority.

In the meantime, without that authority, we must get temporary interim authority. So that member knows that the moment that the budget would actually pass—and we call on all members to support our budget—that would be the moment at which the government would then have full authority to implement that plan.

This is interim authority that's being sought. Why? Because Manitobans need the tax relief and affordability measures now.

Mr. Wasyliw: Now, the minister, in his preamble, was discussing about how this was an affordability measure. Well, 40 per cent of Manitobans rent and they saw their tax rebate go down.

And based on the minister's own numbers, homeowners—who are, by virtue of being homeowners, wealthier than renters—are getting a higher rebate than those who rent, and I'm wondering how the minister can explain that in terms of fairness.

Mr. Friesen: We're very proud of our new renters' residential tax credit that provides an annual \$525 payment to all renters, but I wonder how that member could rationalize the NDP's decision to hold back eligibility to 45,000 low-income renting houses—renters—who were not eligible for those credits previously, made eligible now through this government's new program.

How would that member want to rationalize their decision to not extend this same credit to 45,000 low-income Manitoba houses?

Mr. Lamont: If the bill passes, would the cheques be delivered during the period of the Thompson by-election?

Mr. Friesen: I would want to first make clear to the member that even while there is a by-election, the business of government—and this is clearly established in our rules—continues to go on. The government does not cease to function. I think he's referring to certain advertising capabilities that the government is curtailed in doing, and we carefully abide by those rules, unlike the previous NDP government.

However, to his question, I would tell him that the rebates will go out aligned to coincide with when a municipal authority is issuing their tax bill. So, for Winnipeg and Brandon, that will be coming up more quickly, and for some municipalities it will be more in the fall and towards the late fall.

Mr. Wasyliw: When the rebate cheques are issued, will the minister's name or picture, or the Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) name or picture, appear anywhere on those cheques?

Mr. Friesen: No.

Madam Speaker: Well, the time for this question period on this bill is over.

Debate

Madam Speaker: Are there any members wishing to debate the bill?

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): Everything about this bill is symbolic of what is wrong with this government and what ails this province. It's—I mean, just the absolute cynicism of this is going to be legendary.

This is Brian Pallister's legacy; this is his signature policy. This is—he doesn't want people to remember that he took a sledgehammer to our health-care system, that it's going to take a generation to rebuild our broken health-care system. A system where people needlessly lost their lives because this government couldn't manage the system, and in 'factively', in bad faith, made changes knowing full well that it would be disastrous and chaotic, and then, when the chaos came, they stood back and did nothing, and here we are. So this is the legacy of Brian Pallister.

And, of course, if we recall how this happened last year: the budget got passed—there was no mention

of this—and then we're past the bill deadline date, and this bill automatically comes up and it's—everything was a panic, a scramble. It just showed the absolute disorganization of this government, that you'd think that this signature, legacy-building project of theirs would have been thought through, planned out, that they would have had the legislation in the previous budget, and they would have gotten it in before the bill deadline. And then we had a big fight over getting Brian Pallister's image or name off the cheques, that sort of rank cynicism and, thankfully, the government didn't push that and backed down.

Mr. Andrew Micklefield, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

But, what we see from this is just a pattern of impulsive lack of organization and just constant chaos and managerial incompetence from this government. And again, we're back here again today. This, again, was their big signature feature in this year's budget, yet they couldn't work out the math and think about how much money they actually needed to implement their grand policy idea, so we're here again today because they have to clean up their mistakes.

And I don't think you have to convince any Manitobans that this government just simply cannot manage themselves out of a paper bag, let alone a pandemic, let alone a nursing crisis, let alone a cost of living crisis, let alone, you know, the economic crisis that we're entering into with this government.

And the irony is that, you know, this was their fix-it scheme. You know, they knew that Manitobans didn't like this government, that they didn't like their policies, and—they certainly can read a poll like everybody else—and, of course, when Brian Pallister's popularity fades, all of a sudden, this idea comes up and this will solve it, right? This is going to get us back in Manitoba's good graces. The absolute irony is the PC party polls dived after this came in; it actually went down.

