

Fifth 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
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
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	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek, Hon.	Interlake-Gimli	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
KHAN, Obby, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLEIN, Kevin E., Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMONT, Dougald	St. Boniface	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya	Notre Dame	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	McPhillips	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice, Hon.	Seine River	PC
MOSES, Jamie	St. Vital	NDP
NAYLOR, Lisa	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg, Hon.	Riding Mountain	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle, Hon.	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
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, Hon.	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>	Morden-Winkler	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 15, 2023

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

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

Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 226—The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Amendment Act

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I move, seconded by the MLA for Fort Rouge, that Bill 226, The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

MLA Asagwara: I'm happy for the third time to bring forward Bill 226, The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Amendment Act. The Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Amendment Act will offer parents the opportunity to have their newborns tested for congenital cytomegalovirus, or CMV, the most common, non-genetic cause of permanent hearing loss in children, as part of their regular newborn hearing screening. This will prevent complications later in life because if CMV is identified quickly, newborns can

be offered antivirals that are more effective earlier in life.

More and more provinces are screening for CMV and it's overdue that Manitoba gets on board. Now, while I'm disappointed that I'm having to introduce this Bill 226 for a third time, I do hope that this bill, and the newborns in families who will benefit from it being passed, receive the unanimous support of this entire House.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, I table, for the information of the House, on behalf of myself and the Opposition House Leader, the Estimates order.

Madam Speaker: Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Jewel Casselman

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): Madam Speaker, today I have the pleasure to speak to the accomplishments of an outstanding teacher in the St. James-Assiniboia School Division.

Jewel Casselman has been teaching K-to-5 music at Lakewood School for 17 years of her 35-year career as an educational musical professional. Jewel runs several extra-curricular programs at various levels, such as the school Orff club, the primary choir for grades 1 and 2, and intermediate choir for grades 3 to 5. Her choirs and Orff clubs have received many gold standings and trophies at the Winnipeg Music Festivals.

Jewel was recognized by the Manitoba Orff Chapter in 2014, receiving the Morna-June Morrow Award for excellence in music education. She was also recognized in 2019 when she received the prestigious Michael J. Proudfoot Award, which is presented to the conductor who demonstrates a passion for excellence in choral work.

In 2022, Jewel was nominated for the MusiCounts Teacher of the Year Award. This award was for dedication and student impact.

And on Monday evening, Jewel's many years of joyful hard work was recognized at the JUNO Awards in Edmonton. She was honoured by winning the 2023 MusiCounts Teacher of the Year Award. She is the first ever elementary educator to win this award.

Madam Speaker, please join me in congratulating and celebrating the accomplishments of Jewel Casselman.

Kamil Jones-Strachan

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, I am so pleased to stand today to introduce this House to a talented Wolseley resident, Kamil Jones-Strachan.

Kamil is 11 years old and he recently won the Stewart M. Thomson trophy from the Winnipeg Music Festival for best vocalist in the 14-years-and-under category.

Kamil sings with the Winnipeg Boys' Choir and he plays piano. Later this month, he's heading to Toronto as a finalist in the Royal Conservatory of Music, Music Lights the Way Piano Festival.

A few years ago, Kamil's dad Larry Strachan composed a song based on the 1974 poem *Hey Black Child* by Useni Eugene Perkins. It was written for Kamil's brother Jericho to perform at the Winnipeg Music Festival, and this year it was his younger brother's turn. With this performance, Kamil was selected best vocalist in his age category for the second year in a row.

Kamil not only made beautiful music, but he also shared a beautiful and important message with all those who witnessed his performance: "Hey Black Child / Do you know who you are / Who you really are / Do you know you can be / What you want to be / If you try to be / What you can be".

Kamil comes from a musical family. Dad, Larry Strachan, is an orchestral conductor, as well as composer. His pieces have been performed by the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra. Mom, Zilla Jones, also has a degree in music, but is an award-winning fiction writer who also happens to be a lawyer and an anti-racist activist.

I wanted to honour Kamil today for his hard work as a vocalist and pianist who is also competitive in math and soccer. Kamil is clearly a talented and focused boy who, like his older brother, will grow into a well-rounded young man in a family of leaders and

artistic role models in our community. I'm so glad that many of Kamil's family could be here today to see him recognized in this way.

Please join me in congratulating Kamil Jones-Strachan.

* (13:40)

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter)—oh, no. The honourable member for Rossmere.

Medically Assisted Death Eligibility Criteria

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): Madam Speaker, I rise to raise the concerns brought to me by medical professionals deeply troubled by federal government recommendations that eligibility for medically assisted death be expanded to include minors and those struggling with mental health.

In fact, the federal parliamentary committee's 23 recommendations contain the word *minor* 17 times and call for consultation on, quote: "minors in the child welfare system and Indigenous minors." These are sick, dystopian recommendations that promote a death culture in Canada and should be off the table.

Canada has drawn concern from other nations as one of the world's most permissive assisted death jurisdictions, yet now contemplates expanding MAID for those with mental illness, and children.

Those considering these changes must contemplate their implications and consider the kind of country we are building not only for our children, but also for ourselves.

No one should ever be encouraged to end their life. People recover from mental illness, and the distresses experienced by teenagers, though very real, are seldom permanent.

Death is not the only option. Support is available though friends, professionals and organizations offering proven help for those in dark places. No one is beyond hope and a good future. I call on those receiving these recommendations to turn their pause of these expansions into a stop.

Anyone watching who is at risk or knows of someone at risk to harm themselves should call 911, go to an emergency department or consult Manitoba's Mental Health and Wellness Resource Finder website.

We must show compassion by helping people and their families find life, not death.

Since legalizing MAID seven years ago, Canada has steadily removed restrictions and now contemplates MAID for children and the mentally ill. Just because we can does not mean we should. What we justify today will be normal tomorrow, and many are asking: Where will all this end?

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

International Hope Canada

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House to recognize the incredible work of International Hope Canada, a non-profit organization in my constituency of Burrows. IHC is a volunteer-run organization that provides non-pharmaceutical medical supplies and equipment to countries where such items are in critically short supply.

I had the privilege of meeting with volunteers at IHC recently and visiting their 9,300-square-foot warehouse that accommodates donated and reclaimed medical equipment and supplies received by IHC. It was amazing to see the dedication and passion of all the volunteers and their creativity in reusing equipment to create usable medical equipment such as wheelchairs, stretchers and much more.

Since 1997, IHC volunteers have sent medical materials to over 50 countries and communities around the world. What first started as a passion project by Phyllis Reader, an operating room nurse, has evolved into a volunteer-run organization that is addressing the pressing need for supplies and equipment in the under-resourced countries.

Years ago, most refurbished items were hand delivered in suitcases or shipped in crates or on pallets. Now, with the support of other community partners, IHC volunteers fill 40-foot shipping containers to send overseas.

I want to take this opportunity to appreciate all the volunteers at IHC who dedicate their time to helping our brothers and sisters all over the world.

What would otherwise end up in landfills, IHC is repurposing the same materials to transform lives. Most of their items are primarily given by hospitals, clinics, medical businesses and individuals. I encourage Manitobans to consider IHC when donating supplies and unused medical equipment.

Madam Speaker, I ask members to join me in recognizing the invaluable work of volunteers at International Hope Canada who are here with us in the gallery.

Muriel Chisholm, Val Cutts, Hank Friesen, Janice McBean, Tom Nichol, Kevin Stewart, Paul Stewart.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows.

Mr. Brar: May I request for leave to enter the names of the guests into Hansard?

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to allow—*[interjection]*—the member doesn't need leave. He just has to give the names to Hansard.

Zane Lambert

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize and acknowledge the life and accomplishments of one of the best Canadian professional bull riders: Zane Lambert. Lambert was born and raised in Westbourne, Manitoba and attended school in Gladstone. Although he no longer resides in the area, his roots are in Agassiz, and his notable career spans all across Canada.

Zane grew up around horses and cattle, but rodeos and bull riding were not of abundance in our rural communities. However, that did not deter him from his dream of riding. At a young age, he had a passion for bull riding and, by the age of 15, had the desire to go pro but would have to wait until he was 18 as an 'adult' before making that dream become a reality.

Zane has been on more than 750 bulls, riding more than 375; has won 31 events and more than \$500,000 in earnings. He is also the only rider in Canadian history to have qualified for and competed at every PBR Canada National Finals and the first rider to have won the year-end events multiple times in back-to-back years.

These are just a few of the many highlights to be proud of his only 20-year career. Having just retired from his pro riding, Zane looks forward to being with his family and watching his young boys wear out cowboy boots and hats and getting them involved in rodeos.

Last fall, the pro rider was recognized with the Zane Lambert Lifetime Achievement Award, and 2023 will see the beginning of this annual award go to an individual who has the same drive, passion and commitment as Lambert had to the sport.

Thank you to Zane for all his contributions to professional bull riding and for being a wonderful, respected role model and a mentor for those up and

coming in the sport. May you continue to lead by example.

Although Zane is not able to join us today, I welcome his very proud parents, Keith and Karen Lambert of Agassiz constituency.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to ask that our members join the House in recognizing and congratulating Zane on his most notable career in professional bull riding and wish him all the very best in his retirement of the sport.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions I would like to introduce to you some guests we have in the public gallery.

We have seated in the public gallery, from HBNI School, 22 grade 9 students, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Lifelight Air Ambulance Impact of Privatization

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): We've raised concerns about medical transportation many times with this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), and there have been many issues.

Eleanor Buechler suffered a heart attack in February. She had to be transported to Brandon Regional Health Centre, but once there, physicians decided that she needed to be sent to Winnipeg for further tests.

In short, this trip was terrible. And I quote, Eleanor said, I thought I was going to die on this trip. I didn't expect to make it to Winnipeg. End quote. This is the state of health care in Manitoba today.

Will the Premier apologize to Eleanor for failing to give seniors in Manitoba the health care that they deserve?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Deputy Premier): I appreciate the member raising this concern.

We take the health and safety of seniors—in fact, all Manitobans—very seriously. That's why, in this particular budget, we're investing an additional \$668 million for health care. Madam Speaker, this

represents a 9.2 per cent increase to the health-care budget this year alone.

We're going to continue to make investments in health care so that Manitoba seniors and, in fact, all Manitobans get the health care that they deserve.

* (13:50)

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

Mr. Kinew: Ms. Buechler deserves better. She says that she was petrified—that's a quote—during this trip. And this is an issue that affects rural Manitoba and the North, everyone across the province.

She told us, and I quote here: I'm usually a behind-the-scenes kind of person, but I need people to know about this because it has crushed my faith in the health system. Something has to be done. End quote.

We agree. Something has to be done, but nothing that this government has done to date will improve medical aviation services. In fact, after privatizing air ambulance services, this government is now seeking to contract out even more of these services. They put out that RFP just last year.

And who's paying the price? Well, it's patients like Ms. Buechler.

Will the Premier admit that the privatization of Lifelight Air Ambulance services was wrong and that she will commit to improving health care for seniors like Ms. Buechler?

Mr. Cullen: We certainly are on a journey to heal health care here in Manitoba. And that's why we're making record investments in health care. This goes into the transportation services, as well, whether this be by ground ambulance or air ambulance.

Certainly, the intent of the RFP that's been put out in terms of aviation services will ensure a timely, safe and reliable and consistent care for patients that are using the aviation services. This, I think, RFP will also build a more modern critical-care service that supports the evolving needs of Manitobans, including those in northern Manitoba.

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

Mr. Kinew: I just want to point out for the Deputy Premier that Ms. Buechler was transported to the Brandon Regional Health Centre. This is a live issue in the Westman, this is a live issue in many rural communities.

It began with Brian Pallister's privatization of Lifeflight Air Ambulance, which this Premier supported along with the rest of the PC Cabinet. We know that this privatization has led to very poor patient outcomes. Some very high-profile cases come to mind.

Now, in this instance, Eleanor Buechler is speaking out. She's a senior who shouldn't have to go and fight the provincial government just to be able to get safe transportation for the health-care services that she needs. And yet, such is the case of health care today under this PC government.

Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) simply admit that the air ambulance privatization agenda was wrong and that this government will now reverse course?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker, our goal is to make sure that Manitobans have the services that they expect and they deserve, quite frankly.

That's why we are making a record investments in health care, almost \$8-billion investment in health care in this year's budget. We recognize, through the RFP process, again, to develop a 24-hours-a-day, 365-days-a-year service to make sure that adequate and critical and the specialty care that is needed is there and provided in those—for those services.

I will say, also, Madam Speaker, we recognize the challenges on the human resource side. That's why we've committed \$200 million to attract over 2,000 health-care professionals.

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

Allied Health Professionals Collective Bargaining Contract

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Under this Premier, health services in the Deputy Premier's backyard are closing. You look at facilities in communities like Carberry, Glenboro, Wawanessa, Roblin, all of these facilities are experiencing closures because health professionals like lab techs, paramedics and others in allied health have been without a contract for five years.

No contract for these health-care heroes. That's disrespectful and that's one of the reasons that we're losing people from the front lines of health care in rural Manitoba at a time when we can least afford it.

Why has the Premier disrespected allied health-care professionals for five years?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Deputy Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, we do, in fact, value the health-care workers. They are the front line in providing services for Manitobans across our province.

We recognize—certainly, we're challenged with human resource, not just in Manitoba, quite frankly. This is something we're seeing all across the country.

And, unfortunately, what we're finding in some of these situations, we have other provinces actually coming into Manitoba and poaching some of our doctors. That is putting extra stress on these emergency room facilities.

Madam Speaker, we recognize these challenges. That's why we've committed \$200 million to attract 2,000 more health-care workers to Manitoba.

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

Mr. Kinew: You know, Madam Speaker, some of these facilities in the Westman and the—in the Interlake and in the Parkland are closing because we're losing allied health-care professionals.

But here's the part that the Deputy Premier leaves out: The reason why a lab tech leaves for Saskatchewan is because this government has frozen their wages for half a decade. We're in a war for talent, but this government is forcing health-care professionals out of the front lines with this disrespect.

Allied health-care professionals are the paramedics that transport you to the hospital when you need it, that ensure that you can get an X-ray, that are the respiratory therapists that take care of some of the sickest people in this province, and for five years this government has refused to sit down at the table with them. That's an absolute shame, because it's harming patient care across our great province.

When will this Premier end the disrespect for allied health-care professionals?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker, I want to point out to the members opposite that many of the contracts in health care and across health care have actually been put in place. I know there's a few outstanding contracts, as the member referenced. Certainly, those discussions are ongoing.

We, as government, are not the, you know—we are the payer; we're not there negotiating those contracts. I'm optimistic that these contracts will be resolved in the very near future. And this is critical to health care in Manitoba.

We, certainly, are investing in health care; \$7.9 billion in this budget alone, committing \$200 million specifically to attract health-care workers.

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

Mr. Kinew: How many people in rural Manitoba complain about long waits for ambulances? This is the reason why. It's because this government has left paramedics and other allied health-care professionals without a contract for five years.

