

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

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 15, 2020

The House met at 1 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

Good afternoon, everybody.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

(Continued)

Madam Speaker: The House will now come to order and we will continue with orders of the day.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Will you please canvass the House to see if there is leave to move to second readings on bills 62, 59, 58, 57, 56, 55 and 54 in that order?

Madam Speaker: Is there leave for second reading of bills 62, 59—*[interjection]*

Oh, is there leave for bills—for second reading of Bill 62?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Is there leave—

An Honourable Member: Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: Oh, the honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): I apologize, I meant to say yes.

Madam Speaker: So I will put the question again.

Is there leave to do second reading of Bill 54? Is there leave—*[interjection]* Sorry, 62.

Is there leave to do second reading of Bill 62?
[Agreed]

Is there leave to do second reading of Bill 59?

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Is there leave to do second reading of Bill 58?
[Agreed]

Is there leave to do second reading of Bill 57?
[Agreed]

Is there leave to do second reading of Bill 56?
[Agreed]

Is there leave to do second reading of Bill 55?
[Agreed]

Is there leave to do second reading of Bill 54?

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

So the honourable Government House Leader has announced that we will now move into second readings starting with Bill 62.

SECOND READINGS

(Continued)

Bill 62—The Fuel Tax Amendment and Retail Sales Tax Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: So I will call Bill 62, second reading, The Fuel Tax Amendment and Retail Sales Tax Amendment Act.

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 62, The Fuel Tax Amendment and Retail Sales Tax Amendment Act, be now read a second time and to be referred to the Committee of the Whole.

Her Honour Lieutenant Governor—general 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 Education, that Bill 62, The Fuel Tax Amendment and Retail Sales Tax Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a Committee of the Whole.

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

Mr. Fielding: It is my pleasure to introduce Bill 62, The Fuel Tax Amendment and Retail Sales Tax Amendment Act, which implements administrative and tax relief to Manitobans and business owners. These measures are not—are part of our government's message, our measures to deal with COVID-19 pandemic.

The bill, The Fuel Tax Act—by temporary waiving the requirement for a single-trip permit and the payment of the tax when acquiring the permits, this will reduce the administrative burden for motor transportation carriers bringing vital supplies such as food, medical equipment and other goods into the province during the state of emergency.

The Retail Sales Tax Act is also amended by the bill to provide much needed financial assistance to Manitobans by eliminating sales tax on residential and commercial properties. Eliminating the sales tax on residential property insurance is part of our 2020 tax rollback guarantee and has been expanded.

We expanded it, Madam Speaker, to include commercial properties as an additional financial support during the COVID-19, and on average this will mean over \$880 for businesses that they will not have to pay—small, medium-sized businesses—which is so important these days.

These measures will save Manitobans close to \$75 million annually. Madam Speaker, the measures contained in the bill reduces administration for carriers bringing vital supplies and also provides significant tax relief to Manitobans at a time when substantial tax relief is needed.

Therefore, I encourage members of the House to support this bill.

Questions

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

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I just wanted to quickly begin by thanking all of those in our transportation industry who are doing such amazing work in ensuring that goods that we so rely on are safely transported and continue to be during this pandemic.

My question is with regards to the changes issued under subsection—sorry, section 6, subsection 2(2), with regards to single-trip permitting, wondering if the minister could give some clarification as to the need for that provision?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Well, it's a temporary measure that we're impacting. The temporary waiving of requirements to obtain a single-trip permit will reduce red tape and administration for out-of-province motor transportation carriers bringing vital goods and services to Manitobans in time of need.

We know that some out of 'trown'—there's some of the bigger firms that have a—kind of a tax agreement in place. So this will allow reduced red tape for small trucking companies that are going back and forth across the line. I think it's upwards of \$18 for that single use, so it'll allow them to transport back and forth important goods and services and reduce red tape in this time of need.

Mr. Wiebe: As I said, Madam Speaker, I think Manitobans have a new-found appreciation for the work that's being done in this sector along with so many others that are often maybe overlooked. Again, I think Manitobans understand the need to ensure that transportation continues and that certain exceptions are made.

I'm wondering if the minister could expand on what he means by red tape, what this bill pertains to with regards to those regulations and how that might impact the safety of the transportation of those goods throughout our province.