It's interesting, in the last poll, that once they announced the second part of this tax rebate, their numbers went down yet again. So, from a political strategy, it's certainly not helping them. And so, at the end of the day, when they're about to shut the lights out and leave this place, this is going to be a gift to their party donors.

And that's really what this is. This is about rewarding their political party donors and giving—using the tools of government to support them. This is—never been about education. They have never once talked or rationalized that we needed to do this to

somehow fix education in Manitoba. In fact, this has the opposite effect of defunding education in Manitoba.

* (16:10)

And people—Manitobans understand that this is not going to improve their schools. This is not going to hire a teacher. This is not going to reduce class sizes. This is not going to bring back full-day kindergarten. This is not going to bring back English-as-second-language teachers. This isn't going to make our tax system fairer. In fact, it does the exact opposite.

You know, it was interesting hearing the Finance Minister today, for the first time, talk about how, you know, maybe property taxes aren't the fairest way to pay for an education system. That has never once been a rationale for doing this, because if that was the rationale, the government would rapidly increase its portion of school funding, and it has not done that ever. In fact, the proportion of provincial funding of our schools has dropped in six years under this government.

So, we absolutely know that this has nothing to do with our schools. This has nothing to do with supporting our students and everything to do with defunding education. So, you know, why is it here? This is a failing government that's sinking fast. And they are virtue signalling to the remaining few people that still listen to their very empty rhetoric.

So, they're calling it an affordability measure. That is an insult to Manitobans. This is absolutely not an affordability measure. In fact, I guess you could ask the follow-up question, affordability for whom? Oil companies? Corporate landlords? The equity funds that own huge tract lands of Manitoba farmland? That's who this is intended for. Those are the winners here.

So, if you're Brian Pallister, and you're a large estate owner and you have, you know, four or five homes, given the day—I mean, our conservative estimate was he was getting \$7,000 back last time. It'd obviously be a lot more right now.

And then who else wins from this?

We have big commercial landlords like our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), you know, so large that she can sell \$31 million worth of commercial property, including an apartment building in my riding, and just overlook it. It's like nothing. It's like, oh, it's just a rounding error.

Well, her and her big corporate landlord friends, they benefit from this. This is a huge rebate cheque. They're not getting back 500-plus dollars here. They're getting back thousands, if not tens of thousands, of dollars. They're absorbing most of the \$350-million tax rebate, as are the railway companies, as are the large corporate landlords based out of Calgary, who own many of our big towers and apartment buildings here.

There is millions and millions of tax dollars leaving Manitoba as a result from absentee landlords, or out-of-province landlords or out-of-province owners of our buildings. That does not help Manitoba's economy. If that money isn't here, it's not being used for goods and services, it's not circulating throughout the economy, it's not creating new jobs: we lose. We lose as a province.

So, this money isn't getting into the education system. It's not getting into the economy. It's going into the pockets of people who absolutely need it the least, who are doing just fine, thank you very much. Nobody asked for this. Nobody was saying, you know, I have \$31 million in commercial apartment buildings and I'm feeling squeezed right now. Nobody was saying that.

And then, of course, this is going to help people who own multiple homes, people who have vacation properties and, of course, like everything that motivates this government, PC Party donors.

But who are the losers here? Who are the people who will not benefit from that? Well, pretty much almost every Manitoban. Almost every Manitoban is going to come out worse from this, right? You have—let's start with the 40 per cent of Manitobans who are renters. And I appreciate this government—every single riding has thousands of renters in them, and this government doesn't see them, doesn't care about them and just simply won't advocate for them.

And we see what happened here. They won't even keep the previous \$700 rental rebate. They won't even give them that. They've reduced it by \$175. And by doing that, they're raising taxes on renters at the same time they're cutting it on their landlords.

How is that fair? In what world is that fair? In what world does that make life more affordable? You have a—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —corporate landlord that is getting a larger tax break than their tenants, and their tenants are actually seeing their taxes go up.

And, of course, you know, above-guideline rent increases, which this government hands out like, you know, Tic Tacs, you can pretty much, anybody—a landlord can come and slap a coat of paint on a hallway and you're going to get your 10, 20, 30 per cent rent increase, and those renters right now are getting 'renovicted'. They are housing insecure, and they're struggling with real affordability issues while their landlords are laughing at the bank.