That's why these paramedics and other allied health-care professionals—we're at risk of losing them. It's because of a political decision made by this government. The government could easily ensure that these folks are respected, that they get a decent wage and that they stay on the front lines, but they won't.

Instead, this PC government is trying to save money. That's during a health-care crisis.

Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) finally admit that this approach is failing Manitobans, and start respecting allied health-care professionals today, starting with a new contract?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker, I will, again, point out that many of the contracts dealing with health care in Manitoba have been addressed. There's a few outstanding contracts that I think will probably be resolved in the coming days or months ahead.

Madam Speaker, I will say, as well, in this particular budget—and hopefully, the members at the end of the day will bring forward and allow us to move this budget forward, because this budget, through our tax savings, will provide a benefit of \$1,400 in this tax proposal alone.

And these types of initiatives, as well as having these contracts resolved, will make us, as Manitobans, and Manitoba more attractive to health-care workers, and they will stay in Manitoba to support health care and support Manitobans.

Recruitment of Rural Paramedics Collective Bargaining Contract

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, the Premier and her PC colleagues must have a real disdain for health-care workers.

The Premier, who was also Brian Pallister's failed Health minister, and her PC government have kept allied health-care professionals without a fair contract for nearly five years—and, in some cases, almost seven years, Madam Speaker. Paramedics in rural and

northern Manitoba who are already paid less than their counterparts in Winnipeg have been struggling to provide emergency care, because this government's cuts to health care have increased vacancies and burnout amongst workers.

* (14:00)

Will this Premier admit that her government's wage freeze stands in the way of a real plan to recruit, train and retain paramedics that want to work in rural Manitoba?

Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): I will remind that member that our province has come through a pandemic, which was stressful on health-care workers, and we owe them our gratitude.

We value—on this side of the House, we value our health-care workers, we value nurses, we value health-care professionals—allied health-care professionals. That's why we put forward a \$200-million plan to retain, to train and to recruit more health-care professionals.

We're continuing to work on the negotiating table, as well. Shared Health is there as the employer; they're negotiating. The Leader of the Opposition misleads this House by claiming that they're not.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, the minister could show that he and his government value these workers by not continuing to freeze their wages for the up-to-almost seven years that they have for these allied health-care professionals. It's been over 1,800 days that these professionals have gone without a contract.

Manitoba's health-care professionals are willing partners in trying to find solutions to the chaos that the PCs have created in health care. They will tell you they're understaffed, they will tell you they're underpaid and they are underappreciated by this minister and this government.

Red River College's advanced-care paramedic program had zero students because Shared Health, created by this government, won't even hire advanced-care paramedics.

How does this government expect to fill vacancies—never mind ACP seats—when they continue to mistreat health-care workers, freeze their wages and not provide them the deal they deserve?

Mr. Teitsma: Madam Speaker, I'll simply point out that this year's budget demonstrates the commitment to valuing health-care workers. That's why there is 668 million more dollars going into our health-care system under this year's budget; a budget that the NDP voted against.

Part of that is a \$200-million commitment to retain—as well as train and recruit—to retain health-care professionals. That's certainly what demonstrates a commitment to our health-care professionals in this province.

The negotiations continue. They are at the table. I'm optimistic that we'll be able to come to an agreement soon.

Madam Speaker: The—[*interjection*] Order.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, the chaos in health care caused by the Pallister-Stefanson governments' cuts to rural health care continue to undermine patient safety.

This Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and her government claim to speak to health-care workers but, clearly, they're only talking to the health administrators in management, not the front-line health-care professionals who are delivering care every single day.

Emergency room closures and the threat of EMS station closures has rural paramedics fearing that every day the system will fail and that they won't be able to provide the life-saving care that Manitobans depend on.

Why has the minister neglected the working conditions for rural paramedics for so long?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): The chaos the member for Union Station refers to is the chaos that was built under the previous NDP administration, Madam Speaker—structures that were designed to keep people out, not bring them in. We are rolling back the dark days of the NDP.

And these are not my words. We have made changes to allow for internationally trained physicians to enter the health-care workforce sooner.

And the registrar of the College of Physicians and Surgeons said the exam they had to write was holding back many qualified internationally trained physicians from coming to the province.

I want to table this, Madam Speaker, as one example of the structures the members opposite created—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program Impact of Staffing Shortage

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Sexual assault survivors are being turned away from the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program due to a lack of staff. Manitobans are being asked not to wipe themselves or to shower until they can return when staff are available.

Rather than fix the SANE program's chronic staffing issues, like they promised back in April of 2022, the PCs instead decided to hire a forensic manager to work remotely out of Alberta. That's not what the SANE program needs; they need people that are working directly on the front lines.

Will the Premier apologize for breaking her promise to SANE nurses and sexual assault survivors?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): Our government is keeping our commitment and promise to individuals that have experienced the trauma of sexual assault.

That is why, Madam Speaker, we created the forensic nurse examiner program. It was our government that invested \$640,000. It is our government that has provided for positions: permanent, full-time positions to be implemented in that program.

Under the previous administration, it was casual individuals that worked in the program and picked up shifts along the way, Madam Speaker. Six of seven staff have been hired into the new positions: a manager, and training is under way to ensure individuals get the care they need.

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

MLA Fontaine: The Health Minister promised to fix the SANE program staffing issues back in April of 2022, and yet, she's failed to do anything in what is another shameful display of complete incompetence.

Over the last month, nearly 10 sexual assault survivors were turned away and told—or, told that they could wait in the ER for hours on end, due to a lack of SANE program staff.

One of those survivors was a little girl, Madam Speaker. A SANE nurse said she does not know if this little girl ended up getting the help that she needed.

Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) apologize for failing sexual assault survivors, including children?

Ms. Gordon: I want to reiterate that six of the seven staff we committed to investing in for this program have been hired, Madam Speaker. Shared Health is working to improve the reliable access to this vital service, so dedicated staff are being trained. And I want to thank all the nurses and individuals who are currently working in that program.

We on this side of the House respect you; we value and appreciate the good work that you're doing. And we are making investments to ensure the program has all the supports that is needed to provide this vital service.

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

MLA Fontaine: This PC government's incompetence is having inexcusable and cruel consequences. Two days ago, another child was turned away from the SANE program and told not to come back until there was staff available to examine them. Two days ago, Madam Speaker.

That's shameful and it only further traumatizes this child. Having to turn away sexual assault survivors, including children, is also having an—terrible effect on SANE nurses, who feel this very intimately.

Will the Premier and the minister finally do the right thing and hire Manitobans instead of Albertans?

Ms. Gordon: Madam Speaker, earlier this week, one of the members opposite was thanking our government for beefing up staffing in his northern community. Today, the member for St. Johns is not pleased that we have hired six of seven staff to support this very important program. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: We will continue to make record investments in the program—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon:—some members opposite never did, and to support all the nurses and individuals who are working so hard and so dedicated in that program. We on this side of the House thank you for your commitment.

Finance Department Employee—Criminal Charges Department's Knowledge of and Response to

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): This is a question for the Minister of Finance (Mr. Cullen), Madam Speaker.

* (14:10)

An RCMP investigation, code name Project Dawgpound has resulted in the arrests of 21 people and a seizure of \$2.5 million in drugs and firearms.

One of those people is a Manitoba Finance Department employee, who was found to have been bribing police officers and leaking police intelligence. Understandably, Manitobans want more info and to know how like—how something like this has happened.

So, the question is: Can the minister tell the House when he was made aware that one of his employees was being investigated by the RCMP?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the D Division of RCMP and the different law enforcement agencies around Canada who were involved in operation Dawgpound.

Of course, they followed the evidence and the evidence led some unexpected places, but it speaks to the fact that no matter who you are or where you're employed, if you're alleged to be involved in helping those to manufacture or distribute drugs, there are consequences. There are consequences in the law.

Charges were laid, and we'll let the court process work its way through, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Again, the question is for the Minister of Finance. I think he has some details that may be relevant and of interest to Manitobans.

We know that, as I said, among the—those charged was a Manitoba Finance Special Investigations Unit employee, and this employee was charged with a—bribery of officers, breach of trust by a public officer and conspiracy to evade payment. It's very concerning, and so we're simply asking some factual questions that I'm hoping the minister can put on the record.

Can the minister tell us at what point did he put the employee on unpaid leave and at what point was the employee suspended from his job?

Mr. Goertzen: The member should know, as he purports to be the Justice critic, that asking questions regarding charges that have been laid are not appropriate—to have those charges discussed on the floor of the Legislature.

However, the RCMP did report yesterday on the conclusion of operation Dawgpound and the charges that were laid in that particular operation. I want to again thank the RCMP and all those who were involved across Canada for that successful operation.

We know that there are—is more important work to do when it comes to the disruption in the manufacture and distribution of drugs. But yesterday's operation is a clear indication that the RCMP, law enforcement in Manitoba more generally, are dedicated to that effort.

Madam Speaker: The honourable—*[interjection]* Order.

The honourable member for Concordia, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Wiebe: I think the minister will understand I'm not asking questions about the charges, and that's why we're asking that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Cullen)—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

I am going to have to call the—*[interjection]* I am going to have to call the member to order, from Springfield-Ritchot. And if there are others heckling, I will recognize them too.

I have given a little bit of latitude to a member or two. I will cease to do that.

Mr. Wiebe: Once again, Madam Speaker, not asking about charges before the courts, but simply the response by the Minister for Finance's department.

This employee was found to have been leaking police intelligence and bribing officers, so these are very serious allegations. But Manitobans want to know that there are checks and balances in place to ensure that this kind of thing won't happen again.

So, once again, can the minister tell us what he is doing—what the Minister of Finance is doing to prevent this from happening amongst one of his employees again?

Mr. Goertzen: The Department of Finance will no doubt be taking the appropriate measures to look at the circumstances around this situation, but it is

inappropriate to speak in great details about the circumstances of this case, where there are charges that have already been laid, Madam Speaker.

But I would again reiterate my thanks and congratulations to the women and men of the RCMP and other law 'enforcement' who were involved in this operation each and every day. While we see the end result of that operation by the seizure of drugs and the seizure of illegal weapons, they are putting themselves at risk in those operations. We don't always see that risk and that danger, but we know that they're doing it every day and we appreciate it, Madam Speaker.

Construction Workers Wage Reduction Concerns

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Madam Speaker, on this side of the House, we respect people who have to go to work every day, workers who get dirt under their nails and workers who wear out their steel-toe boots year after year. They work hard to put food on the table for their families and they should be paid properly.

But this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) couldn't care less about the workers who build our province. She is looking to cut their wages, and that's wrong.

Will the Premier tell the House why she is planning to cut wages for construction workers?

Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): Madam Speaker, I honestly don't really know what the member's insinuating or trying to suggest. I—perhaps she's misinformed. Perhaps she can lend some clarity in the follow-up question. That would certainly help.

Our government is committed to enhancing affordability for workers across this province. That's why our budget includes massive tax cuts to give Manitobans—and especially low-income Manitobans—a significant reduction in their pay—in their income tax, which will result in a significant increase in their take-home pay.

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

MLA Marcelino: Under this Premier, apprenticeship funding was cut by 43 per cent since 2016, and she weakened safety protections by cutting apprenticeship ratios. We've now learned that the PCs are looking to cut the wages of construction workers this year.

The cost of gas and groceries keep going up, and now the PCs are trying to cut the wages of the people who build our province. That's wrong.

Will this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) stop her plans to cut construction workers' wages today?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): I first want to thank all Manitobans who have decided to take a career in the trades. Our government is grateful for all of your hard work.

Madam Speaker, what the member is referring to is actually our attempt as government to reach out and get feedback from front-line workers on various proposals before us, and that would make the members opposite nervous because they've never sought feedback from Manitobans before making decisions.

We won't follow the lead of NDP because we know we're doing what's right by Manitobans.

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

MLA Marcelino: Madam Speaker, Manitobans know that this Premier and her PC colleagues don't have their backs. While everyday Manitobans struggle with increasing bills, they are trying to cut the wages of construction workers. And it's just like this Premier to be so out of touch with working people and with what regular people have to go through.

We need a clear commitment. Will the Premier back off her plans to cut construction workers' wages? Yes or no?

Mrs. Guillemard: It's certainly not surprising, but it is very disappointing that the NDP are choosing to fear monger. There is nothing truthful in what the member has stated, and we look forward to having more conversations with apprentices and front-line workers as we move forward in advancing their needs and paying them respectful wages, which we have always committed to do and we will continue to do so.

Care and Safety of Children in Foster Homes Auditor General Recommendations

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Yesterday, the Auditor General released an update on the progress of a series of audit recommendations, and it is dismal. Only 10 per cent of recommendations have been fulfilled; that's a 90 per cent fail rate.

On the management of foster homes, of 112 recommendations, there are 89 outstanding.

The AG found that caregivers weren't getting enough to actually support children and that safety–basic safety checks weren't being done in foster homes and elsewhere.

That hasn't changed. Why not?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): Well, I think the member would know that our government is radically transforming child welfare and that we did have a good conversation with the Auditor General, explaining that some of the implementation of the recommendations have really changed since we have moved towards a different system with Indigenous governing bodies leading their own child welfare and managing the foster system underneath them.

* (14:20)

And then, in this year's budget, we also did increase the money for authorities through the–their funding agreement. And that is something that, so far, this member has not supported.

And if he's really concerned about the implementation of all those recommendations, including better governance for foster families, he should support our budget.

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

Mr. Lamont: Madam Speaker, over 2,000 children in the custody of CFS were in what's called a place of safety. It's–they're not supposed to be there for more than 30 days but, if there's nowhere else to go, they–that is where they need to be. But they have been spending years there.

The report said to monitor the placement and support children in places of safety and make sure they are funded like foster homes. That has not happened. The Premier was Families minister after this report, and not one of 28 recommendations resolved on her watch.

Why isn't the care and safety of children in CFS a top priority?

Ms. Squires: Madam Speaker, the members opposite will know that, when we formed government, we knew that we had a major department that needed to be transformed with child welfare. We had to move away from a system where children were being placed in hotels that was significantly over-utilized under the former government. We also know that children in care rose from 5,000 in 1999, when the NDP took

office, to 11,000—over 100 per cent increase in the number of children that went in the system.

When we formed government, we made a commitment to reducing the number of children in care. We made a commitment to enhancing the services and the supports that families received, family reunification and transforming the child-welfare system.

I hope this member will support the bill that I'd introduced yesterday that will bring—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Auditor General Follow-up of Recommendations Government Compliance Record

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, in two and a half years or more, the government has failed to implement recommendations from the Auditor General.

Vital Statistics: 84 per cent of recommendations not done, including information security.

Quarry rehabilitation: 100 per cent not done, including improper tendering services.

Drinking water: two thirds not done, including the disturbing incompleteness of testing and reporting for lead in schools and daycares.

Post-secondary education institutions: 100 per cent not done, including making timely board appointments.

Why has the government been so poor at basic management so that so much has not been properly attended to in a timely basis?

Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): We're—certainly, we sincerely appreciate the Office of the Auditor General and the work that they do there. We support them in their work, and we appreciate the recommendations that they take so much time to make. And it's our—the—it's the position of our government that we will endeavour to follow those recommendations.