Mr. Fielding: Well, we're waiving the administrative function, I guess I would say, in terms of red tape. We know we've got administrative staff that's here, so for small transporters that are looking to carry essential services back and forth, the bigger firms have an ability through kind of a tax gasoline-sharing agreement where they don't have to apply for these things.

There's a one-time usage, I think it's upwards of \$18, that the smaller firms or carriers would have to cost. There's a cost savings to them as well as an administrative savings. They don't have to go through the red tape to apply for this and that we don't have administrative supports to do this. So this is impacted while the state of emergency is on.

Mr. Wiebe: Wondering if the minister—he had mentioned, I think he had said essential services. He may have meant essential goods.

I'm wondering if there's a designation within this bill that would pertain to those—what goods are considered essential, or whether this is a blanket clause that would apply across the trucking industry and the transportation industry?

Mr. Fielding: Well, obviously, trucking is considered as an—a critical service for—and transportation, for the most part, is considered nature's—but this as—relates to things like food or medical supplies, these are the types of items that we're referring to but overarching. It provides more of a global approach to this, if transportation items are coming back and forth.

*(13:10)

Again, this doesn't impact the bigger players because they have a tax-sharing agreement across provinces, but this will reduce red tape for small carriers as well as a little bit of administrative costs.

Mr. Wiebe: So I think I understand the cost element that the minister is trying to address with this legislation. My concern, of course, is with the safety and ensuring that there is some accountability to ensure that those goods that are being transported would indeed be essential, would indeed be necessary.

Is this a delay that's being proposed here, or is it a complete waiver of all requirements for reporting by these smaller trucking firms? Could the minister offer some clarification?

Mr. Fielding: Yes, thanks for the question. It's a waiver, a waiver while the time—the state of emergency is—while we're under a state of emergency. So it's a waiver. They don't have to pay during the state of emergency happening in Manitoba.

Mr. Wiebe: And so is that—just to be again very clear about this—is that simply for the duration of the state of emergency that's been declared in this province, or is it in relation to the state of emergency extending beyond what the Province has issued at the time that this bill would presumably receive royal assent?

Mr. Fielding: Yes, the temporary waiver will be in place for the duration of the state of emergency for COVID-19 pandemic. The measures are retroactive, so it starts on March 20th, 2020, the day that the state of emergency was proclaimed by the Province.

Should have a small impact on revenues for us; we're not worried about revenues as much. It's \$54,000. But again, it is retroactive to that date when the state of emergency was done, and it is, again, a waiver.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further questions?

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): On the question of amendments—or the removal of the PST on insurance, I know that we've spoken with many

chambers of commerce and small businesses who are much more interested in direct help.

I was wondering if the minister could explain or say who he's been—received support from or who he consulted with before making this change.

Mr. Fielding: Well, we've had ongoing discussions since the pandemic started with, for the most part, people in the business community. We've talked to a number of people from all different walks of life. We think that it's important, and what is important, and there were some discussions earlier on that somehow there wasn't a lot of financial support given to small and medium-sized businesses.

We have deferred about \$3 billion of taxes. This one measure, including the commercial component of it, will save an average business about \$880: again, \$880 a year. So this is supports for small businesses that were there.

Mr. Lamont: We all know that averages are tricky things. If Bill Gates walks into a bar, on average everyone becomes a billionaire. It doesn't mean that that's the actual saving that each business will have. So, I mean, part of the concern here is that this will actually overly—or benefit large property owners, whether they're residential or commercial.

Has there been any thought about the distributional impacts of this? I mean, the fact is that it means that some large operators will save much more than small and medium-sized businesses. Is this something that the minister has taken into consideration?

Mr. Fielding: The way we calculated, there's about 60,000 businesses here in the province. About 42,000 commercial properties will benefit from this measure saving each business, as they mentioned, about \$880. You're absolutely right. It depends on how big—of how much savings they're going to have. I would also argue, though, bigger and smaller businesses, depending on how big a size you are doing this, has a bigger and smaller impact.

So this is something that gives cash back—money that wouldn't be spent, and what is important about this is businesses may be deferring a whole bunch of costs as they're probably doing, but probably deferring insurance is something that they're not going to do because you don't want to be in an issue where you don't have insurance. So this will be true cost savings for businesses.