So, if this government was really serious about affordability issues, if they're really serious about it, they would make sure that the most vulnerable Manitobans got the lion's share of that \$350 million. But they won't do that because they don't stand in solidarity with those people; they stand in solidarity with their campaign donors, and those are a very different demographic than the people that rent their buildings.

And we know that the other aspect of it and the sort of the—I think it's disingenuous when the minister says that, you know, this is somehow going to help people, because municipalities have had their funding frozen for six straight years by this government. So, that's six years of cuts with inflation. They are stretched. They can't run deficits like this government, this government, who ran the—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —largest deficit in Manitoba's history. They can't do that. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

If members need to have conversations, take it outside, go on the couch, but please respect whoever's speaking. Heckles, please keep them at an appropriate level.

Thank you.

Mr. Wasyliw: So, this government has now underfunded municipalities to the point where their finances aren't sustainable, they can't run deficits. And so what happens now? They have this space. And what are they going to do with the space? They're going to fill it in with higher municipal property taxes to make up for the cuts of this government.

So, you know, this government gives with one hand, but takes with a big, heavy other hand. And so the minor dollars that a handful of homeowners may

get back is going to quickly get scooped up by other, underfunded levels of government, and I can tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that Manitobans, at the end of this, are going to be worse off financially from this move.

And then, of course, what also gets affected is—our education system is systematically being defunded; it's chronic underfunding year over year. And this government is incredibly fiscally illiterate. It is frustrating hearing them talk.

You know, just a story, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was a school trustee at the Winnipeg School Division before I came here, and I actually loved being a trustee; I had no plans on running provincially until Brian Pallister and this gang came along. And I guess I should thank them because, but for them, I wouldn't have been here. I remember, you know, starting in 2016, sitting around the school board table, and we had very different conversations back then.

Prior to 2016, the discussions—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —were how do we improve the education system—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —how do we make it more fair, how do we make it more inclusive?

After this gang gets into office, the conversations around a school board boardroom table is, we are getting cut; what valuable program do we have to dismantle and cut? What vulnerable student do we have to let—you know, disappoint and not give the resources they need to succeed because this government doesn't value public education?

* (16:20)

And, you know, you can only sit around a boardroom so long cutting, cutting, cutting where you have to act. And I guess, you know, the members opposite, they're a different breed; they seem to relish in that. That seems to be—makes their day, and they've spent the last six years sitting around a boardroom wondering how they can make the lives of Manitobans more miserable.

And so—but I couldn't take it anymore. And I had to, you know, add my voice to this Chamber and to this team in order to make sure that the parents and families are heard in this Chamber because education has taken a huge hit in Manitoba and, like health care,

it will probably take a generation to fix. And, absolutely, we will do that, and we have the right people and the right team.

So—and again, this is a government that doesn't understand how inflation works; they're completely oblivious to it. They just don't know the concept. You know, 80 per cent of a school board budget is salaries, and the average cost-of-living increase in a contract is about 2 per cent a year. And then, you know, you have normal—fuel goes up, paper goes up, food goes up. That's another half percentage a year. So when you sit down and build a school board budget, you have to find 2.5 per cent of new money every year just to keep what you have.

And when this government came along, they would give zero increases or even lower than zero, so you would have to raise property taxes in order to backfill. And nobody wants to do that. Nobody wants to do it, but you had to because this government wasn't—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: —a partner in education, and they didn't value students, didn't value public education. And the government didn't like that. There was a solution; it wasn't great, but at least our schools were getting funded. So this government put a stop to that. They stopped school boards from having the ability to backfill the cut with property taxes. And when that happened, that's when you started seeing the absolute devastation in our schools.

For the first time in a generation, school boards are cutting teaching positions. And we saw that at Seven Oaks, we saw that in Brandon, we see that in rural Manitoba. We see valuable programs that alter the trajectory of a vulnerable student's life like full-day kindergarten being cut, right? That ends up costing us Manitobans. Every child that we lose, that we don't successfully get through the school system and give them a hopeful future, is a child that's going to end up using social services or other government programs on the back end.