I will just remind the member, though, that—and even the Auditor General acknowledged this, as well—we've just come through a pandemic. Government's focus was on getting this province safely through that pandemic and launching the recovery of our province economically. That's where our focus was, that's where it should have been and that's where it continues to be.

But we will take a look at all those recommendations and implement them.

Thank you.

Glucose Monitors and Insulin Pumps Expanded Coverage for Diabetics

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): I know that in my constituency of Brandon East, many individuals living with diabetes cannot live their fullest life without access to the necessary technology and equipment. That is why, in 2021, we did what the NDP government failed to do during their tenure, and that was to expand eligibility for advanced glucose monitoring and insulin pumps to all young adults under the age of 25.

I'm wondering—I'm—ask the minister if she could update the House on the added investments that this government has made to improve the lives of Manitobans living with both type 1 and type 2 diabetes?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): Thank you for the question.

Madam Speaker, our government recognizes that diabetes is a challenging disease to manage at any age, and that insulin pumps and advanced glucose monitors are critical in making life easier for those living with diabetes.

For the first time in Manitoba's history, and as part of Budget 2023, our government is expanding coverage for advanced glucose monitors and insulin pumps to all eligible Manitobans living with type 1 and type 2 diabetes.

Madam Speaker, Manitoba now has the strongest program in Canada, and it's proud to be a leader in our country in providing 'diabetic-betes' supplies and coverage.

Education System Funding Concerns Minister's Meeting with School Boards

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): The Manitoba School Boards—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altomare:—Association annual convention starts tomorrow. On the agenda is a meeting between the Education Minister and board chairs. It's clear what the dialogue will be about: the PC chronic underfunding of public education, Madam Speaker.

Seven years of underfunding is forcing school divisions across the province to cut programs and staff

that students rely on. School divisions like Border Land, Hanover, Pembina Trails and Sunrise have all had to endure seven years of this austerity, Madam Speaker. However, it is not too late for the PCs to reverse course.

Will the minister do the right thing, and adequately fund Education today?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): It gives me a great opportunity to stand up and put some facts on the record. And it's unfortunate, Madam Speaker, that my friend, the Education critic from Transcona, stands up and continues to put misinformation on the record.

Madam Speaker, \$100 million; 6.1 per cent increase. Largest increase in over 25 years to the K-to-12 sector. We are making changes, and funding advancements in the K-to-12 system, something far more than the NDP ever, ever did.

And for that, Madam Speaker, I know that the member's having a difficult time, so I'm going to table a chart to show him that the increased funding in education has increased year after year, and even more under our government. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Transcona, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Altomare: It is clear that the minister doesn't understand the impact of something called the cumulative effect. It's a 'cumulative' effect of seven years of PC austerity that is forcing school divisions right now to make impossible decisions—which programs to cut, which families to not support and what school divisions need to do next.

This is what's happening, Madam Speaker, and he refuses to acknowledge it. And here's the problem: he has to meet with the Manitoba school boards tomorrow.

What message is he going to bring to them, and will they finally fully fund public education?

Mr. Ewasko: Again, it's unfortunate that this member is just talking from his leader's self-promoting talking points, Madam Speaker.

We on this side of the House have been funding education to more than the rate of inflation since we came into government in 2016, which is actually 23 per cent increase—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko:—Madam Speaker; 23 per cent. And I know that the member from Transcona is busy yelling from his seat, which is unbecoming, but it's a 23 per cent increase—\$100 million; a 6.1 per cent increase to the K-to-12 sector.

We are working with our education partners, Madam Speaker, unlike the NDP, who sat back, never brought them into the offices—matter in fact, I even brought the critic into my office for a few meetings as well.

Madam Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

SANE Program

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

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

(1) The Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner program, SANE, is run out of the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

* (14:30)

MLA Asagwara:—and provides critical support to sexual assault survivors. The program also helps collect evidence for potential prosecution.

(2) Demand for the SANE program in the province is rising. With 764 sexual assault survivors—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara:—receiving treatment from April 2022 to January 2023, a nearly 50 per cent increase since 2017 and '18.

(3) The SANE program has only one full-time nurse and just over a dozen others who are on call to conduct sexual assault examinations in their off hours.

(4) The provincial government has failed to increase funding or hire additional staff to support the SANE program, breaking its April 2022 promise to spend \$640,000 annually and hire five additional nurses and a provincial co-ordinator.

(5) The provincial government's refusal to support the SANE program has resulted in severe staffing shortages, leading to at least 14 sexual assault

survivors being sent home with the instruction not to shower or wipe themselves until they return and as staff are eventually able to treat them. It has been reported that survivors often don't return, and the number of people being turned away could be significantly higher.

(6) The provincial government has compounded its failure to provide supports for victims of sexual and gender-based violence by refusing to proclaim a bill passed in 2021 that would hold the provincial government accountable for providing resources available to child survivors of sexual assault. The bill, sponsored by the MLA for The Pas-Kameesak, is entitled, and I quote, Reporting of Supports for Child Survivors of Sexual Assault Act. End quote.

(7) The SANE program staffing shortage is just one example of how the provincial government's cuts to Manitoba's health-care system and front-line health-care workers, including nurses, is causing Manitobans harm.

(8) Urgent action is needed to immediately fix the SANE program staffing shortages and to ensure that sexual assault survivors are supported with timely access to care.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to stop breaking its promises to Manitobans and provide basic and respectful health care for sexual assault survivors in the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, SANE, program by ensuring it is properly staffed so that no prosecution of perpetrators of sexual violence is compromised by the failure to collect evidence.

This petition has been signed by Ashley Slagerman, David Gauthier, Kevin Brown and many Manitobans.

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

Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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

(1) The Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys has been served notice by the Red River Valley School Division to vacate the premises currently situated in the auditorium of École Héritage school by March 31 of 2023.

(2) The auditorium was originally built in the 1960s by renowned Manitoba architect Étienne Gaboury, and has been home to JRL for 48 years.

(3) A photo of the auditorium captioned, the regional library, is published in a 2008 document titled, heritage buildings in the RM of De Salaberry and St. Pierre Jolys. It is marked as an important modern building that could attain the status of heritage site.

(4) The JRL and Red River Valley School Division have flourished from a mutually beneficial memorandum of understanding for 54 years.

(5) Their shared collection boasts over 50,000 books and has the fourth largest collection of French-language literature in rural Manitoba.

(6) Students that are bused in from the neighbouring municipalities that do not have a public library, such as Niverville, Grunthal and Kleeferd [*phonetic*], are provided with free access to the public library and its fourth largest collection of French books in rural Manitoba during the school year.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

(2) To request the Minister of Education to recognize the value that JRL provides to the student population of École Héritage school, as well as the communities of the St. Pierre Jolys and RM of De Salaberry.

(3) To request the Minister of Education and the Minister of Francophone Affairs to recognize that a memorandum of understanding between the Red River Valley School Division and the JRL is mutually, financially, culturally beneficial.

(4) To request the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to recognize the heritage potential of this important building and its status in the community; and

(5) To request the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to prevent any renovations to the auditorium that would destroy and devalue the architectural integrity of this building.

This petition is signed by Kelly Tone, Gailene Kletke, Stefan Tone and many more Manitobans.

Right to Repair

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Manitoba consumers believe products should last longer, be repaired when broken and that planned obsolescence has environmental consequences that threaten a sustainable future.

(2) In 2021, the European Union set minimum design requirements for many electronic devices with new right to repair legislation.

(3) The Biden administration in the US has formally backed the right to repair movement in January 2022, following the European Union lead.

(4) Right to repair enables consumers access to resources needed to fix and modify their products, appliances, including cellphones, washing machines and refrigerators.

(5) Right to repair also allows consumers and electronic repairer businesses access to the most recent versions of repair manuals, replacement parts, software and other tools that the manufacturer uses for diagnosing, maintaining or repairing its branded electronic products.

(6) Right to repair further allows consumers to reset an electronic security function of a branded electronic product if the function is disabled during diagnosis, maintenance or repair.

(7) In addition, right to repair ensures manufacturers replace electronic products at no cost or refund the amount paid by the consumer to purchase the electronic product, where they refuse or are unable to provide manuals or replacement costs.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to adopt right to repair legislation, requiring manufacturers of electronic devices and appliances, including washing machines and fridges and farm machinery, to make information, parts and tools necessary for repairs available to consumers and independent repair shops.

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Foot-Care Services

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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, 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 two nurses filling those positions retired.

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

* (14:40)

(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 and 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 the essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1st, 2022.

This petition has been signed by Jordon Morris, Leni Queskekapow and Tiffany Ross.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Punjabi Bilingual Programs in Public Schools

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) According to census 2021, Punjabi is the fourth most spoken language in Canada and there are 33,315 people in Manitoba whose native language is Punjabi.

(2) Thousands of Punjabi newcomers are coming to Manitoba as students and as immigrants, looking to call this province home. People of Punjabi origin contribute a great deal to the social and economic development of Canada and Manitoba in fields such as education, science, health, business and politics.

(3) In coming to Manitoba, Punjabi newcomers make sacrifices, including distance from their cultural roots and language. Many Punjabi parents and families want their children to retain their language and keep a continued cultural appreciation.

(4) Manitoba has many good bilingual programs in public schools for children and teens available in other languages, including French, Ukrainian, Ojibwe, Filipino, Cree, Hebrew and Spanish. Punjabi bilingual programs for children and teens, as well as Punjabi language instruction at a college and university level could similarly teach and maintain Punjabi language and culture.

(5) Punjabi bilingual instruction will help cross-cultural friendships, relationships and marriages and prepare young people to be multilingual professionals.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to take steps to implement Punjabi bilingual programs in public schools similar to existing bilingual programs and take steps to implement Punjabi language instruction in other levels of education in Manitoba.

This petition has been signed by Hargian Singh, Hardial Singh and Gurtej Singh.

Thank you.

SANE Program

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

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

(1) The Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, SANE, program is run out of the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg and provides critical support to sexual assault survivors. The program also helps collect evidence for potential persecution–prosecution.

(2) Demand for the SANE program in the province is rising, with 764 sexual assault survivors receiving treatment from April 2022 to January 2023, a nearly 50 per cent increase since 2017-18.

(3) The SANE program has only one full-time nurse and just over a dozen others who are on call to conduct sexual assault examinations in their off-hours.

(4) The provincial government has failed to increase funding or hire additional staff to support the SANE program, breaking its April 2022 promise to spend \$640,000 annually and hire five additional nurses and a provincial co-ordinator.

(5) The provincial government's refusal to support the SANE program has resulted in severe staffing shortages, leading to at least 14 sexual assault survivors being sent home with the instruction to not shower or wipe themselves until they return and staff are eventually available to treat them. It has been reported that survivors often don't return, and the number of people being turned away could be significantly higher.

(6) The provincial government has compounded its failure to provide support for victims of sexual and gender-based violence by refusing to proclaim a bill passed in 2021 that would hold the provincial government accountable for providing resources available to child survivors of sexual assault. The bill, sponsored by the MLA for The Pas-Kameesak, is entitled, The Reporting of Supports for Child Survivors of Sexual Assault Act.

(7) The SANE's program staffing shortage is just one example of how the provincial government's cuts to Manitoba's health-care system and front-line health-care workers, including nurses, is causing harm–Manitobans harm.

(8) Urgent action is needed to immediately fix the SANE program staffing shortage, and to ensure that sexual assault survivors are supported with timely access to care.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to stop breaking its promises to Manitobans and to provide basic and respectful health care for sexual assault survivors through the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, SANE, program by ensuring it is properly staffed so

that no prosecution of perpetrators of sexual violence is compromised by the failure to collect evidence.

Signed by many Manitobans.

Miigwech.

Home-Care Services

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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

(1) Home-care workers in Manitoba provide skilled and compassionate care that helps better the quality of life for thousands of Manitobans.

(2) Robust home-care services are proven to reduce the strain on health services and demand for hospital beds.

(3) Home care reduces the demand for long-term-care beds as it allows people to continue living in their own space.

(4) Studies show that a third of the 200,000 Canadians living in long-term-care homes could stay home with proper home-care support.

(5) Investing in home care saves money, as daily services cost half the price of a long-term-care bed and one seventh of the daily cost of a hospital bed.

(6) The provincial government's cuts to home care in Manitoba has resulted in chronic staffing issues that caused the WRHA to cancel 27,000 home-care appointments in the month of April 2022 alone.

(7) Many clients in Manitoba only receive home-care services once a day, whereas countries such as Denmark offer up to six visits a day.

(8) Home-care workers in Manitoba are paid poor wages, are offered little benefits, lack sick time and are overworked, resulting in difficulty retaining and attracting workers.

(9) Home-care workers have been without a contract since 2017, due to this provincial government's interference in labour negotiations.

(10) Investing in home care is a proactive approach that would save the Province millions of dollars as well as allow more Manitobans to age in place.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health and the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care to immediately increase investment in home-care services so that home-care workers can be paid a fair wage and clients can receive the level of service they require.

This has been signed by Sudha Sharma, Evelyn Teano, Antonietta Alag, and many other Manitobans.

* (14:50)

Health-Care Coverage

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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, dependent 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.

(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.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Could you please call for second reading debate, Bill 14, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. If it passes—or, if it passes at second reading, please then call Bill 14 for Committee of the Whole. If Committee of the Whole is complete, would you please call Bill 14 for a third reading.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider second reading of Bill 14 this afternoon, and if it passes second reading, the—it is indicated that we will move to Committee of the Whole, and if that passes, we will be calling concurrence and third reading.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 14—The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

Madam Speaker: So, I will now call second reading of Bill 14, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023.

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care (Mr. Johnston), that Bill 14, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance, seconded by the honourable Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care, that Bill 14, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, be now read a second time, and be referred to a Committee of this House.

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

Mr. Cullen: I'm pleased to rise to provide some comments on Bill 14, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. This will implement tax statutes and administrative changes as part of Budget 2023, as well as some additional priority legislation.

This bill implements historic tax measures to lower taxes for Manitobans and businesses, which makes our economy stronger and more resilient. Madam Speaker, this bill will implement the largest personal income tax reduction in Manitoba history, providing much-needed assistance to all Manitoba taxpayers, each and every year moving forward.

Mr. Dennis Smook, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

This includes the historic increases in the basic personal amount and personal income tax bracket thresholds. By increasing the basic personal amount to \$15,000, Manitoba taxpayers will save \$311 million in 2023 and 47,400 additional low-income taxpayers will be removed from the tax rolls.

Since we formed government in 2016, this number is 74,000, which is roughly 10 per cent of all taxpayers in Manitoba. This will provide savings of up to \$524 for an individual or over \$1,000 for a two-income family, compared to 2022.

By increasing our tax-bracket thresholds to \$47,000 and \$100,000, taxpayers will benefit from an additional tax savings of \$160 million in the 2024 tax year. As a result of the changes to the basic personal amount and tax brackets combined, taxpayers will see up—will save up to an additional \$1,399 in 2024.