Mr. Wiebe: The minister referred to savings for corporations, for businesses. I'm wondering if he can

just detail what the impact to the Treasury would be in terms of the loss of revenue for the Province for making this change.

Mr. Fielding: Well, I would put it the other way. I would say it's \$75 million of tax savings for businesses and residents—or, individuals that are here. I think anyone that probably owns a house or other types of insurance—or businesses and commercial will benefit from this.

So this is \$75 million of cash on hand that businesses and residents won't have to pay; \$75 million—it's around 35, \$36 million for the commercial side and around the same amount—somewhat right around that amount for the residential side.

Mr. Wiebe: And, as the minister mentioned, those corporations which are larger would benefit the most. Likewise, those who, I guess, pay the most in their home insurance would also benefit. Say, if you had a seven-car garage and you needed to insure every single one of those spaces, that might be a very big savings for yourself and maybe less so for others.

Again, if the minister can detail what the hit to the Treasury would be in terms of a loss of revenue, making these changes which benefit mostly the large corporations and, of course, those who have to insure some of the most expensive houses and homes in our city.

Mr. Fielding: Well, on this side of the House, we don't consider it government money. We consider it the people's money and taxpayers' money, and that's why we're giving \$75 million of tax support relief to residents. There's about 510,000 residents who will benefit from this as well as close to 42,000 businesses. It's their money which they pay in. This is tax relief.

We know businesses are struggling. We've deferred over \$3 billion of tax relief for Manitoba businesses. This is going to put on average about \$880 for residents, I—or, rather, for businesses, about \$75 for each individual residence—a part of this tax measures.

Mr. Lamont: I know that there's been a lot of concern, and CFIB and other small business organizations have said that a huge number of businesses could be bankrupt within a month.

So I'm just wondering if the—if they don't get adequate rent support or support to actually pay their bills during this time, I'm just wondering if the minister is—or the—his ministry has considered how

many fewer businesses may be ineligible for this tax cut because they will be bankrupt by July 1st when it comes in.

Mr. Fielding: Well, our government has taken strong action. In fact, over—close to \$3 billion, a tax relief for Manitobans—deferrals on whole host of different things that are here. This item that we're talking about here will provide about \$880 for every individual business that's there. We want to make sure that businesses have the support.

There's some good programs; the wage subsidy program which our government pushed to have it enhanced from 10 per cent to 75 per cent we think will help. We think some of the EI programs that have been brought forward by the federal government is there, and we're trying to get the message out to make sure as many businesses as well as residents get the message and are able to get on these federal programs.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further questions?

Debate

Madam Speaker: If not, the floor is open for debate.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): It is a, indeed, an honour to rise today in this emergency session to speak to a bill which I think does address some of the concerns that we've heard with regards to transportation and trucking here in this province.

I want to begin by just thanking all those folks who are out there continuing to keep the transportation system moving, to keep goods and services coming to our province to allow all of us to be able to go to the grocery store and see full shelves.

And, as I said earlier, I think this is a time where maybe these are folks who do work that isn't always noticed or isn't always appreciated in the way that it should be. And this is, I think, an opportunity for all of us to show that appreciation, to say thank you to those folks who are continuing to work day in and day out on the front line, so to speak, but in a way that's not quite as visible as those we see in our local grocery stores or in other places. So I want to thank them for doing that work.

I also want to acknowledge that we did have an opportunity to speak to members of the Manitoba Trucking Association to hear some of their concerns first-hand, to learn some of the challenges that they're seeing when they're out on the road, some of the challenges that they're facing when they're offloading

goods or picking up shipments, and also to understand that in many cases these are small, owner-operated enterprises.

* (13:20)

So, when we talk about small businesses, as we ask questions about—here in question period today, those are some of the best examples of very small business, very small owner-operators who operate them themselves as a business and who are probably some of the most impacted with regards to some of the downturn that we're seeing in the economy.

Of course, we know that sales of certain things such as toilet paper continue to be strong, but other less important—or less vital goods, maybe—are lessening, and so we want to understand those challenges. And we want to understand the challenges that the trucking industry is facing with regards to being out on the road and not having the same access to food, to restroom facilities, to rest facilities as they're moving across the country. This is a major problem, Madam Speaker, and it is one that I think needs to be paid some attention to.