We can either invest in our students now and save money later, or we can write them off as this government does and end up paying more, sometimes much much more, later on. So, when we give up on these students, it hurts us all, it hurts our economy, and it actually becomes more expensive.

But the minister says today—quite, you know, unironically—that property taxes aren't the way to go

for funding schools because there's inequities. I absolutely do not disagree with anything of that. So the question is, why is this government relying more on education property taxes to fund our schools than they are with general revenue?

As, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you know, since they came to office, Manitoba used to fund about 60 per cent of the education bill from income tax general revenue and only about 40 per cent from education property tax. In the six years of this government, that number has actually dropped and is now 58 per cent general revenue and 42 per cent property taxes. So, property taxes, despite their rhetoric, are going up under their watch. They're raising education property taxes on your homes and they're pushing off the tax system from income tax onto education property taxes.

And it gets worse. The MLA from Assiniboine isn't here, but he would tell you that some parts of—*[interjection]*—some parts of the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

You're supposed—*[interjection]* I just want to remind the honourable member that one cannot reflect on the presence or absence of another member while speaking in this House.

I'd just ask him to—*[interjection]*—yes, to take that back and continue with the speech.

Mr. Wasyliw: Gladly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologize. I—you know, still new. Yes. *[interjection]* Yes, well, and I will because I got lots more.

But if he was here and he was, you know, being a genuine, sincere, honest man, he would let you know that in St. James school division—he'd have said the same—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

I have been—I've been spending some time lately reading the catalogues of unparliamentary language, and I would just issue a caution around terms like genuine, sincere, honest. I think that probably—no, I know that other speakers have commented on these things. I will not comment on them in an official capacity, for the record, but I will caution members about the use of such language.

Mr. Wasyliw: So, the point I want to make—and I'm—you know, keep trying here—is that that MLA would be able to tell you that St. James-Assiniboine school division, their residents actually pay more in property taxes for their education system than they do from

general revenue. And the same is true with Pembina Trails.

So, the system wasn't designed for property taxes to pay most of the education bill, but that's happening very much in parts of the city, in ridings like, you know, Kirkfield Park, in Assiniboine, in Fort Richmond, in Waverley and even in Fort Whyte. And you just don't see the MLAs from that side advocating for their homeowners, because this is not really about that. And it's not about making the education system fair.

So, you know, what's also very interesting is that this government has been very critical of the federal government, who at one time used to pay 50 per cent of health-care transfers to the provinces, and now it's 20-something per cent—I think it's low 20s. And they're very critical. They said the federal government needs to step up and start paying their fair share of health care in Manitoba.

And you know what, and—we actually agree with them. We actually think that that's a fair criticism and that the federal government does need to come to the table with appropriate funding.

What is so hypocritical about that position, and is absolutely astounding that they are not self-aware, is what they're accusing the federal government doing with health care is what they are absolutely doing with education and school boards. It's the exact same thing.

So, if the federal government is shirking its responsibility for giving transfers for health care to Manitoba, then it's clear, by their own logic, that the province is shirking its duty with education transfers to school boards. But they never, ever mention that. And again, they don't seem to be able to understand the hypocrisy in taking that position.

And of course, this is having real effects. I'm hearing of schools that it's routine to have 30 kids in a classroom. And I don't know of a parent anywhere that thinks that that's a good thing, that they want their children to get less attention in school, they get less one-on-one time with their teacher.

And—but that's where we're going. I don't understand how the—this governing party thinks that that is better quality education by stacking children up. And that they look to Alberta and think, oh, that's the model we should use. Calgary city high schools have 50 kids in a classroom. And that's where we're headed, right?

And of course, you know, this government used to be really big on standardized testing and PISA scores until, of course, they took over and PISA scores and testing all went down under their watch, and have gotten much worse.

Now, they don't talk about it. Now, they're not concerned about it. Now, we got to talk about poverty and the social determinants of education. But when they were in opposition, oh, you know, the Manitoba government, so bad; our test scores are so bad. Well, they've gotten worse. And it's no wonder because if you want good test scores in Manitoba, we have to address child poverty, which, of course, has gone up for the last three years from this government. Every single year for the last three years, child poverty has gotten worse under their watch.