For a taxpayer with an income of \$30,000, the changes included in this bill will reduce the amount of Manitoba income tax they owe by 23 per cent next year. These changes also make a significant improvement in the competitiveness of our personal income tax system compared to other provinces.

Our basic personal amount, for example, will go from among the lowest in the country to fourth highest, and will match the federal amount, meaning Manitobans will not pay a cent of income tax on the first \$15,000 they earn.

Regarding the carbon tax relief tax credit provisions contained in the bill, these provisions will treat payments currently being made to Manitobans under the carbon tax relief fund announced in January, as a refundable tax credit under our income tax act.

This will ensure the payments are not taxable income and do not impact recipients' eligibility for other provincial or federal income-tested benefits. I am pleased to announce that of the nearly 700,000 cheques totalling \$200 million, today more than half of the cheques have been mailed, and we are on track to have completed mailing cheques to all eligible Manitobans before the end of March.

On the business side, for the fourth year in a row, we are increasing the thresholds under the health and post-secondary education tax 'lery' in 2024, which will save Manitoba businesses \$9 million next year and exempt another 150 businesses from having to pay the tax.

* (15:00)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the tax measures introduced in Budget 2023 were identified as priority areas for improvement for Manitoba's tax system by the Premier's Economic Advisory Council on Competitiveness and supported by the tax competitiveness working group. And I would like to thank the members of the council and working group for their valuable advice.

However, we know we have even more work to do, and I look forward, as Chair, to continuing discussions with the working group about further improvements to both our personal and business taxes to improve our competitiveness and grow our economy.

The payroll tax is often identified as a disincentive to hiring more Manitobans. I am pleased that in Budget 2023, we have signalled the first reduction of this tax rate in 24–25 years starting in 2024, provided our financial performance allows for

it. I look forward to our government confirming any rate reduction later this year.

Other features of the bill include: expanding eligibility for the Interactive Digital Media Tax Credit to allow for more flexible forms of employee compensation and incentives as eligible labour expenditures, which better aligns the credit with current industry practices; making the Mineral Exploration Tax Credit permanent, along with important amendments to ensure continued eligibility for critical minerals for which Manitoba has been endowed with deposits and which have attracted the attention of international mining and other companies; making the Green Energy Equipment Tax Credit, which supports geothermal and solar panel installations in Manitoba and will expire on July 1st, permanent; increasing the exemption threshold for the Health and Post-Secondary Education Tax Levy, the payroll tax, from \$2 million to \$2.25 million and increasing the threshold below which the lower effective rate applies from \$4 million to \$4.5 million; and, Mr. Acting Speaker, extending the tax refund limit period to match the audit period for provincially administered tax refunds resulting from an audit, replacing a discretionary authority with an automatic refund requirement.

Other priority pieces of the legislation—the bill include: clarifying that Treasury Board approval is required prior to Cabinet approval for supplementary loans, which provides authority for loans that exceed loan authority approved in the annual budget, such as those provided during the COVID-19 pandemic and as provided in The Financial Administration Act; setting out a new legal framework for services to be shared between departments in a non-financial context, such as staff in one department providing services to more than one department and reporting to more than one minister. Examples of the administrative efficiencies to be found within non-financial services include IT services, communication services and policy development resources.

Bill 14 also provides expanded funding authority to flow grants to other reporting entities in the broader government to ensure that we are more successful in creating much-needed child-care spaces. Manitoba has entered into a bilateral agreement with Canada to expand the early learning and child-care sector by 23,000 spaces by 2026.

In order to achieve this commitment, Manitoba is expanding its capital program to include Indigenous organizations, municipalities, public post-secondary

institutions and other public sector organizations alongside the existing child-care capital partnerships, the school divisions and community-based non-profit organizations.

The changes in this bill show our continued commitment to helping all Manitobans with higher costs and making Manitoba a more competitive place to live and do business. Over the last 12 months, Manitoba's economy has outperformed expectations, and we are re-investing every cent of new revenues to support people across this great province. This includes tax breaks, school tax rebates and Carbon Tax Relief Fund cheques. That is more than \$5,500 in pockets of the average family, while deficit reduction stays on track.

It is imperative that BITSA 2023 passes without delay. This will ensure that critical supports begin to become available to Manitobans as soon as possible, including the savings from the 2023 basic personal amount increase starting to increase the amount of take-home pay for Manitobans' paycheques as of this July.

This concludes my comments on The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023.

Thank you.

Questions

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): 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 questions or answers shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I'd like to ask the minister: What is the basis for the change to The Executive Government Organization Act? How can two departments share communication services?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Finance): I will say to the member opposite that in a number of situations, we have shared resources within—across departments. We see this on the IT front. We also see it on some of the financial services. You may have one person acting as the financial officer for possibly two of the smaller departments within government.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): It's my understanding that the income tax changes would not have an impact on individuals whose income is so low they're not currently paying income tax.

How many people would, in Manitoba, not currently pay income tax because their income is low?

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate that question from the member opposite. So, our intent is to move our basic personal amount where people—the threshold where people will start paying income tax in Manitoba. Right now it would be less than \$11,000, moving that to \$15,000. That change alone in this year would take 47,000 low-income Manitobans off of paying tax completely.

With the changes that we've made over the last number of years in terms of indexing that threshold, this brings a total of over 74,000 Manitobans that no longer pay provincial income tax.

Mr. Sala: The minister described that there are already currently some sharing of services between departments. He referenced a couple examples.

I just would hope that he would explain why these changes are needed if this is already being done in government.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, I would say to the member opposite this is activities that have been going on within government for a long time now. This statute just allows that to formally take place. We're acknowledging, through this legislation, what has actually been happening in practice for, quite frankly, for decades.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I was wondering, there was a question here about the tax changes. It seems to me—has the Minister of Finance done any sort of analysis of distribution, which is to say, you know, it's one thing to talk about an average, but the reality is that somebody at the bottom of the income scale will save a little bit on their income tax breaks, while people at the very top will be getting a lot more.

Is there a breakdown available of the, you know, who's getting the bulk based on income scale?

* (15:10)

Mr. Cullen: Yes, thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for that, and we have done some analysis in terms of who benefits the most and who benefits the most on a percentage basis, based on a couple of different levels of income. And I will say that the biggest proportion

of savings go to those individuals that are at the lowest end of the spectrum.

And I believe an income earner—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The honourable minister's time has expired.

Mr. Sala: I'd like to ask the minister: Would changes to The Executive Government Organization Act apply to government agencies like Shared Health?

Mr. Cullen: You know, I'll have to take that question under advisement from the member.

I will say, in reference to his previous question, that an income earner making \$30,000 will see savings on the indexing of 23 per cent of their income, those making \$50,000 will save 14 per cent—or see a 14 per cent reduction on their taxable income, those making \$100,000 will only see a net savings of 9 per cent.

So clearly, those making a lower income will have the bay—the best, largest percentage of savings on their income tax.

Mr. Sala: I'll just re-ask the question there that I posed: Would changes to The Executive Government Organization Act apply to government agencies like Shared Health?

Mr. Cullen: I advised that the member opposite that I will take that under advisement and will get that information to him.

Mr. Sala: There are interdepartmental working groups that currently exist, for example, a cross-departmental group between Manitoba Justice and families regarding the child-welfare system. That particular initiative was announced several years ago. What was the legal basis for their work and how would the government's proposed change impact that work?

Mr. Cullen: I will take the member's question under advisement. He's fishing.

Mr. Sala: It's a little concerning that the minister responsible for this bill doesn't have some answers to some pretty basic questions here. They keep going: Why is government requiring Treasury Board to recommend loan authority? Previously Cabinet solely had this power. Why is another committee of Cabinet required to recommend such a change?

Mr. Cullen: Again, a word back on the member's previous question. The answer is no. Shared services

applies to departments only, does not apply to entities such as he referenced before.

In terms of the—now, the ability of the Treasury Board to review loan—possible loans to agencies, organizations, we thought it was a proper thing to have oversight to the—by the Treasury Board and then a subsequent recommendation made to Cabinet.

Mr. Sala: What happens if Treasury Board does not recommend a supplementary loan authority? Can Cabinet still authorize a loan?

Mr. Cullen: I would suggest that in any situation, you know, Cabinet has the ultimate authority to make decisions. Not just financial decisions, but other policy directive decisions as well. So, ultimately, Cabinet would have that say. Certainly, Cabinet, in our case, at least, Cabinet would listen to the experts and the recommendations coming from Treasury Board. That's why we have a Treasury Board, so we have members dedicated and experts dedicated to doing analysis on situations as they arise.

Mr. Sala: BITSA comes into force on royal assent. Does that mean all provisions in the bill come into force when this bill receives royal assent?

Mr. Cullen: That is the intent, yes.

Mr. Sala: That was brief.

What analysis has the department done regarding the amounts of money that employees will see—the increase, we guess—regarding changes to the basic personal exemption changes? Can you share that analysis?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, certainly our budget documents do provide some analysis and breakdown on that and I'm—if the member wants additional breakdown that's over and above what's included in the documentation that we have made public, we can certainly endeavour to do that.

Clearly, by increasing the basic personal amount, Manitobans can reap savings in this year up to \$524, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We are hoping that we can signal to the federal government by the end of April that we are going to be making these changes and increasing the basic personal amount. If we do that, taxpayers can start seeing reductions on their bill—sorry, on their paycheque—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The honourable minister's time has expired.

Mr. Sala: I'd like to ask the minister just to provide some clarity to the House how they went about selecting the new bracket levels. Were they inspired by another jurisdiction? Where did they come from? And—hoping he can offer some clarity on that.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, the basic personal amounts or basic personal exemption was top of mind for many people that we spoke to and listened to, whether it be our tax competitiveness group, the Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) economic advisor on tax competitiveness.

Clearly, we are losing people to out-migration. We as a province have to be competitive and retain and attract people here in Manitoba, and certainly this was one thing where we were out of line. We were probably second last in terms of the basic personal amount. We've aligned our threshold with what—where the federal government starts taxing Canadians, quite frankly, across the country. So this is certainly a bold step, but gets us more in line with other jurisdictions—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The honourable minister's time has expired.

Mr. Sala: I'm hoping the minister can share whether or not he has any concerns about the distribution of the tax benefits that will come from the—this bill.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, I would say to the member opposite, first and foremost this is—that benefits the most is the low-income earners in Manitoba. As I stated earlier, this increase in the threshold will take 47,000 Manitobans right off the tax rolls and will not play tax at all. The thresholds that we have increased over the last number of years has taken 74,000 Manitobans off of the tax rolls altogether. A person making \$30,000 will realize a tax savings of 23 per cent just by this particular reduction as well. Those making \$40,000—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The honourable minister's time has expired.

Debate

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): Hearing no further questions, the floor is now open for debate.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): After seven years of making devastating cuts to every single corner of government—health care, education, municipalities and, as I said, every corner—the PCs brought forward a budget, of course, last week with a lot of very big promises focused on trying to convince Manitobans that they've changed.

And unfortunately, of course, we know that Manitobans know they can't trust this government. They know they can't trust this government to fix the problems that they created or to follow through on commitments made. Got a long, long list of broken commitments from this government.

* (15:20)

We also know that in this budget, the PCs also proposed a number of tax changes, and those tax changes are outlined, of course, in this BITSA bill that we're here to debate today.

Those changes are being billed as affordability relief, as we heard from the minister, and of course, we do know that Manitobans are in desperate need of relief right now. And that's especially true over these last several years, where we've seen huge spikes in inflation and gas costs and food costs. And of course, it's especially true because we know that this government has made life much more expensive for Manitobans. Whether it's raising hydro rates or failing to take action on our skyrocketing rents, they have made life much more expensive.

So people are desperately in need of help right now. That's true; we know that. But as we know with this government and with the PCs, any time tax changes are proposed, you need to read the fine print. Because we know with this government, when tax changes are proposed, there will usually be serious tax fairness considerations that need to be explored. And what's contained in this bill and the proposals it brings forward, it's no different. There are some serious tax fairness concerns here, and I look forward to exploring those in today's debate.

I do want to start just by saying, at a high level, that I do think it's incredibly important that we do have a strong debate on this proposed bill, because the changes that are being proposed in this BITSA are likely to have deep and long-lasting impacts on our provincial government's ability to pay for the things that Manitobans need, to pay for the costs of investing in health care, and ultimately, of digging ourselves out of the hole that this government has created for us here in Manitoba.

A \$490-million combined spend on the tax cuts—we look at the bracket changes and the changes to the basic personal exemption—is a lot of money to spend right now. And, of course, it's clear Manitobans want us to be digging into this proposal because they expect that their government will behave in a manner that is fiscally responsible and that looks out for their

interests over the long term. So we do need to consider the proposed revenue losses that will come from the potential passing of this bill.

Of course, we know that we can't just consider the revenue losses that would stem from the passing of this bill. We also have to consider the other additional tax changes that this government has brought forward, and specifically we can point to the education property tax changes that are going to result in an additional \$500 million of expenditures once we get to that 50 per cent number. So, we're talking about, you know, a billion dollars or so here of expenditures at a time when our province faces genuine, significant financial risks. We're in a financially risk-laden environment right now.

So we have to be concerned about the provincial purse, and there are really important questions to be asked. So, that's what we're here to do today, of course, and hopefully we'll give opportunities to Manitobans to get a sense of why there are some serious concerns with these changes that are being proposed.

So, this BITSA bill does propose a number of changes, many of which we've just discussed in that question-and-answer period. But I'm going to really focus on two of the key changes that are brought forward in the bill because they are the most consequential going forward for our province and will have the biggest impact on our ability to raise revenue.

The first one is the change to the basic personal allowance and the bracket changes. So those are—that's one package of changes I do want to look at. And, of course, the other are the proposed changes to the health and post-secondary education levy. But I do want to start by taking a closer look at the proposed changes to the basic personal exemption and the bracket changes.

So, we know that, of course, this bill does propose changes to that exemption; we're proposing to raise it to \$15,000. That change is booked to happen this year; it would happen as soon as this bill receives royal assent. And there are some proposed changes to tax brackets, of course, which would come into effect next year.

We can see that the government is proposing to raise—we're going to maintain three brackets, but we're going to move from \$36,842 to \$47,000 as our first bracket, and then from \$47,000 to \$100,000 as our second bracket, and that's moving us from the bracket of thirty-six-thousand-eight-hundred-forty-two to

seventy-nine-thousand-six-hundred-fifty. So, a significant increase and change there. And then, of course, the last one is now over \$100,000. So they are bringing forward a bunch of these proposed changes.

Now, the government is arguing that these proposed changes will provide—will provide some needed tax relief for Manitobans, and we do know that these changes will provide some small benefits to Manitobans. But there are important questions that need to be asked here, as we've mentioned, about fairness. And to do that, it's useful to look at some of the ways that these benefits are going to be distributed to Manitobans at different income levels.

So, to help do that, we can look at some analysis that was recently performed by David Macdonald. He's an economist with the CCPA and his analysis was recently published by the CCPA Manitoba in a recent post that they put out. And in looking at that analysis, it's clear that we can see some serious concerns relating to tax fairness right off the top.