I also want to just acknowledge within this bill that there is a, I think, an opportunity to see that anytime we can help some of those smaller—either owner-operators or smaller trucking companies—some of which we have within our province, that anytime we can give them a leg up during this pandemic would be a good thing. And so I think that there is a lot of opportunity to support that and to show our support as a Legislature and as all Manitobans, for those truckers and for the work that they're doing.

That being said, Madam Speaker, I do want to highlight that this bill comes to us as a sort of hybrid bill, a sort of mishmash of different ideas, some of which apply, as I said, to the trucking industry, but some of which aren't quite as closely tied to it and, in fact, I would argue really are different issues altogether.

And we came into this legislative session, this emergency sitting, with, you know, a number of criticisms in the public of this government trying to use this time to push through items—agenda items that are not directly related to the COVID pandemic.

And, you know, we came to this session, as I know the—our leader, the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew) mentioned, in the spirit of working as Manitobans, not as partisans in the sense of our political affiliations, but really for what is the best for

all Manitobans. And we truly come to this place in that spirit.

However, when bills such as this come forward, it simply serves to highlight how this government is using this opportunity to push other agenda items, which in many cases have been announced previously, in some cases have been—have actually come forward in the form of bills to this Legislature and, in fact, have received some attention and have received some debate. In this case, the government is using this opportunity to bring forward tax measures which, one would argue, have very little to do with the current pandemic and the realities that Manitobans are facing.

Manitobans are contacting our offices, concerned about their employment, concerned about their child-care situation. They're concerned about their small business, about how they're going to keep it afloat. These are all issues that are first and foremost on the minds of Manitobans, not to mention their own health and the health of their family and friends.

These are what—they're coming to us as the number one priorities, and yet this government has used this opportunity to talk about an issue—again, trucking, which we are now starting to all realize is so very vital when we're trying to keep our economy moving at a pace that it can, that is reasonable, but also to make sure that we have all the goods that we need in order to continue to be fulfilling our own needs in our own households. They used that opportunity to bring forward a bill which, let's be frank, Madam Speaker, basically favours those who have the most and have the best ability to weather this current pandemic.

So, in this case, as I said, if you have a \$7-million home, you probably pay quite a bit of tax or quite a bit of insurance on that home, and you probably pay a tax on that. That is going to benefit you more so than the average person here in Manitoba who's just trying to make ends meet. Likewise for corporations who pay their fair share in taxes when it comes to the PST and other taxes that they're eligible or required to pay—they also would be more benefitting the larger corporations.

This is a concern, Madam Speaker, because while we're trying to find ways that we can support the average Manitoban, while we're trying to find ways to support the workers in this province, the government continues to focus only on giving tax relief to those who can most afford it. It is, I think, a very clear

indication of where this government hopes this session will go.

We as the loyal—the official opposition—Her Majesty's loyal official opposition. I think I've got that right. I'm getting—[interjection]—and we're doing our job here in this Legislature to ensure that we're making sure that those concerns are coming forward. We will support those bills which benefit Manitobans. We will continue to work through this emergency in the spirit of co-operation.

However, when there are bills that come forward, Madam Speaker, which do not directly address the concerns of Manitobans, we have no issue with standing strong, with standing together and ensuring that those bills do not get pushed through under the cover of this pandemic.

So, with those few words, Madam Speaker, I do look forward to the rest of the day where we have an opportunity to speak to this bill again and others and hopefully be able to put the views of Manitobans on the record, continue to push forward as an official opposition and to hold this government to account in every opportunity that we have.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): We've expressed our concern about this measure to the Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen), as well as to the government—and simply that this—at a time when we're faced with large deficits and cutbacks, this measure would add \$75 million in revenue losses. It would mean that we are borrowing to pay for, again, borrowing and—to pay for a tax cut.

The other is that it is not targeted in a way that will actually help the people who need it the most, that this is simply because it—when it comes to inequality, that the concentration of property ownership is even greater than the property in the concentration of income inequality that the vast—that it means that there will be very substantial savings for very—a few very large property owners, while a few driblets and drabs are left for everybody else.