* (16:30)

We're seeing medieval diseases showing up on the streets of Winnipeg where people are walking in—I shouldn't say walking—they're getting wheeled into an emergency room with trench foot. What civilized country has a trench foot problem?

But that's where these types of irresponsible financial decisions come from, because when they originally, you know, came up with this scheme, it was like: oh, well, you know, we're going to make sure we're in a balanced budget situation first, and we're going to spread this over 10 years.

But, of course, when they—the poll numbers start crashing, that all goes out the window. And despite registering the largest deficit in Manitoba's history, despite having back-to-back credit downgrades—the only government in Manitoba's history to have that happen—they decide that now's the time for Brian Pallister to get a big cheque for his estate; now's the time for the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and her large corporate landlord friends to cash in. And they're going to borrow money to do it; they're not going to wait 'til it's balanced.

And, I think, one Free Press column said that we're now paying about \$30 million in interest a year to pay for this. So not only do we lose the \$350 million revenue this year that could go a long way to reducing, you know, wait times for surgical backlogs, could go a long way to rebuilding our schools and lowering class sizes, we're going to pay \$30 million extra a year for former Brian Pallister—premier Brian Pallister's vanity project.

And it's not us who are going to pay it; it's those children who we are defunding their educations. It's

the children who are now not getting the same level of service in Manitoba, in their schools, that will have to pay that interest, and it will, you know, compound year over year over year. In what world is that fiscally conservative? In what world is that sustainable?

I mean, this certainly isn't your grandfather's Conservative party; this is very Trump-like. And, unfortunately, I think, for Manitobans, the PC Party certainly has lost its way. And I imagine there's many former members—we certainly meet them in the door in Riel and other places that we're campaigning in right now—that are completely disillusioned with this government and absolutely want to go in a different direction and know that they've been swindled, right? They've had the bait and switch. This is not what they voted for; this is not any sort of kind of government that they want.

So they did this with record-high deficits. They said we were going to spread it over 10 years. They did, you know, 25 per cent in the first year, and now it's, you know, three quarters, and it'll be half by next year, and that's three years they're going to be at 50 per cent. And what this does, it shifts the tax burden away from people who can pay: the very wealthy, the largest corporations, the people who are the most successful in our economy. They get a tax break, they don't have to pay their fair share, and somebody does.

And when you cut a tax, somebody has to make up that difference or you lose services, and so this government's very comfortable cutting our services, but there's just some services they can't cut, so who ends up paying for that? Well, it's people who can't afford to pay, and this measure fundamentally makes our tax system less fair. This rigs our economy and it stacks the system against people. People, hard-working Manitobans who are in an affordability crisis, need help, and this makes their life harder.

You know, the minister will need to explain why the landlord gets a larger tax rebate than the actual tenant and how that helps the affordability crisis in Manitoba, because he certainly didn't do that here today.

Manitoba NDP is prepared to raise the minimum wage \$15 today. That's a further \$6,000 in a person's pocket. We're not talking a few hundred dollars of largesse by this government. We're talking about real money that would make a real difference in the dignity of people's lives; \$6,000 to, you know, if you only average 500-and-some dollars, and if you rent—and if you're most likely a low-income person, you're

probably renting—you know, a maximum of \$525. There's just no comparison, right?

The NDP plan actually addresses affordability. It actually puts real dollars in people's pockets. It will actually help the economy grow. And then yes, yes, the party donors for the PC Party will have to pay their fair share and, you know, that's just the way it's got to be because you cannot live in a civilized society without a fair and equal tax system.

And one of the sort of side dangers that I—that this government's playing with fire: by rigging the tax system, by skewing it for the very wealthy, Manitobans will lose trust in government. Maybe there's—maybe that's their plan. Maybe they want Manitobans to lose trust in government because then, they can turn around and say, well, we've got to privatize everything, because they certainly want to privatize health care, they want to privatize Hydro. I imagine if they think they could make a buck off our schools, they would do that, too.