And the first thing that his analysis suggests, and it jumps right off the page, is the significant disparity between the impacts on the lowest income earners and on high-income earners in Manitoba, and the benefits that they'll receive from the proposed changes.

Top income earners will receive, should this bill pass, a grand total of 26 per cent of all of the tax benefits stemming from the passing of this bill. That's a total of approximately \$130 million in savings for the top 10 per cent, for the very wealthiest people in this province. And the bottom 20 per cent, Mr. Speaker, the bottom 20 per cent will receive 1 per cent of the total tax benefits coming from this bill.

That's a shocking disparity. So, again, top 10 per cent, 26 per cent of all the benefits; the bottom 20 per cent are going to get 1 per cent of those benefits stemming from these changes.

Now, of course, part of that is because the lowest income earners in the province aren't going to benefit a lot from these changes because they're already in receipt of other tax credits that prevent them from being able to benefit further from the proposed changes in this bill.

Now, the disparity doesn't just exist between the top 10 per cent and the very bottom. There's also significant disparity in the benefits that are going to be gained by high-income earners and middle-income earners, middle Manitoba; nurses, construction workers, regular, everyday Manitobans.

And we can see that the analysis in that CCPA that was done by David Macdonald shows that the top 10 per cent of income earners are going to be in receipt of tax benefits more than the—more—sorry—it shows that the top 10 per cent are going to get more in tax benefits than the bottom 50 per cent of all income earners combined. So the top 10 per cent are going to get more than the bottom 50 per cent combined.

And we can also see in the analysis that middle-income Manitobans—and again, we're talking about working folks here in this province—who stand to get about \$500 a year from these proposed changes once everything is booked in and enacted, they're going to get \$500, but top income earners are going to receive more than double that.

So if you're a regular Manitoban, you're going to get a small amount of help, maybe about 50 bucks a month if you break it down on a monthly basis. But if you're a top income earner in this province, you're going to get more than double what that middle-income earner gets.

There are some very real concerns with that, and I know that many Manitobans, when we've spoken to people and I've spoken to people in my community, they're worried about what that means and the impacts that that will have on the province long-term, but they're also concerned to see that this government's so brazenly giving away so much more to the very wealthiest people in this province.

In another important point that needs to be drawn out here is that there is no cap here. There's no cap to these benefits that are being provided. So, Brian Pallister, who we know did quite well with the education property tax changes that he brought in for himself and for others in his income bracket, he's going to benefit from these changes. You know, other folks who are living in fairly large homes on Wellington Crescent are going to benefit from this.

Our current Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) is going to benefit from these tax changes, who—and we know she's lost \$31 million in the couch and probably isn't in great need of additional tax cuts from this government, but that's what they're offering.

* (15:30)

There is no cap. The wealthiest people in this province are also going to receive dollars from these changes. I think there are some very important questions that we need to be asking about why we would be giving those benefits to folks at that income level.

Now, we know that, without question, that we're going to see some benefits, of course, for middle-income families. And they do need some benefits and they are drowning in costs. But it's important that we point out that the bill that's been brought forward here, in the way that it ends up distributing those benefits, should be viewed as a poisoned pill. It should be viewed as a poisoned pill because in order to get relief to families, as being—as is being proposed here, those families need to be willing to accept this government's continued under-funding of the services that they rely on.

Because ultimately, if we're no longer collecting those revenues from the wealthiest people in this province, and we're offering them this tax giveaway, that will result in continued cuts to the services that Manitobans rely on. It will result in continued cuts to health care, to education and to municipalities. And that's a serious concern.

And it also has to be recognized that when we're removing that taxation from the various—very wealthiest people in this province, that at the end of the day, over time, those funds, those revenues that we're losing and not—no longer collecting from them, will need to be made up at some point. That bill will come due. We still will have ongoing costs. We do need to continue to make—increase investments in health care, and, of course, across government, after many years of this government putting us in the hole.

But at the end of the day, taking away those revenues and losing those revenues from those very—the very wealthiest Manitobans will mean that lower income Manitobans, middle-income Manitobans will need to make up the difference over time. That money will have to come from somewhere, and ultimately, they are going to have to shoulder that burden over time because of this government's proposal.

I want to shift, now, just to talk briefly about the payroll changes that are being proposed here. These are the changes to the Health and Post-Secondary Education Tax Levy. We know that that raises the exemption threshold for remuneration from \$2 million to 2.25. That continues the trend that we've seen from this government in raising that. And in addition, the threshold below which businesses pay a reduced effective rate will be raised from \$4 million to \$4.5 million.

Now, the core question I think we need to be asking here is, why is this government proposing tax changes, tax savings for big businesses in Manitoba when small businesses are receiving no additional

supports? And I think that question is incredibly important right now in the context of our post-COVID situation. We know that businesses—small businesses across the province got—were absolutely hammered through COVID, and they saw their sales tank. Many of them took on a lot more debt to try to get through to the other side of the pandemic. And they were forced to do that, because this government didn't provide them with supports.

This government wasn't there for small businesses when they needed help. And we heard that. I know that my colleagues heard that from small businesses throughout our communities. We heard that from the CFIB, who themselves throughout the pandemic were talking about how small businesses just simply were not getting the help that they need. So that, you know, those concerns—that failure to help small businesses, that left them in a very difficult position. And, of course, here we see the government bringing forward proposed benefits for larger businesses in this province, but leaving small businesses out—without that help.

And, apparently, they're continuing to go forward without any thought to supporting small businesses, to helping them to get back on their feet so we can ensure that they can continue to do their important work of creating jobs in our communities and offering those important services that we rely on in our various communities across the province.

So the question is, why isn't the government helping them? Why are larger businesses with 30 to 40 employees being given this gift, when small businesses are the backbone of our provincial economy? That's an important question. Why are they being left out?

I think it also bears mentioning that the carrot that the government has included in this bill, related to potential future changes to the—to this levy, that what they're proposing lacks transparency. We can see that there's no clarity around when or why they would actually go forward with reducing that tax levy. They've said in the bill—or, it says in the bill that if revenues are positive, or if the conditions are generally favourable that they'll do that. But that's lacking in transparency. There's a lot of important questions that we should be asking here.

Will they be decreasing that levy if we continue to be in a deficit position? What constitutes a positive revenue situation? What constitutes a state in which they would actually proceed with that? We have no

idea and, unfortunately, the bill does not spell that out and this government has failed to speak to that.

There are some top-level concerns that I want to touch on here relating to the proposed \$490-million spend, the first of which is the wisdom of proposing tax cuts when we're in a deficit situation. We know that we need to, because we are in a deficit situation, deficit finance any proposed tax cuts. And so, ultimately, in our current environment, where we are in a deficit, effectively, what the government is proposing with these changes is that they will pay interest on tax cuts, which, as we've outlined, will disproportionately benefit the wealthiest people in the province.

It's the same thing that happened with the education property tax cut, which we know resulted in us sending cheques to out-of-province millionaires; million-dollar cheques to Cadillac Fairview. We had to borrow money to pay the costs of sending those cheques out. The government likes to think of—they like to think of themselves as fiscal hawks, but I think there's good reason to wonder whether or not that's an accurate claim, given they are continuously finding ways of having us—and pay interest and paying more and more interest. That's a significant concern.

So we do need to question the wisdom of moving forward with deficit-financed tax cuts. And we've already seen—the Province has seen two credit downgrades as a result of their fiscal irresponsibility and their failure to monitor the books and to do what's best for our provincial purse, and that's increasing the cost of our borrowing. That's a real concern right now.

Another major top-line issue that I want to discuss here is the wisdom of looking at booking in \$500 million worth of tax cuts—again, which will disproportionately benefit the wealthiest people in this province—when we're in the hole we're in right now, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We are, of course, far, far behind the levels of investment that we need to be seeing in departments across government. We know that even in the budget proposals that they brought forward in health care, there—a vast number of areas that the proposals they brought forward will not bring us up to where we need to be after you consider inflation. We're in a deep, deep hole.

And so, the wisdom of pursuing, you know, again, more large tax cuts at a time when we have a significant need to make major investments going forward is questionable, and we haven't heard this

government made a good case yet as to why this isn't a significant risk, why we should believe that we can continue to do what we need to do after booking in what they're proposing here in terms of these revenue losses.

And the third top-line thing I really want to touch on here is that they're proposing these tax changes at a time when we're dealing with a significant risk of seeing revenues drop in the next couple years here in Manitoba. We don't know what's coming.

An Honourable Member: Even one year.

Mr. Sala: We don't know—as my colleague has said, from Elmwood, even in the next year, we don't know what's coming.

We do know that we're currently in receipt of bonanza revenues from the federal government, many of which are stemming from equalization payments that are driven by record oil prices that are, you know, being buoyed in Alberta, of course, by the war across the sea; that's driving big equalization payment increases.

We're seeing potentially temporary revenue increases for government overall due to inflation and we know that that is driving increases in government revenues that could themselves be temporary.

And, of course, the government's purse this year is going to be buoyed by record profits from Manitoba Hydro—record profits that, I should add, are being driven by Hydro investments made by previous NDP government. But those record profits from Hydro are themselves, as we know, at risk of going up and down, depending on the amount of water that flows through our dams.

There is significant risk that those huge amounts of money that are flowing into our provincial Treasury this year are temporary, that they're time limited. So, we need to be very, very concerned about the potential for looking at these types of significant reductions in revenue. And, of course, again, we know that middle-income and low-income Manitobans do need that help, but we can see that these proposed tax changes book in huge benefits for the wealthiest people in this province. And there are very serious questions to be asked about the wisdom of doing that at a time when we face so much fiscal risk, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

* (15:40)

We know that people in this province need help, as I've said multiple times. And, of course, this proposes a means of doing that, but it's coming seven

months away from an election. It's coming seven months from an election. It has to be said that this government has had years—many, many years to take action on our affordability crisis.

In fact, not only have they failed to take action on the affordability crisis; we know, of course, that they've made our affordability crisis much, much worse. They've done that through doing everything they can to raise hydro rates as quickly as possible.

They brought forward a bill—bill 36—which was passed, that ultimately sought to jack hydro rates up as quickly as possible. It set unachievably high financial targets for Hydro that forced them to set rates as high as they possibly could, and we're seeing Manitobans are going to be paying the price for that.

Instead of working to freeze hydro rates as we've committed, they passed legislation that worked to make them go up as fast as possible, making life less affordable.

We see rent increases that continue to skyrocket on Manitobans, above-guideline increases that continue to skyrocket because this government refuses to take action to fix that issue. We, on this side of the House, brought forward a solution. We brought forward a bill that would have put a stop to that issue. This government refused to act. They've allowed rents to continue to skyrocket.

We know that they've failed in countless other ways to raise costs on Manitobans, but another way that they've raised costs on Manitobans is through their cuts. Their cuts, over the last many years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to education, to municipalities, to post-secondary, have cost Manitobans more money, as well.

On municipalities, we know that their cuts to municipalities are forcing municipalities to raise tax rates so that they can do what citizens need to have done in our communities.

We know that in post-secondary, their cuts to post-secondary resulting in, again, more increases for tuition. Manitoban students are carrying the costs of their cuts.

And we know that if we look at education, this government's cuts over many, many years to our education system has made life more expensive for parents. Where their kids may have previously gotten that band instrument provided to them, now they're being forced to pay for. Where parents used to maybe

have that field trip be paid for through the division, they're now covering the cost of that.

So, their cuts have also cost Manitobans more money in a number of areas, and those are just a few examples.

All this to say, the government has had an incredibly long time to act to show that they care. To show that they care about the affordability challenges that people are facing. And—bringing forward these tax changes seven months from an election isn't going to convince Manitobans that they care. It's not.

And, in fact, bringing forward these types of proposals only seven months before an election, along with the various promises that they brought forward in their budget shows Manitobans just how desperate they are and it shows Manitobans that it's not about them. It's not about Manitobans and what's best for them. It's about their political futures. That's what these changes are about.

Manitobans deserve better government. They deserve a government that actually cares about improving affordability in this province, that proves that they care about affordability. And they deserve a government that they can trust, that they can believe in. And, unfortunately, Manitobans cannot trust this PC government.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): Thank you, Mr. Acting—excuse me—Speaker. I am certainly pleased to further speak to this bill, supporting this monumental budget expenditure.

Excuse me.

I wish to focus, Mr. Acting Speaker, on the expenditures and the budget that—this monumental budget does to support the seniors of Manitoba.

We received many responses that helped us shape our seniors strategy, Mr. Acting Speaker, and I certainly enjoyed getting out across this province to speak to the many people of Manitoba, and certainly all of the seniors that were consulting with us as we travelled. Whether it be through the surveys, whether it be through the stakeholders, whether it be touring the facilities that house seniors across this great province, most importantly, we had the opportunity to actually sit down and talk to people, to hear what they had to say.

And, certainly, affordability was a very significant component of the discussions that we have, and this expenditure, this budget, certainly addresses that to help the seniors of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, our government has been able to construct a highly comprehensive senior strategy, which will certainly bring results to Manitoba. As a matter of fact, it already has. This historic budget has made it clear that seniors are the top of our government's mind.

Our government recognizes that not only do seniors have needs for support for care, they also have needs for support for affordability, and that's what these expenditures within this budget do. It recognizes the need to enhance care for seniors, and not only are we doing that right now, based on the expenditures that we put forward in the Stevenson report, as well as the initial senior strategies expenditure, which, as I mentioned, the Stevenson report was an expenditure of \$32 million, and that, certainly, is addressing needs of affordability for individuals, and the safety of individuals, Madam Speaker—or, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Our government is certainly committed by these initiatives to continuing to fulfill the needs of our seniors.

As Minister of Long-Term Care, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I recognize that, and our department recognize—and I've emphasized this before—we have a situation in all of society, and, certainly, Manitoba is part of that, is the expansion of the baby boomers now hitting the demographic of seniors, and it's a very significant situation, and this didn't come by just now.

The previous government had 17 years to develop a plan to start addressing this, and frankly, I haven't seen an NDP plan in regards to seniors, and I've looked high and low for it. But we do have a plan; we do have expenditures in place. We are going to address the care of seniors, and we're going to address the financial needs of seniors.

You know, Madam Speaker—or, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, when I was a young man growing up in St. James, I went to a school called Linwood School, and at that time, the population, the increase in my demographic, was absolutely phenomenal.

And we actually had kids that had to go in the classroom, that had desks set up in the classrooms because of that demographic. And it just is so apparent that when that demographic comes—is coming forward now and is entering the realm of the baby boom and the seniors, it's very apparent that the plan that we

have and the seniors initiatives that we're taking are going to be beneficial to not only the seniors that are becoming seniors, but the existing seniors that are there.

Madam Speaker, I can't tell you how proud of—I am of my department. They're made up of very passionate people; people who understand the needs of seniors; people who understand the needs of those individuals who are in personal-care homes, who are utilizing home care; the people that are, you know, struggling sometimes to make ends meet. And we recognize that. And that's one of the reasons that that tax-free \$15,000 that this budget implements is a real benefit to low-income and middle-income seniors. So I can't tell you how supportive I am of that initiative.