And this is particularly a matter of concern, as I asked earlier—I asked the minister earlier what the impact—what the financial impact of this is going to be, if thousands of business—of small businesses are unable—have to close the doors between now and July 1st—which is a very real prospect, as we've heard from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and others because the one thing that this—that small businesses need now more than anything else is not

further deferrals which will just pile up and mean they have to pay it off in a couple of months or essentially that those bills will continue to pay up, whether it's a tax deferral, whether it's a deferral in utilities which means that many businesses will face an even greater burden when it comes to open, which is the exact opposite of what we need. I think I've already heard that there are many—that one in 10 restaurants across Canada has closed its doors permanently.

And I did—we did send out a request to all chambers of commerce in Manitoba as well as BIZ groups across Winnipeg to ask basically if there was an option between having 75 billion—\$75 million used to provide relief on insurance that people would much rather prefer a grant program. And there have been excellent grant programs or—I have—grant programs in Saskatchewan and across Canada that are designed to essentially help businesses hibernate to be able to make it through this pandemic. And they, if I can, I would just like to read a few of the letters that we've received.

This is from a business owner saying the current proposal by our government has nothing to do with helping small business. This isn't a change they're proposing for the pandemic, it's just something they have on their wish list to go along with their small, underfunded government ideology. It looks like the government is trying to move its pre-COVID agenda through the Legislature without doing the hard work of doing current COVID-related needs.

This is from another business owner from my constituency: Without any help financially, there will be a slaughter of restaurants, health-care places, hair salons, independent coffee shops and others forced to close due to the pandemic. Please help sustain our small-business community and help us thrive after this pandemic, like the government is trying to move its pre—again, move its pre-COVID agenda through the Legislature.

* (13:30)

I—we also had many responses from rural Manitoba, from—one example said: We could use support on fixed costs for our acknowledged tourist draw to our community in the Interlake. Once a year, people will spend in two to four other businesses, thereby supporting a small community that relies to a large amount on summer into early fall tourism. If we all go into winter with no ability to open and earn some funds to support us through the winter months, there will be more casualties in small business in the community.

As a registered non-profit charity, we are an all-volunteer operation with no staffing costs, but we have fixed operating costs, like rent, phone, et cetera. That was from Gimli.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order.

As the member is reading from some actual letters that he received, does the member have three copies of each to table for the House?

Mr. Lamont: Yes. I do not immediately, but I can obtain three letters for tabling—I can obtain three copies for tabling, if you wish.

Madam Speaker: If the member could do that this afternoon, that would be helpful, then.

Mr. Lamont: And finally, as—we had somebody who was in favour in principle of the removal of PST on insurance as a business owner, however, said because of the pandemic, they would forgo it for one year, until June 2021 and use the monies to support small business.

Finally, from a rural small-business owner, rural communities are made up of very small businesses that are predominantly run by one person, the owner—who usually doesn't pay themselves—to a maximum of 10 employees. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamont: None of the announced financial support plans help any of the owners of these businesses. They need to start recognizing actual small businesses in rural areas and cities.

We hope that this government will do that. We are not in support of this measure, but we certainly hope that the government uses some of the funds it has in order to step up and provide not loans, not deferrals, but actual grants to businesses in order to make sure that they can make it through this crisis.

Madam Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak in debate?

Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 62, The Fuel Tax Amendment and Retail Sales Tax Amendment Act.

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

We will now move to Bill 58, The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act, second reading.

Bill 58—The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Cullen), that Bill 58, The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to the Committee of the Whole.

Motion presented.

Mr. Fielding: Bill 58 is part of the Province's response to COVID-19 pandemic and state of emergency. This bill posts—proposes to amend the residential tenancy act to assist Manitobans who are experiencing financial hardship because of COVID-19. Tenants who have lost their jobs, laid off, work less than otherwise financially—sorry, worked less or otherwise financially impacted by COVID-19 pandemic may not be able to pay their rents on time and will be at risk of eviction.

Tenants may be in self-isolation in their rental units, following the advice of the chief public health officer. Many tenants will be able to access federal government programs. But, in the meantime, it is critical that tenants should not have to worry about being—or, having a roof over their heads, Madam Speaker.