But there's the real danger, is that Manitobans will lose trust in their government because they know that the government is skewing the rules against them, and they're making things unfair and harder. They are—certainly, they'll reward their friends. We saw that with the MLA from Fort Whyte. And they seem to punish all others.

So, the other sort of issue that this government doesn't seem to care about is when you underfund schools, the money has to come somewhere. There has now been an explosion of school fees across Manitobans. So when kids come to school, they're getting presented with a bill, and they have to pay for more and more things that were taken care of by the school system.

And so parents are paying more for simple things like school supplies and field trips and all those things that used to be taken care of by schools. And, again, that doesn't affect everybody equally. It doesn't affect everyone equally. And, again, you know, if we want to build an inclusive Manitoba, it starts by making sure our tax system is fair, and this is absolutely the wrong approach, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): Well, thank you, Deputy Speaker, and thank you for presiding over this House in this very important debate today on the supplemental appropriation.

Deputy Speaker, I recall last year at this time, we were also rushed into the Legislature to debate a bill, bill 71, where all of a sudden, something had to be brought before the House that it was a matter of very high importance. And, you know, on this side of the House, we were kind of excited to hear that maybe it'd be something—maybe some more funds, some more support, especially coming out of the pandemic, for a public school system that's been absolutely devastated since 2016 when it comes to the type of fiscal support that a public school system requires.

Because support is more than just, you know, a cost to public schools or a cost to public education, Deputy Speaker. Public education is an investment. I think every member of this House would know that. And an investment is also looked at as something that allows us to be the proper stewards of a system that Manitobans cherish.

I will tell you, Deputy Speaker, now we're back today again in a rush, brought to us this very day, of a supplemental thing because the current government is unable to organize themselves in a way that can show their—not only their somewhat of a fiscal prudence but a fiscal plan for Manitobans. So here we are today, debating a supplemental appropriation because a Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) of this province has yet again changed course on what was said earlier, as what she is on the record as saying. And so here we are today, now, debating a \$349-million supplemental appropriation. Significant amount of money.

And I will tell you that when it comes to core government services like health care and public education, Manitobans really care about that. It's what defines us as a people.

* (16:40)

I will say that Manitobans demonstrated that clearly, concisely and passionately during their own commission on K-to-12 education. How did they do that, Deputy Speaker? There were over 23 written—2,300 written submissions; 62 formal briefs; 1,260 teacher survey respondents; 1,700 workshop participants. That shows a passion for public education. That shows Manitobans are committed to this—this project of public education.

So, what was the result of all this consultation? Well, this government came out with bill 64, completely divorced from what was laid out in many of these briefs, presentations, participation. It was so divorced from what was recommended that we saw an unprecedented movement to end a government bill, an

unprecedented movement that was supported by this NDP opposition here—one that was able to delay that bill because it was so completely divorced from what people want in their public education system.

And Manitobans will do the same when it comes to the cuts that we have had to endure, the citizens of this province, to core government services, Deputy Speaker, like health care and education.

I will say that during the commission hearings, it was noteworthy that everyone wants to have a system that is fully supported. So instead, what do we get? Deputy Speaker, in 2016 the FRAME clearly states and lays out from general revenue from this—from the government: 62.4 per cent of funding in 2016, now down, in the FRAME report, to 58.2 per cent, despite what people were saying in the—their own commission report, that public education needs to be properly funded; funded to a level so that every child can flourish, have every opportunity regardless of where they live.

And what do they have? They have a government that has systematically cut that. It's on page 1, Deputy Speaker, of the FRAME document. That cannot be disputed. That shows their commitment, and it's one that's waning and out of step, I would argue, with what Manitobans want.

So now, what do we have? We're here debating a supplemental appropriation because of the lack of organization shown by this government, a lack of understanding of what the people of Manitoba want, Deputy Speaker, and that's really concerning. While we're debating an extra \$349 million, I want to be here debating the extra support that Manitobans require in their core services that they expect their government, which is a steward of this, to take seriously. And here we are debating this supplemental appropriation when we know our core government services are being starved.