* (15:50)

Madam Speaker, I would like to—oh, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to address some of the initiatives that our government has put forward in regards to the seniors strategy. And I can't emphasize them enough, because I am extremely proud of them as the minister: \$450,000 to accelerate the ability for Habitat for Humanity to modify and help low-income seniors to be able to ensure that they can stay in their homes longer.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$100,000 is a massive support, because we recognize that seniors are a diversified group and \$100,000 to support the Rainbow Resource Centre to ensure that the rainbow program continues to flourish within the seniors area is something that we're proud of and we're very pleased for this expenditure to go through as we pass this budget.

Madam—or, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a \$12.6-million initiative for Self and Family Managed Care. What that is is that it addresses home care, and we continue to hear the challenges of home care.

Well, this is an initiative that allows people to be able to be in control of their own destinies by having the funds to be able to initiate home care. And it's certainly an initiative that is—and I can tell you that there is more to come with home care. There is a lot more to come with home care that our government will be announcing in the near—in the very near future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can also indicate that we have addressed the support for palliative-care services. We're starting off with a program in Southern Health, which will be expanded to out—the whole province of Manitoba. So those people that are going through the anguish—and families there—of

being at home for their path to the end of the life, we're going to make it easier, and this expenditure within this budget certainly does that.

Madam Speaker, we're very pleased to announce \$325,000 support to the Alzheimer Society First Link program. And we all know and I think we've all been touched by somebody within our acquaintance or our family that has experienced the challenge of dementia, and it's a very difficult disease to be able to address, and we're happy to support people. Particularly, I enjoy dealing with Wendy Schettler and Erin Crawford from the Alzheimer Society of Manitoba, who have been extremely supportive of our initiatives to enhance the dementia situations in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, also to—or, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what this budget does is it really, really speaks to the support that this government gives to seniors and the advocacy of seniors. A 72 per cent increase in the Seniors budget is quite significant, and that demonstrates the support that this government has for seniors and the expenditures that I've indicated do support that.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I indicate that there is more coming. The seniors strategy was initiated with a number of focuses, and we're going to follow through on ensuring that those focuses are met.

So thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I look forward for it.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Johnston: Mixed messages from my colleagues—clapping to sit down.

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): It's important that we put some words on the record with respect to BITSA, the budget implementation act, because of its implications and its—the potential ramifications that it will have on our province.

It's important to note the issues that this bill will cause for the people of Manitoba and what, quite frankly, this government is proposing and why it's important for us to stand on record as to what will actually happen. That way, we're all in full awareness of the impacts of the bill.

And now, I think, the first thing to go—to show is that, you know, when we look at—talking to Manitobans and speaking to Manitobans, and look at this government's track record when it comes to putting forward budgets in terms of running this province fiscally and the decisions that they've made,

it's clear that the decisions they made don't align up with the priorities of Manitobans.

That's quite clear, and I think it was evidenced today by the recent poll and survey showing that the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) in Manitoba has the lowest approval rating in the country. I think that just goes to show that they—that what this bill, what this budget is putting forward doesn't line up with the needs and the priorities of Manitobans, that the Premier and the Cabinet and the entire PC team is not meeting with the expectations of Manitobans. And, quite frankly, it shows that Manitobans don't approve of this government at all.

So now, when we dig into the changes that this bill provides, and despite the comments of the minister and despite the comments of the Premier and her team, it's very important to realize that they are clearly choosing to prioritize the wealthiest Manitobans over the lowest income Manitobans. And that's quite obvious.

It's important to recognize that that's the choice that they're making in a time when low-income Manitobans have suffered the worst as a result of the COVID pandemic. Not just the worst health concerns, health outcomes, but the worst economic outcomes because of the economic slowdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

And even though the low-income Manitobans have suffered more and the wealthier Manitobans have been able to still, you know, have difficulty through the course of the pandemic, but fare, in many cases, a better state than low-income Manitobans. We're still seeing this government prioritize their financial interests over low-income Manitobans.

Now, this is the priority that they've chosen. We would want to take a different approach where we're able to recognize the importance of helping the low- and middle-income and average Manitobans with the financial difficulties that they're facing right now, with the affordability challenge, the affordability crisis that we're all facing right now.

You can't go to a grocery store and not see the rising prices every day. You can't look at that fruit and vegetable section and not realize that it's higher than it was last month, six months ago, last year. You can't go and get eggs or any product, quite frankly, without seeing that you're paying more for it and it's hurting your pocketbook a little bit more.

When you go to the gas pump, you see how much that's increased, and we feel those challenges. We feel

the fact that things are more expensive now than they once were. And this government's supposed solution to some of these problems is to give wealthy—the wealthiest Manitobans and the wealthiest corporations in Manitoba a big tax break.

And so the top 10 per cent of Manitobans, as a result of the income tax bracket change that this bill—this budget proposes, the top 10 per cent is going to get over a quarter of the benefit. Mr. Deputy Speaker, 26, 27 per cent of the benefit, financially, is going to go to the top 10 per cent, whereas the lowest 20 per cent is just going to get a fraction of that.

Mr. Brad Michaleski, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

You're talking about over \$1,300 is going to go, on an annual basis, to the top 10 per cent, compared to \$37 to the lowest 20 per cent on average.

Now, how is that an equitable way to help Manitobans afford the rising costs that they're seeing every day, every week, when they go to their grocery store? For someone who's living paycheque to paycheque to get an average increase of \$37 a year, roughly, you know, what is that—\$3 or so a month—how is that on earth going to ever help them face the rising costs of gas and groceries?

This government doesn't propose any solution to help those folks, but yet they've prioritized—they've somehow found a way to give the wealthiest millionaires, billionaires and richest corporations in our province extra money to the tunes of hundreds, if not thousands of dollars.

That's the choice that they're making—not to help you, not to help everyday Manitobans, not to help low-income Manitobans, but to help their rich friends and the wealthiest people in our province.

* (16:00)

And that's the concerns we have about how this government has chosen to prioritize the fiscal management of our province. And I think it's quite clear that these sort of decisions not only show the lack of wisdom that this government has, but also shows that they don't have the experience with how to truly grow our economy in an equitable way.

Now, we look at the challenges that we've faced throughout this economy, right? We know that, as a result, a lot of people lost their jobs during the pandemic. We also know that, you know, we saw a lot of these jobs come back. A lot of people got new employment, went back, got some training, went to

school—now educated into their jobs, and are looking for ways to—looking at regrowing our economy.

Now, how are we regrowing our economy? Are we doing it with the type of jobs that would make Manitobans feel proud, with good pay, high-quality jobs that are also—provide safe and good work environments? Is that the types of jobs that we're seeing this government promote and invest in?

Or are we seeing this government promote and invest in minimum-wage jobs, and trying to shift jobs over from good-paying union jobs, or good-paying, safe-work-environment jobs over to low- and minimum-wage jobs. That's the type of investment that this government is trying to do.

On top of that, they're trying to make decisions in terms of procurement and government spending that will send money out of province, out of Manitoba. In a time when we need to be rebuilding our economy, they choose to send money out of province. Now, how does that make sense?

An Honourable Member: They're all about Calgary first.

Mr. Moses: That's right. I think—maybe they should be renaming that—their party, the PC Party, the Out-of-Manitoba Party—the Calgary Party. Is that, perhaps—because that seems to be who they're working for, not for Manitobans.

Now, I—now, you want to know what I'm talking about, Mr. Deputy Speaker—or, Assistant Deputy Speaker, I think we are talking about—and, as an example, we look at the property—the school property tax rebates.

I look at how this government has chosen to give millions of dollars to corporations that are not based in Manitoba. To not just any corporation, but billion-dollar corporations that are not based in Manitoba. Now, tell me how that—on Earth could benefit our province.

And remember, this is money that is supposed to and has traditionally gone to our schools, to kids in classrooms. To kids in classrooms who need support; to kids who maybe have a learning disability and need a little extra help. To kids who've suffered, and need mental health supports in classrooms. To kids who need a little help learning how to read, or with numeracy, with literacy and want to get some more one-on-one time with a teacher; well, they're out of luck, because they sent the money for that out to Bay Street. Out to billionaire corporations on Bay Street.

That's what we got from this government. That's what we continue to see with this government, right here in this budget. That's the decision they've made before, and they're continuing to make. And the result of this is that the Province is facing a much more challenging time when it comes to our fiscal finances.

And you look at the reality of it: it's not just the fact that we are sending this money out of province, which is unquestionably a bad idea. It's not just that we're robbing students to do that; that is also unquestionably a bad idea. But we're also doing it—this government has also chose to do it in years where we're in deficit.

They've proposed a deficit budget, and at the same time, they've proposed to send cheques to billion-dollar corporations out of province. So, yet, we're borrowing money, having to pay interest costs—at a high interest rate, mind you; you know, this is one of the highest interest rates that we've seen in a generation—and they've chose to borrow money, paying the interest rate costs, so they can take that money and send it out of province to the richest companies in the country, at the same time when we need the services right here in Manitoba.

And what are some of those services that are suffering so badly in Manitoba. What are they? Well, you look at them.

You talk to any Manitoban, and they'll tell you a story about how they had to wait in an emergency room; or a family member, or a friend. You talk to any Manitoban, and they'll tell you how they had a friend, a mom, a dad or themselves had to wait on a surgical wait list for months and months—if not years and years—to get their surgery done for their hip, or knee or cataract surgery.

That was the services that we're talking about, that Manitobans are suffering from, because of the decisions of this government. You talk to any Manitoban, and they'll tell you stories about how their child or themselves didn't get the support services that they needed in schools, or how the classroom size that used to be smaller grew and grew and grew every year. And the ratio from student to teacher became larger and larger and larger.

Manitobans will tell you this. It doesn't matter whether you're in my—constituencies like mine, in St. Vital, or your beautiful constituencies like St. Johns, or Concordia, or Notre Dame, or Thompson, or Burrows, or Elmwood or Keewatinook. They'll all tell

you the same thing: that Manitobans are sick and tired of the cuts from this PC government.

Now, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, it boils down to the choices that this government has made. And they've failed; the choices that they've made have failed. Not only do we know that, and I think the members on this side know that, but Manitobans also know that, and that comes out very clear as day, when we see polls, we see results like the one that came out today that shows that the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) of the province has the lowest approval rating of any premier in the country—any premier in the country.

And, mind you, it's been low, and it's continuing to get lower. Now, the reason that is salient, and the 'wayson' that I bring that up is because it just goes to show how out-of-touch, not only the Premier but her Cabinet and the entire PC team is with Manitobans.

The fact that they're not even able to put forward a budget that can resonate with Manitobans; that meet the needs of Manitobans; fails to address issues—critical issues—like fixing the shortage of health-care workers in our system. Nurses I talk to still are suffering from mandatory overtime; going to work and not even sure when their shift will end.

Those working conditions are extremely difficult for anyone in any field, let alone people who are trying to keep Manitobans alive and give them the best health care that we deserve. That's extremely difficult position to be in. And yet, we're thankful that nurses are doing that every day for Manitobans.

And we want to work to make sure that their working conditions can be better. We're thankful for the doctors, the health-care aides, all of the united health-care professionals who do the work to keep Manitobans safe and healthy each and every day, in spite of the choices of this government; in spite of the cuts of this government; in spite of the challenges that this government has put in place to make their life more difficult—to delete positions, to close emergency rooms, right here in Winnipeg and across the province.

And in spite of those challenges, the good people in our health-care system continue to work each and every day. And we see this trend continue throughout industry and industry in our province. We see that teachers have larger classroom sizes because of the removal of classroom caps. We see that health-care—we see that child-care workers haven't had a proper wage for the work that they do in childhood education.

We see that the investments that this government has made—oh, sorry, I will say the lack of investments that this government has made in personal-care homes and in home-care workers has resulted in some of the most catastrophic outcomes during the pandemic in our personal-care homes.

Sadly, we all know of stories of Parkview, of the Maples—personal-care homes in Manitoba. And while those are devastating and heartbreaking, they could have been avoided if we had a government that was working harder to protect those lives and put in place measures which would have helped Manitobans stay safer in their personal-care homes.

* (16:10)

Where Manitobans are looking for more help to live independently with the help of home care, where seniors in our community want to stay at home, where they want to live independently in community and stay active, but need a little bit of help with home care—well, they've been struggling because of the cuts to home care, the fact that home-care workers no longer have as much resources to get their job done properly. They often have to bounce from patient to patient without breaks in between, with no coverage for gas and with the—the fact that they—many of them don't have the added, needed support to do their job and take care of Manitobans the way they ought to be taken care of.

Now, it's important to recognize that all of these systems are linked together. The personal-care-home system with seniors and home care, our hospital system as well as the diagnostic system and people getting their blood work done—all these systems are related within our health-care system. And we have—we ought to have a government that puts into place strong connections because they're interrelated.

Now, what they have done is they've introduced, you know, many years ago, Shared Health and their system within Shared Health to oversee many of the regional health authorities. Right? But it seems that their plan to over—to implement this has, in a way, still not filled many of those gaps.

We saw a tragic story a few weeks ago where a woman was discharged from hospital and required home care in her life. But it—she didn't receive that home care, sadly, until after she had passed away.

Now, that story is very important for us to learn from because there needs to be a strong connection between our home-care system and our hospital system. There needs to be communication there so we

can avoid these situations and Manitobans can get the care they need to live long and productive and healthy lives.

I've heard from the constituents in my own neighbourhood who have had to visit the hospital. And while they were in hospital, there was no communication from the hospital, from their doctor or nurse, to the home-care system. And as a result, home care showed up at their door saying, I'm here to help you with home care, but that person was in hospital.

Now, we'd love to have connected systems which would allow there to be communication between one health-care agency and organization and another body, so that there could be a strong continuum of care for Manitobans to keep them healthy at home and, most importantly, allow them to get the health care they need right here in Manitoba.

And I say right here in Manitoba as it would seem obvious that Manitobans would get health care in Manitoba, except not under this PC government. Somehow, they found a way to send Manitobans out of province to get health care. Not just out of province, but out of country. They said that our system is so strained, we've cut our system so bare we've got to send you out of the country to get the health care that you need.

Now, what kind of choice is that? We know that the solution is to build a stronger public health-care system. Invest in our health-care professionals, invest in training more health-care professionals, invest in building up our capacity, invest in building up our systems so Manitobans can stay here, get the help they need close to home.

Now, I think it's also important, before I sit down and before I let many other speakers put some important words on the record, before I—I'm sure that I've put enough words on the record, because this is important. We're talking about the budget of Manitoba that puts millions and millions of dollars through our economy.

One of the things I want to point out, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, is the choices that the government is making when it comes to procurement. And we're seeing many contracts that the government is awarding get sent to companies who are not based in Manitoba, not hiring Manitobans to do this work.

And we're—I'm mean, let's face it, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, here in Manitoba, we're not the largest province in the country. We don't have the largest budget in the country.

That means that we need to be even more careful with every single dollar that we spend. We need to make sure that every dollar we spend gets put to good use. Gets put to the use of helping to build our province, helping to be youthful in health care and education, and growing good-paying jobs in Manitoba. But also, it needs to accomplish more than one of those things at the same time.