Bill 58 temporary amends the residential tenancy act to implement three measures: first, the landlords will be limited to 'issuing'—issuing notices of termination or evictions effective March 24, 2020, to specific circumstances where a tenant is impairing safety and engaging unlawful activities that pose an imminent risk to the health and safety of others; second, to freeze rent increases there will be a set—there will—set to take effect as of April 1st—again, April 1st and for the subsequent months while the amendments are in effect; third, to prohibit change—charging late-fees for non-paying rent on time, effective April 1st, 2020, and for the subsequent months while the amendments are in effect.

These measures remain in effect until the amendments are repealed by proclamation. This approach provides flexibility so that these measures can be adjusted as COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on Manitobans evolves over the coming months.

By limiting a landlord's ability to issue notices of termination for urgent matters involving 'inmate' risk or to the health or safety of an individual, this approach continues to balance the needs to support renters experiencing economic hardship,

Madam Speaker, or who are self-isolating in their units due to COVID-19 with the safety concerns.

While these measures are in place, landlords cannot issue notice of termination because the tenant has not paid their rent. The Residential Tenancies Branch is available to answer questions and to resolve urgent situations involving health and safety for landlords—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fielding: —which could include a landlord illegally shutting off utilities or locking tenants out of their rental units, or a landlord dealing with the situation where a tenant is conducting illegal activities from their rental units.

Madam Speaker, these proposed amendments are designed with one purpose in mind, which is to respond directly to the financial impact of COVID-19 for public health emergencies.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Questions

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Can the minister give us an indication of how long these rent freezes will last?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): It really depends on how long the state of emergency happens in the COVID-19 crisis. No one truly knows at this point, but it is our intent to, while the state of emergency is on, is a good parameter.

Mrs. Smith: In addition to rent freeze, many renters are finding it difficult to pay for their rent at this time. Many people have lost their jobs due to COVID-19. What measures is the government offering to help renters pay for their rent?

Mr. Fielding: Well, one of, I think, the crown achievements of the government since being elected is enhancement of the Rent Assist program, Madam Speaker. We know since coming to office there's more than 3,000 people supported on the Rent Assist

program than when the former government was running the file.

And so we think that's important to support renters. Those programs are in place. We think it's important to have supports through things like EIA as well as Rent Assist to support people in the time of need.

Mrs. Smith: I'm happy to hear, you know, the minister say this. So I'm just wondering if they plan to increase EIA rates as well as Rent Assist to support the very people that he's talking about who have lost their job, that now have children home full time and many of the social services that have supported families are no longer there.

Mr. Fielding: Well, later on I'm sure we'll be debating how much money appropriated to address the pandemic that we're having here with COVID-19, close \$1 billion. We know that's supportive. We know that there's going to be more people, unfortunately, having to take on EIA or go onto EIA after EI-kind-of programs are not there for them any longer, and so the government will be supporting these as well as important programs like the Rent Assist program. The Rent Assist program is something that has pulled us from having the child poverty capital when the NDP were running the show to about middle of the pack.

That's not good enough, Madam Speaker, but it's a vast improvement and that's because of the program, the Rent Assist program that we pushed for when we were in opposition and forced the government to do before getting on now 3,000 more people are supported under the Rent Assist program.

Mrs. Smith: I just want to say thank you to the federal government for stepping up and actually increasing the child benefit to families in Manitoba and right across Canada so that we can make sure, or ensure, you know, on their part, that families aren't going hungry.

But I'm going to ask the minister again. He talks about, you know, we're going to see this budget come out, this extra—the extra funds that they're asking for, so I'm going to ask again how much is going to be allocated to increased Rent Assist to families as well as increasing EIA benefits to families here in Manitoba?

Mr. Fielding: The member opposite is somehow trying to allude to the fact that the CCB, the Canadian child benefit is the only reason why we pulled up from being worst in the nation in terms of child poverty capital. What experts will tell you, it's because the

Rent Assist program having over 3,000 more people that are supported.

* (13:40)

To answer your question, quite frankly, I don't know how many people will apply. You look at the number of people that applied for unemployment insurance just over the last month, it's over 25,000 people. So it really depends on how many people apply for these programs. But these programs are in place. In fact, the Rent Assist program is a program that the federal government is emulating in their National Housing Strategy, which we think is important.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): So, I think that the bill does introduce some valued changes that will protect renters.