And there is a direct line between this \$349 million and only one-time funding of \$110 million to clear—it's some kind of—to clear the surgical backlog that 170,000 Manitobans are enduring. We have 1.4 million people. One in 10—we'll just use that number—are on a surgical wait-list, and instead, we're debating the supplemental appropriation so that I can get some kind of tax rebate on my house that comes at the cost of core government services. This is almost insulting, and here we are having to debate this.

And what happened? You know what, with bill 64 we saw that—unprecedented—a government revoking a bill. But we also have to understand, Deputy Speaker, that there was a companion bill to bill 64, and that was bill 71. Bill 71 was brought forward in front of this House as a companion to bill 64, and that's an issue because they revoked bill 64—also needed to revoke bill 71. Because now what we have is a classic cart-before-the-horse situation here. Without proper consultation, without a plan of how to fund public education, we're handing out millions of dollars—we don't even know where some of that is going. We haven't had a fulsome dialogue with the citizens of Manitoba of how we need to modernize our education funding model.

We do hear some talk of conversations going on, but it's not even on the front-facing website of the Department of Ed that these conversations are even happening, and with who, with what stakeholders. Because I will tell you, if we learned anything from bill 64 is, if you're not consulting Manitobans on public education, you're going to get burned. And here, again, we're going down these same paths, these well-trodden paths. How many times do we have to go down this road? How many times does the government have to beat its head against the wall and thinking that they're going to change how Manitobans feel about public education and core government services?

So here we are, a year ago, debating a hastily slapped together bill put together—because they thought bill 64 was going to pass before the public said—and Manitobans said—hey, forget it. And now we're back a year later again to discuss and debate more supplemental appropriation.

I expect that next year, we'll be back here again—you know what the difference will be next year, though, Mr. Speaker—or, sorry, Deputy Speaker, I apologize. You know, we'll be back here again next year because, you know what, there will probably be some other supplemental appropriation, because they'll want to make sure that—oh, you know what? We have a fiscal plan: the so-called stewards of the public purse, the good stewards are putting forth this that doesn't have any basis in what really Manitobans are looking for. And this is a problem, a huge one, because what's occurring here is such inconsistency that it's almost becoming de rigueur—something that can be expected from this government.

So, Deputy Speaker, I'll give you an example: previous premier, 25 per cent; current Premier

(Mrs. Stefanson), on the record as saying—after removing bill 64—on the record as saying that we were not going to touch this rebate because we need to get our fiscal house in order—on the record.

And now, all of a sudden, in a budget document, we have a 12 and a half per cent increase in this to the tune of \$349 million. How is that fiscally responsible when, in their own surveys, when consulting with Manitobans on Budget 2022, the No. 1 priority of Manitobans is restore health care? No. 2 priority: funding public education to the level that it's required to be funded at because we know the pandemic—we know what the pandemic has done to the health-care system in our province, and we also know what it's doing to public education. It requires a planned approach that has investments targeted at areas where we can see support is needed.

* (16:50)

And I can tell you, right now, in many schools in this province, Deputy Speaker, there are real cuts occurring at the granular level. I can give you an example: there are many earlier schools in my constituency and in my neighbouring constituency that will—not my neighbouring, the other person's constituency—but anyway, I digress, that are facing now real cuts to teachers, cuts to additional support staff, a school population that will be impacted by cuts to resource teachers and supports for students for additional needs. A school that'll have 60 more students is now lost 0.5 of a resource teacher, has lost two EA positions and is struggling to meet the needs of an incoming kindergarten class that will really stretch the base support that they have to provide for students in their area.

So this is a real-world example of what happens when you starve the system since 2016. There's this old term: the chickens will eventually come home to roost; and right now, students are really feeling that. After two years of pandemic learning, students need a government that is going to provide support specifically targeted to those kids that did not do well during the pandemic. And we needed to have a plan for that, Deputy Speaker, and we don't have that, and that's a very concerning.

I'd also put on the record, Deputy Speaker, that when we're talking about this particular rebate, it's that it was constructed just like bill 71, in a very ham-fisted way, one that doesn't take into account the nuances of people's personal circumstances and one that really disproportionately favours those that are very well off.