It's possible for us to invest in our health-care system and create good-paying jobs at the same time. It's possible for us to invest in a clean climate and clean environment and create good jobs at the same time. It's possible for us to invest in our education system and ensure that we're keeping Manitobans as healthy and as happy as possible.

It's possible to do these things, but we can't do it when we have a PC government that chooses to send that money out of province by making procurement decisions that would rather choose and select out-of-province or out-of-country companies, sometimes, rather than Manitoba-based companies.

It's such a shortsighted decision—such a shortsighted decision—trying to take a possible one-year gain of going by the lowest bidder instead of choosing a company that would rather put its money back into the province and re-invest it into the people of Manitoba.

These are the sort of decisions that you would do if you had a long-term plan in place for benefiting Manitoba. These are the sort of decisions you would make if you really thought that, you know what, Manitoba is going to be the place that I'm going to stay in.

You know, the person who was making this—decisions before, well, he took off and left to Costa Rica. So, I think we're now looking at who's making these decisions right now, and we look at the group and, well, looks like not many of them will stick around. At least a third of them are going to be leaving their positions, so I'm really questioning whether they have the long-term interests of Manitobans at heart, or just their own interests.

And their own election interests. After all, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, we know this is an election-year budget. And we know that they are trying to play political games with this budget and putting forward ideas that might only pass or take place if they get re-elected.

Now, that's political games with Manitobans' money. We saw the political games with some of

the cheques that were sent out by the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson). We're seeing more political games with this budget.

And when the minister was asked, you know, can you clearly describe what it means to—for favourable economic conditions, which would trigger further changes to the tax as proposed in this bill; well, there was no clear answer. There was no clear answer about describing what favourable economic conditions meant in terms of the eyes of the minister.

Perhaps the minister doesn't even know himself. He's playing so many political games with Manitoba's finances that it seems that he's lost track. It seems like he hasn't kept track with some of his own schemes of how he's going to put forward a budget to help him and his party win an election.

And that is just a few of the concerns we have with this bill, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker.

I think it's important to note that not only does this budget fail in terms of many of the aspects that I've outlined—it's not the priorities of Manitobans, it doesn't truly invest in health care and education—but, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, it, quite frankly, just leaves out many of the important issues that I hear from Manitobans all the time.

The fact that we don't have a good plan—frankly, any plan—to decarbonize our province. No serious plan to address climate—the climate crisis—which, as you and I both know, as Manitobans all know, is one of the greatest challenges that the globe faces.

And are we doing our part as Manitobans? Well, according to this budget, no, because it seems that they have simply forgot about the environment and the climate crisis.

Is there any plan to decarbonize our fuel at homes? Is there a plan to decarbonize—reduce CO₂ emissions from our transportation sector? Is there any efforts made to help industry or companies do their job and grow good-paying jobs while at the same time finding ways to reduce their emissions? We don't see any of those investments in this budget. Now, those investments are important. Those investments are critical to the growth of our province, and they're critical to the well-being of our economy.

* (16:20)

Now, we have an opportunity to be economic leaders. With the power of Manitoba Hydro, we have the opportunity to grow a clean economy, to grow an economy that is not just based on oil and gas, but one

that's based on the power of clean hydroelectricity, where we can remove our reliance—reduce our reliance on fossil fuels. And in—by reducing the reliance, we're—we could have an opportunity to create hundreds and thousands of jobs. In industries like agriculture, there's huge opportunities. In industries—in natural resource industries, there's huge opportunities. In manufacturing industries, there's huge opportunities.

And that doesn't even include the personal emissions that we all make, whether it's through our home heating, whether it's through our transportation. Those are huge opportunities, and we have the skills. There's talents, there's industries, there's people who are working to electrify our province. There are people who are working to decarbonize our province. But those folks need to assure—need to be ensured that the Province is going to support that work.

Because the climate crisis is not going to go away. No matter how much this PC government ignores it, it's not going to go away. And so it's important for us to be able to critically address these issues, because they're essential for our future in Manitoba.

And last thing I want to touch on is ensuring that we continue to invest in a strong post-secondary education system. And we can do that in a few really concrete, specific ways.

One I want to point to is the investment into international student health care. The cut of international student health care by the—by this PC provincial government is—was flat out wrong. It was the wrong thing to do. It hampered the lives of international students, the fact that they had to pay, in many cases, over \$1,000 for private insurance to get access to health care.

In some cases, the health care is not respected by institutions, and many times they have to pay out of pocket for care. We know, that in the private system there are gaps, and we've all heard or seen in this—in the paper and in the news horror stories of Manitobans, many times international students, who have faced bills of hundreds of thousands of dollars just because this government did not want to support them with provincial public health care.

And the other point I want to bring out, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker, is the investment that we need to do in research in Manitoba and with Research Manitoba. Investments in research help to grow our economy, sometimes four times over. Every dollar you spend in research helps to grow our

economy at such a great level. And making these investments are—this is the right time to do it. This is just the right time to do it. As we are trying to rebuild, kickstart and put the fuel into boosting our economy, that boost ought to be done through investments in research. To bring the brightest minds into Manitoba, to help them grow and build our economy in Manitoba, so we can have a brighter future in Manitoba for all of us so that all of us can feel welcome here. Whether you're born and raised here, whether international student coming here, you can feel welcome.

And I know that that's one of the most important things that this—our side of the House, this NDP team, values: ensuring that all Manitobans feel welcome, know that they're welcome. And they'll all know, especially after the next election, that this side of the House, that this NDP team, is working for all Manitobans.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): There have been a few things that have been said already, but it's worth emphasizing just how inadequate this budget is and what a bait and switch it is as well.

Look, this is a budget that can find hundreds of millions of dollars for—to cut cheques and relieve taxes on the people who have the most. This is a budget that gives more to people who already have it, while either doing nothing and often taking away from people who don't even have enough.

And that's not something new. That's what this government has been doing all along. It's just a sort of a PC budget on steroids. It's the same old, same old. You have record federal transfers, which is significant, is—it's going up by \$1 billion just this year. Transfers—total transfers to Manitoba have increased by 3 and a half billion dollars since 2016. They were 3 and a half billion dollars in 2016. They've doubled. They've doubled, and the reason it's gone up is because—look, it was frozen for six years before that.

And when you consider what are supposed to be, you know, we think about what the strengths of the Progressive Conservative Party usually would be—one would be, supposedly, fiscal conservatism, or so you would think.

Let's talk about the supposed positive stereotypes around the Progressive Conservatives, that they're supposed to be good fiscal conservatives. Well, we've already seen, you know, there were two credit downgrades already. This budget adds \$1.6 billion in net debt. We're still running a deficit of \$363 million

while we're putting out unfunded tax cuts. We are borrowing money.

And in some of the cuts for the—and some of the cheques for those property taxes, the—they're owned by oil companies. They're owing—like, if you're give—cutting a cheque to CN Rail—the big—the per—the biggest shareholder in CN Rail, who will be benefiting from this, who has benefited from these property tax rebates, is Bill Gates.

We're going into deficit. We are going to have to pay back money with interest in order to cut cheques to Bill Gates. It doesn't make sense. And he's just one of the—is the—and—is he going to put that money back into Manitoba? No.

No, this is—I mean, you know, they've called it trickle-down economics, but really, what this is is it's like, this has also been called, you know, the equivalent of, you know, force-feeding a horse and expecting the—and telling people that the sparrows are going to eat better at the other end. That's trickle-down economics. And that's what this budget is still doing.

You know, and I'll quote from one of the members opposite that once said, you know, the—of health care, he said, you know, the ministers can boast about billions of dollars that go into the system, yet the systems get worse.

They can boast about announcements that happen, but the system doesn't get better; it gets worse. And one of the reasons why it gets worse is because they've created an environment where there isn't any responsibility, where there isn't any accountability in the system itself, where the money goes in, but there's no accountability for results that come out. That was the member from Steinbach. That was the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) in 2008.

And, you know, there was another member who was talking to—if you look at this budget, the colossal amounts of federal money that are coming our way—and there have been warnings from this own government, from this government's Finance department, said, look, we're too dependent.

We are putting our own revenues at risk because we are too dependent on federal revenues and we're going to be in a really tough spot if, say, a Conservative government were come in and change their mind. A government that goes back to cutting the way the previous Conservative government did. And they capped Manitoba's federal transfers for six years straight.

For six years straight, there were no increases. Even as our population aged, even as our population grew, the actual amount per capita spending on Manitobans by the federal government under the previous Conservative government went down, year after year after year.

And so, we're not investing. This is not a government—this is not a budget that's about investing. This is not a government that's about post-pandemic recovery. It's about filling a helicopter with cash or filling a T-shirt cannon with cash and just firing at everybody they possibly can and hoping it results in some improved popularity. But it's not about actually fixing a whole bunch of the broken systems that are in place.

And, again, we had an MLA in 2009, during the budget debate, talking about the fact, you know, we need to start looking at how much money we're bringing in with respect to revenues in this province, and start looking at the revenue when it comes to the federal government. And ask, you know—at core government revenues, are they—how much of this is sustainable?

How can we pay for those social programs and the social safety net that needs to be there for Manitobans who've paid into it for the years, who need and should have a health-care system that's there for them when they need it, which is rot—not right now?

That was the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson). That was the Premier in 2009 saying the same thing.

And when you look at what—how these taxes work, the reality is, if you look at the way property is distributed, the share of ownership. People talk about inequality, they talk about—but really what you're talking about is concentration. You're talking about concentration of ownership and concentration of wealth. It's how much people own.

* (16:30)

And, you know, for about 90 per cent, roughly, of the entire population, it's a pretty steady slope from poverty up to about, let's say, \$100,000 in income. And all of a sudden it shoots up, and then there are people who are making hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars, and the number of people who actually make that amount of money is pretty tiny.

And it's the same way—it's exactly the same thing when it comes to property ownership. Most people don't own anything. You know, there was a study in 2013 about property ownership in Canada; two thirds

of all the property is owned by the top 20 per cent. That's the way it is. The top 20 per cent of Canadians own about two thirds of all the property.

There's all sorts of reasons for that, including colonization and the fact that all sorts of people have been stripped for property and their land titles and they're still owed that—both Metis and First Nations and other Indigenous communities who are still owed money—sorry, not just owed income and revenue, but owed land back under treaty land entitlement.

But the reality is, because of those concentrations of wealth and concentrations of income, when you give a property tax cut, it means that the more property you own, the more you're going to make. And the people at the very top tend to own about 500 times as much property as the people at the bottom. That means they're going to get a 500 times greater benefit. And you don't see that when that—when you talk about averages, and you don't see that when you talk about breakdowns by quintiles or deciles, because that's not how it goes. It's actually much, much more concentrated.

And we should all be concerned about this, not just because—you know, you can talk about unfairness or everything else. This isn't what we were promised. This isn't what, when we talk about—you know, we keep on talking about how we're going to have equal growth or we're going to have more opportunity or we're going to have equal opportunity and these tax cuts are going to be competitive. These 'tackets' cuts are going to do nothing to make Manitoba more competitive.

What we need to 'dake'—make Manitoba more competitive is have more businesses. It's about opportunity. It's about our opportunity and not about taxes. *[interjection]*

Now, there's been some heckling from the other side, but I'm speaking as someone, not just as a—*[interjection]* Well, you know, I'll say that there's a minister across the way who says that I've never owned a business. I have owned a business. I've run a business. I've helped other people set businesses—set up businesses. I've helped entrepreneurs raise capital. I've helped entrepreneurs raise millions of dollars.

Some Honourable Members: Table it.

Mr. Lamont: If there's any implication I'm not telling the truth, the ministers can be—can absolutely be feel—feel free to do that.

But when—I've talked with entrepreneurs and I've been at meetings with chambers of commerce, and their No. 1 complaint has been a lack of access to capital. And not just access of capital, access to capital that's not been decided or handed out as a grant or based on some political connection.

And is that, over and over again, you don't actually see the amount of support that they need. And I've heard that directly from entrepreneurs here in Manitoba who've built serious technology and they are unable to get the support they need and they were forced to leave the province because they couldn't get the support they needed here. And I hear—I've heard that lots.

And the reality is, we need to have people—it doesn't do any good to just promise tax cuts to people who can't pay taxes. We have a huge poverty problem in this province, and the fact is, is if you actually, as some people have told me in our consultations leading up to this point, said, you know, they made the point, a good job can be life changing. It really is. And the fact that people know that they can—don't have to degrade themselves or exploit somebody else to put a roof over their head, that's quite something. But that's something that's routinely expected in this province, and it shouldn't be.

But the reality is that when you look at how this money is being spent and the money we're borrowing to do it—we are borrowing money to send to—these are what are called unfunded tax cuts. When the UK prime minister did this and proposed this, it absolutely tanked the markets for the UK.

And part of this is that, because we've warned lots of times, but if you actually look at the number of people who are going to benefit. The people—and there are thousands of people, tens of thousands of people in Manitoba who—I mean, for—there's 75,000 people who live on EIA. They won't see any benefits from this.

And, in some cases, you're seeing people who are going to be maybe saving a few dollars a month. It won't make—it'll be of no benefit to them whatsoever, while people who are making over \$100,000 will, in average, get about \$1,300. People who make \$17,000 to \$2,500 are—will get about \$290. That amount—\$290—that's barely enough to cover most people who are facing bankruptcy, and that's about 50 per cent of Manitobans.

We have a growing crisis in the interest rate, because interest rates are going up and we're already seeing the contagion spread across the world.

The funny thing about this budget is actually it reminds me of the NDP's 2008 budget, where they also promised a billion dollars of tax cuts, talked about all the tax and business cuts they delivered. And when did it happen? It went—it happened right before the 2008 financial—global financial crisis. Where they said, well, nothing—there's going to be—there's no problem. The fact is that there—why are our coffers bursting? Well, the coffers are bursting because—probably because of inflation. Why is inflation high? Well, because we have a war. And what's costing a lot of money? Well, gas. But we're not hearing people complain about the gas companies who are charging—who are price gouging, which, we should be, because that's—inflation is something that happens in the private sector with prices.

We've warned against price gauging. We've warned against price gauging for three years, because that's one of the risks because of what happens in a pandemic. People take advantage of it. And I've communicated this bore—before in this Chamber, but I'll repeat it: there—we should all be really concerned about what's been happening to the economy as a whole because of what's been happening with interest rates.

Last summer Edward Chancellor, who's a historian and a journalist, he's a senior member of the asset allocation team of the 'bosman'—Boston investment firm GMO. He wrote on an online website in an interview called *The Market*—[interjection]

The Acting Speaker (Brad Michaleski): Order.

Mr. Lamont: He published an interview in which he said it will turn out to be largely impossible to normalize interest rates without collapsing the economy. Quote: By aggressively pursuing an inflation target of 2 per cent and constantly living in horror of even the mildest form of deflation, central banks not only give us the ultra-low interest rates with their unintended consequences in terms of the everything bubble, they also facilitated the misallocation of capital of epic proportions. They created an over-financialization of the economy and a rise in indebtedness. Putting all this together, they created and abetted an environment of low productivity growth.