But I would like to ask the minister: what kind of protections are being put in place for small business owners, property owners who might own a few homes whose revenues are going to be seriously impacted by, ultimately, the inability of some tenants to pay their rent?

What kind of protections are being put in place for those small-business owners?

Mr. Fielding: Well, the opposition, of course, didn't have a lot of time for small businesses when they were in government, but I will say there is a number of programs that are in place. Number 1 is the CBA program, the federal government program where there's a \$40,000 grant program; \$10,000 is forgivable if you talk to the Minister of Finance federally, Mr. Morneau. I have a call with him every Monday. That is an important program.

There's a lot of voices out there about a rent type of program. We've got over a billion dollars allocated—later on we'll be debating, Madam Speaker—four hundred million to address COVID-related issues. We're going to look at these things and try and fill the gaps where the federal government isn't in place.

Mr. Sala: What I heard the minister suggest, as with many things that we're seeing in response to this COVID emergency, is that the government is entirely reliant on federal dollars to support Manitobans.

And I'd like to ask him again, is there any specific actions that his government will be taking to help small-business owners who are being put in a precarious position as a result of this challenge?

Mr. Fielding: Well, it's disappointing, I think someone from St. James generally has good common sense, but clearly he hasn't done his homework. He knows that later on today we're talking about a billion dollars, additional appropriation that we'll be talking about to support this, whether it's \$500 million on things like health-care costs, whether it's \$400 million on enabling appropriations.

What we've said is there's federal programs that are in place, we've done a number of items including a billion dollars of tax relief, deferrals which are important. We talked about tax relief for commercial insurance that's going to mean about \$820 for every person in terms of their insurance on a commercial property. These are just the start of the process and we're going to fill the gaps in with the rest of some of the money we're being appropriated here this afternoon.

Mrs. Smith: I'd like to ask the minister why businesses actually weren't included in this rent freeze.

Mr. Fielding: Sorry, I don't understand the question. Could you repeat the question?

Mrs. Smith: So businesses pay rent to landlords. They are exempt from this, which means their rent can go up and they would have to pay an increase. So I'll ask the minister: Why weren't businesses' rents frozen as well?

Mr. Fielding: Well, clearly, we don't adjudicate. We're not in charge of business rents; that's between a private landlord and a tenant, that's a part of it. There isn't legislation that oversees that.

What we can do, where we can provide legislation is through the residential tenancies that controls in terms of the rent increases, that controls evictions. There isn't regulation that's in place that somehow could control commercial tenants.

Mrs. Smith: So what penalties are in place for landlords that charge an increase to tenants?

Mr. Fielding: Well, that's not allowed under the residential tenancy. The legislation that's—were here before us does not allow for a landlord to increase. So, suppose they were have an increase that would go—that would take into effect April 1st, they're not able to charge that amount.

And once we're out of this emergency situation and this act is proclaimed and so it's not in place anymore in terms of the rent controls as well as evictions, they could increase the rents at that point.

But they cannot retroactively go back and get the money in association with the time frames we're talking about for the rent increase.

Mrs. Smith: My question was specific to penalties to landlords that do charge. I do see that this will become into law, but that doesn't preclude landlords from actually doing it.

So, again, I'll ask the minister: what penalties will landlords who decide to charge an increase, will they receive?

Mr. Fielding: That's up to the Residential Tenancies Branch. For the most part, they would retroactively have to pay that money back to a tenant that, for instance, had been charged this.

Mrs. Smith: Can the member tell us if there have been any evictions in the last month and a half, and if there have, how many?

Mr. Fielding: I believe there is over 100 people who are—evictions were in the process of happening once the government made the decision to put a hold or a halt on any rent increases as well as evictions. I think it might have been around 134. I'll have my officials verify that number, but it was a very low amount.

Mrs. Smith: What impact would this freeze have, if any, on condominium fees or condo owners?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I'm going to just clarify something. I did get some information for officials that RBT will set the penalties for landlords if they increase the rent. So that answers the previous question. The RBC can set the penalties.

Mrs. Smith: If the minister can go back and answer the last question I asked about impacts on condo fees for condo owners?