I will say, first and foremost, if this government was really, truly interested in ensuring that Manitobans are looked after, that this rebate, first and foremost, would have just been done on the actual tax bill. But it wasn't. No, it wasn't. That would have been the most efficient thing to do, fiscally prudent thing to do. That would be something where a person can really see what is the impact in how the government is supporting them.

Didn't happen. Didn't happen, Deputy Speaker, until and because somebody wanted to sign a personal cheque to Manitobans. Now, how callous is that, attaching that to public education? And then, because of the work of this official opposition, we made sure that didn't happen because that's not what Manitobans want to see. They want to see real leadership when it comes to not only funding their public education system, but also how their government runs the public finances.

And this is extremely troubling, Deputy Speaker. I can't say that more than enough because it is—when you're left in charge of core public trusts—I know I've said this before but it bears repeating—we're here to tend to the welfare of the citizens of our province. That has to give us pause. We're not tending to welfare of everyone in this province when it comes to this supplemental appropriation—bill 71—or anything that this government has done since 2016.

We have seen it. We see it every time a Manitoban goes to an emergency room. We see it when Manitobans are on surgical wait-lists. We see it when kids can't get the additional support that they need. We see it when kids are waiting up to two years now for a psychological assessment, where when I left the system—which was already getting taxed at the time—it was eight months. It is now approaching 24. Deputy Speaker, we needed a plan to deal with that. Instead, what we have is we're here on a Wednesday—is it Wednesday? I don't know. Member from Steinbach, is it Wednesday? I think it is.

We're debating a supplemental appropriation when, Deputy Speaker, we should be in Estimates. We needed to be in Estimates going through and having fulsome dialogues about our particular portfolios. Instead, we're here because of a disorganized government, having to debate this, when Manitobans are clearly expecting us to be debating matters that tend to the welfare of the citizenry. And here we are now, doing this.

And it's very, very—you know, when I go back to my constituents, Deputy Speaker, they ask the important work that we're doing here, and I do believe everyone comes in here and into this House to do very important work. Because this isn't something that we just do as a hobby; this is a calling. And I will tell you, I would—I believe that members opposite have sometimes—have a crisis of conscience when it comes to these kind of bills that come forward when we're debating the supplemental appropriations, because they know what the cost of this—the true cost of this—really is. The cost is cuts to core government services.

I can tell you, when we talk to our constituents, and I know they get phone calls from theirs because I often get phone calls from other constituencies, Deputy Speaker, who are talking about access to health care, access to what's necessary, what's needed at schools, families that are crying for support because their child isn't getting the support that they need at school.

Can you imagine—can you imagine? And I know the minister also gets these calls, Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Education. I know he gets it because we're both very concerned about the welfare of kids in our province and we need to have—we need to have a government that really takes that seriously.

And so we have, again, a piece here now where here are the priorities of Manitobans and here—over here—is a government that thinks they know what the priorities are. But Manitobans have been telling them what the priorities are. They've been saying we need to ensure that we have our core government services funded properly.

So when they say it's \$110 million for health care and \$90 million for some other piece of health care,

that pales in comparison to 300—can you imagine, \$349 million dedicated to health care because of what's happened, the devastation and the cuts that we've had to endure since 2016?

Deputy Speaker, \$349 million—you know what that would do? That would give people hope. And even if we took half of this \$349 million and dedicated it to schools in a true pandemic relief model for schools—public schools—can you imagine what that would do? Can you imagine the hope Manitobans would have?

So when they say the home of hope, the home of what? Can you imagine right here, right now, if we're—I would love to be here debating a subappropriation dedicated to health care and education. Instead, we're not; we're debating a subappropriation where tens of millions of dollars will leave the province. That's a fact that will not have an impact on anybody here in the province of Manitoba. That's a huge, problem, Deputy Speaker.

I will also say, Deputy Speaker, that there are other ways in which to provide relief to Manitobans. The first one is give them something to hope for when it comes to really tackling that surgical backlog, because right now we keep hearing things, but things kept getting delayed. Why? Because people are losing faith in this government's ability to provide the necessary—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare) will have eight minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 11, 2022

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are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>