Mr. Chancellor then went on to cite a Canadian economist, William White, who was actually born

in Kenora, Ontario, a former deputy governor of the Bank of Canada, who worked at the bank of international settlements and who predicted the 2008 financial crisis.

On a number of occasions, Mr. White warned Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan to his face that the US economy is facing a financial crisis. Unfortunately, he was ignored.

He has continued to be outspoken in warning that we are facing a global insolvency crisis. Mr. Wright has written of central banks that, quote: they have pursued the wrong policies, not just in the last couple of years, but over the past three decades, which have caused ever higher debts and greater instability in the financial system.

Now, to be clear about this, it is the Bank of Canada and other central banks that are responsible for this crisis, not elected officials. Central banks are independent. They're supposed to be independent. There are strict rules ensuring central bank independence, but that will not, of course, stop the Canadian people from blaming the Prime Minister, members of Parliament or the government of the day.

But I'm very concerned that the result of this is that the Bank of Canada has been trying to engineer a recession in order to pop Canada's housing bubble and bring down prices, which are high because of an international war and a hangover from a pandemic that isn't really quite finished.

Housing prices are already dropping, but because Canadian real estate is such a large part of the Canadian economy, it's going to have an outsized impact. If people are already finding themselves underwater on their mortgages, which is only more than their house is worth, then that traps them financially.

It means they can't leave. If they lose their job, they can't move because they end up having a house and more debt than they can possibly pay off. Because even if they pay off the asset the mortgage is applied against, they're still in the hole, and that's a dangerous place to be. And Canadians' personal debt levels are over \$2 trillion. Much of that is in mortgages and, frankly, the Bank of Canada has been trying to control inflation by bankrupting individuals and businesses.

I've also spoken to businesses who are enormously concerned because they took on enormous amounts of debt during the pandemic because that was all that was offered.

* (16:40)

Because governments were—like this one, ordered businesses to shut down with compensation, ordered people to work—not to work without compensation. So we had no paid sick days, we had no adequate compensation and over 80 cents on every dollar in assistance that flowed into this province was federal, not provincial. The Province didn't hold up its side of the bargain, and that's a huge problem right now because they're trying to paper the entire province with money without actually solving the problems that need to be addressed.

And it also has to be said, is that we're continuing on an ongoing policy blunder that happened in 2008. Then, the Harper Conservative government and the Bank of Canada, in their response to the 2008 global financial crisis, decided to bail them out. Canada's banks at the time were effectively insolvent. They were broke. Their liabilities exceeded their value. In 2008-2009 the Harper Conservative government of the Bank of Canada bailed out the banks and backstopped them to a value of about \$200 billion.

Now, contrast that with the support that was given to the Canadian people or even to provincial governments—to democratically elected provincial governments. They faced freezes and cuts. We were willing to find two—they could find \$200 billion to bail out the banking system, but froze payments to Manitoba and our 1.4 million residents for six years.

That measure was seen around the world because Canada's banks didn't fail because essentially our bank bailout was more or less concealed. They sort of boasted, though, we have good regulation, we have strong regulation, when really it had been a five-alarm fire.

But that measure only postponed a further reckoning and it was misinterpreted as a success. And when the pandemic struck, similar measures were taken again by CMHC and the Bank of Canada. And it's an insolvency crisis.

And what's an insolvency crisis? It means an—you know, these are technical terms, insolvency versus liquidity. Liquidity means you're short on cash; insolvency means you're going broke. *[interjection]*

The Acting Speaker (Brad Michaleski): Order.

I would like to remind the House that the minister—or the member for St. Boniface has the floor. The level of conversation is getting pretty high and I'm having a hard time hearing him. So, if you can, just

drop it down, take it to the loge and give respect to the member who has the floor.

Mr. Lamont: So, really, what was about to happen was that a whole bunch of people—is that, really—is that our debt is so high that people are on the verge of bankruptcy, they're in—on the verge of insolvency. Businesses, now banks, the contagion is now spreading across the world. There's Credit Suisse in Europe, which is now in danger.

You have the Silicon Valley Bank, which is the— one of the second largest bank failures in US history. They had \$200 billion; 200—it was worth \$200 billion. Manitoba's GDP is about 60 or 70 billion dollars Canadian. So, we're talking about a US bank with a value substantially similar to several Canadian provinces suddenly going broke.

So, central banks, in response, they've lowered interest rates. But what that did is that it needed—it meant that the people who could borrow could borrow more, so you had—people who have good credit ratings could take on far, far more debt and they could use it to buy up other companies and they could use it to bid up the price of real estate, and that's what's happened.

And the other thing is that when you lower interest rates, it means that people who couldn't borrow before all of a sudden can. So you have—they call it easy money, but the—it means that that money is flowing further and deeper and whole bunch of people who've never been in debt before suddenly are and everybody else is in a whole bunch of debt more, as well.

And because it's so much easier for people who make more, who already have large amounts of property or wealth, to get that debt at an incredibly easy interest rate, it means they can bid up the price of everything. And they can afford to keep doing that for a while, anyway, because they'll buy up housing, they'll buy—but mostly it's stuff that's—they're not investing in new.

They're not investing in innovation, they're not investing in building new factories. It's all about bidding up the price of stuff that already exists. So, you'll take one old—you'll—so, you'll see lots of mergers and acquisitions, and you'll see the price of everything—especially property—go up.

And this is a huge problem for farmers as well. And one of the things that's, you know—I am aware of perimeteritis in this province. And one of the things about this is that I always think of people living in rural and northern Manitoba as the canary in the coal

mine, because they are going to lose their services first, whether it's health care or education and—well, I'm speaking historically, yes—that there and that goes many times over for First Nations, right, is that it's essentially a contraction away to the centre.

And where is the—well, we're going to protect Winnipeg or we're going to do all our services from Winnipeg, and everybody else, it's cheaper and easier to run it from Winnipeg, except for all the people who have to come here for it.

But it has a huge impact—we've had in the past few years, because of low interest rates and amazing, incredible amounts of debt, we've seen incredible increases in the price of farmland. Well, what happens when you're a new farmer and you come in, and you just spent millions of dollars for your farm?

Well, the more you pay for an asset, the harder it is going to be to get paid back for it. So, of course food prices are going to rise, because all of a sudden, the cost of your overhead—your debt overhead on your farm—has gone up.

And it's a huge problem, it's a huge problem for young farmers trying to access, to get into farming; for anybody who wants to get into farming. But it's—these are—this is the central issue that has been missed, because instead of trying to unwind it or find ways to deflate this debt in a way that makes sense, that doesn't punish people—instead, what's happening is that we're seeing interest rates go up, and it's putting banks at risk. Banks: lenders as well as to say nothing of the borrowers.

Now, in the event of a market crash, Mr. White, who again—he should be eligible for a—if there were a real Nobel Prize in economics, he should get it—because of his contributions, he means—he spent years and years predicting exactly what would happen in 2008, only to be ignored; he's a Canadian economist, he should really be hailed for his work.

And he's warned: we need various ways to carefully restructure debts, and the Canadian—current Canadian federal and provincial bankruptcy laws are not enough, either because the defaults—and he said, look, when people are going to go broke, either it can happen in a way that's disorganized or a way that's organized.

It can be orderly or it could be chaotic, and we're much better off if we can negotiate this way and do this in a way that's fair, and equitable and planned—rather than seeing a blowout, where you just have a whole series of defaults go, like a chain reaction.

And there have been people, and I'm sorry to be—I just feel the need to put these things on the record; there have been banks who are predicting that Canada could face one of its largest housing downturns in history, and even risks of a financial crisis, which means that all of a sudden the banks aren't able to handle it, because the many mortgages that they've registered as assets will plunge in value.

So, every single one of those mortgages, those—and it really doesn't take that much, when you consider how much—how much money Canadians have been spending on real estate lately. And I do want to send this warning, because this has potential economic and political effects, both of a recession—but we already have a highly divided, polarized country.

And that it can be—this is the sort of thing that'll be weaponized by extreme political elements, because people—it will drive people into desperation. And that's something we should be doing everything we can to avoid.

And it's worth remembering: all financial crises originate in the financial sector, and that the conditions for crisis were created by the Bank of Canada and other central banks, because they've been mispricing risk across the entire economy for an entire generation.

This is a massive thing to deal with, and there are usually only considered to be two solutions, which is austerity and cuts on the one hand, and fiscal stimulus and tax increases on the other.

This budget bill and this—and BITSA in particular, is incredibly risky at this point; we're taking on \$1.6 billion in new net debt at higher interest rates; we have \$236 million more in interest payments, so that our interest payments are already going up. And this government is planning to reduce revenues by hundreds of millions of dollars, when we don't know where we're going to be in terms of transfer payments in two years. And we're anticipating growth going down.

* (16:50)

So, this is the opposite. I mean, the thing about it is that in all—lots of ways, this is a—the—there are lots of challenges out there. If you drive down Portage Avenue, that's aside from being worried about people's safety or people sleeping in bus shacks, the number of places that used to be bustling shops, the number of for rent and for lease signs that I see in downtown is really distressing.

The state of our health-care system; the fact that, you know, our education system, we are—there are school divisions across the province who are facing cuts, who are facing layoffs because the amount of money that's being put in is not enough to deal with inflation.

And these are not—and these programs, what is being planned, certainly in terms of taxes—you want to increase taxes, giving people more money to drive up the price of real estate is not really the way to do it. But that's what we've been doing.

And we do need a different approach from this. I'm not—and there are people in Manitoba who are absolutely in desperate states. But even the fact that when it came to adjusting the basic personal exemption, it was done in a way that will save a few people a few bucks, at the very bottom, but the people who will save the most are the people who are really doing pretty well.

And it's—I don't think it's a good use of our public resources. I don't think it's a good use—it's not going to have a 'poble'—it's not going to have a positive impact in terms of spending. It's not going to have a positive impact in terms of economics—of the economy.

Because what we really need to do, we need to be making sure that we're supporting entrepreneurs and creating more jobs in the private sector, which we're not doing enough of. We need to make sure that we're training people properly so that they can get those jobs.

But they're—but the fact is, is that government is also—needs to be there, as to whether it's for infrastructure, to making sure that we're doing the basics we need to do to provide good infrastructure, to make sure that people and their families can get to work or hospitals easily, to make sure that people who make goods or provide services can get those services to their customers at the lowest possible expense; but that's not the case with our infrastructure.

We've had it—we've had, you know, municipal budgets—and this is one of ding—and this is one of the funnier moments in the budget, believe or not, it's hard to believe that budgets can be funny. But the idea that this government is saying that it's the biggest increase, their increase to the municipal—to municipal funding is the biggest in a decade, when they froze it for seven years, that takes some nerve.

It takes even more nerve to boast about how they've had the highest increase for people on EIA, because they've increased it by \$25 a month.

Well, they previously decreased it by \$20 a month. So it's actually really, you know, an increase by \$5.

I actually—the Families Minister actually said well, you know, we had a job-seeker allowance, but we're going to—we're not going to be doing that anymore. We, you know, these are people who have not—in 1992, these rates were rolled back to 1986 levels, and they've been there ever since, plus maybe 25 bucks. So there are people who are making less than a thousand dollars a year—sorry, a month—and others, there are people with disabilities; there are people who have mental health and addictions problems. And it is incredible to me to sort of tap your—pat yourself on the back and suggest you're in any way being generous when you're giving people who are living in dire poverty \$25 extra a month while cutting cheques for tens of thousands of dollars to Bill Gates, to the Koch Brothers and to Galen Weston.

We are—this is a—if you were to actually pile up, and this is it—is this is part of the fundamental injustice of this budget, and why we have no intention of voting for it. So with that, I'll sum up.

Thank you very much; I appreciate it. Thank you.

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I have a few minutes, I guess, to make some comments, and then I'll get to have the flourish tomorrow.

People in Manitoba don't believe this government. People in Manitoba don't trust this government. And this BITSA bill that they brought in, the budget that they brought in, is just more of the same. People know that they're trying to pretend that they're the greatest bunch of human beings that ever walked the face of the earth now. They're trying to pretend that the last seven years, where they were the worst human beings on the face of the earth, don't exist.

Well, they do. They do, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. People know that they do. People in the North know that they don't have hospitals anymore. People in the North know that Northern Patient Transportation is so badly underfunded that people are just staying home because they can't afford health care. People know that and they know very well who did it. They know very well who did it to them. And they know very well that they're not going to vote for them.

I talked to a fellow in Lynn Lake one day whose wife of some 50 years had been unceremoniously bundled up in the dead of night, shipped 800 miles away without even the courtesy of telling him beforehand that they were moving her.

That's the kind of mentality that this government has, that they don't care about people. People are immaterial. It's all about the almighty dollar, how many dollars they could save. And now they're trying to pretend, well, that wasn't really us; that was Brian Pallister.

Each and every one of them—well, save two—was a part of that Brian Pallister government. The current Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) was a part of that, sat beside Brian Pallister and clapped and nodded and cheered at every cut that he made to this province's budget for health care, for education, for infrastructure, you name it. There wasn't any part of this government that they didn't have their hands on with the knife, with the scissors, cutting it. People know that.

We see them now trying to trick people—and there's some things in this budget that will help some people. They talk about there being 74,000 people that will be removed or have been removed from the tax rolls. And they say that like that should be something that we're proud of, that we've created so many more poor people, they've created so many more people that can't afford to pay taxes.

And their minds say, well, that's a good thing. Instead of creating employment opportunities so that those people could be lifted out of poverty, so that they could be active, productive members of society, this government just made them less well off, so poor that they can't afford to pay taxes.

And now they've done nothing to help them while food prices have skyrocketed; gasoline prices have skyrocketed. Every cost that the average Manitoban has has gone up. And for seven years, this government, at best, did nothing, and at worst, helped make those costs go up.

They jacked up hydro rates unceremoniously. Hydro now is making money. It's a profitable company. Do we need to have a government that says, regardless of profit, we're going to jack up your hydro rates 2 per cent, 5 per cent, whatever the number is this week? No, we don't. People know that. Particularly people in the North who don't have natural gas, who heat their homes with hydro, know that once again this government has treated people in the North unfairly.

They know that this government has been bad for people in the North. But people in the south know that now, as well. People in the Interlake know that the systems that need to be in place for them to be able to live and work and survive in the Interlake, they know

that those systems aren't there, whether it's health care, transportation.

We know that they're so short staffed with snow plow operators, that the new mentality is just shut the highway down and fine anybody that has the audacity to try and get to their medical appointment. Which they probably waited for months and months and months, and now they'll have to start the clock over again if they don't get on the road and try and get to wherever the care is; the care that isn't closer to home, contrary to what this Health Minister and this government keeps trying to convince people that it is.

Nothing could be further from the truth. People know that.

People know that basic services that—

The Acting Speaker (Brad Michaleski): Order.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for Flin Flon (MLA Lindsey) will have 25 minutes remaining.

This House is—the hour being 5 o'clock, this hour is—the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 15, 2023

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