Mr. Fielding: Condo fees would be separate from this legislation that's put forward.

Mrs. Smith: I want to ask the member, I had a couple of calls from constituents who have family members living with them. Their family members aren't on the lease, but they have nowhere to live. And there's more than 10 people living in a residence and they've been given an eviction notice because they say that it's unsafe and it's making other tenants unsafe within the building that they're living in.

So I'd like to ask the minister if that is a case where a family could be evicted and if he agrees that those tenants are putting other tenants in an unsafe condition when they are just simply socially isolating within a unit.

Mr. Fielding: I don't have the details in the case. What we have put in place, if someone—for instance, I'll give you maybe a couple examples. Let's say there's aggressive nature, if someone is fighting or causing some sort of a criminal activity from happening, they can be evicted. If they're selling drugs, they're selling methamphetamine in these suites, they can be evicted for those types of things.

We—if there's a certain particular case, we can take that back and have information, but that is the nature of things. We want to make sure we're freezing rents and we're not able—not allowing people to be evicted for those particular reasons. It isn't meant for other purposes that—there, but just mainly for criminal investigations or if they're selling drugs or what have you within the parameters of their building.

Mrs. Smith: I thank the minister for that clarification, because these very people are living in social housing that is managed by our Province. So it's great to hear that they will not be evicted if they have extra family members socially isolating within their units.

What supports will the government provide tenants to ensure that their rights are respected during this time?

Mr. Fielding: Well, there's regulations as part of what this legislation we're building in. So, again, if there was some rents that were scheduled to go up as of April 1st, even earlier on that, then they won't go up. And those rents will not go up for the duration of the legislation before it becomes proclaimed or we proclaim the legislation, as well as other things like through evictions.

So the—I guess what I would say is the parameter for this is pretty straightforward right in the legislative piece before us here. There is, kind of, questions and answers that is related to all of these aspects on the Residential Tenancies website that I encourage the member or people that are interested to peruse that and make sure they know all the responsibilities as well as all the rights.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I know that I've heard from both renters, as well as some small landlords who are facing challenges because they know that they won't—they—the landlords themselves might own a single house, are worried about being able to pay their bills.

But, as a bigger picture, is—what is the exit strategy around this bill? Because if people can't pay their rent now, how are they going to be able to pay two or three months' rent in two or three months' time?

Mr. Fielding: The intent of the bill is while the emergency is going on through COVID-19 people are—you know, sometimes what happens is they're either self-isolating or they're in a situation where their businesses have closed down, so this provides protection for that—a temporary protection that happens for individuals during that time period when we want to make sure people are supported.

*(13:50)

So that's why we thought it is important to provide those assurances of not increasing the rent, as well as not allowing for evictions to happen because of COVID-19 related items.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further questions?

Debate

Madam Speaker: If there are no further questions, the floor is open for debate.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): So, first of all, I just want to commend the government on bringing this forward, although I don't think that it went far enough to support our renters here in Manitoba.

What we're hearing from Manitobans is that they don't have the income to be able to pay their rent. They're being forced to, you know, negotiate with landlords which is putting them in, you know, predicaments where we're getting emails and asking for some help in terms of negotiating.

And you know this government has the authority and you know they're going to be talking about a money bill later that could potentially support and go beyond a rent freeze and help thousands of Manitobans who have lost their jobs and are unable to pay their rent. Many, many Manitobans live paycheque to paycheque in this province, including, you know, in my very riding, and I know Union Station's riding as well, and I'm sure many across the other way as well, that have people who have reached out to them that have said, you know, I've lost my job, I don't have an income coming in, \$2,000 from this emergency response from the federal government is not enough.

We know that rents are high here in Manitoba. A rooming house, for instance, is over \$500, and that's just for a room, and you're living communally and putting yourself at risk by having to use a bathroom with other people and having to cook in the kitchen with other people.

So I've also had people reach out to say that they have auto-immune deficiencies and they're afraid and they can't move because this is the only amount of money that they're allowed within Rent Assist.

So, you know, I think this government can be responsible and they can provide some extra Rent Assist to families that are already receiving Rent Assist, and I know the Minister of Families (Mrs. Stefanson) would know that what people receive on EIA right now doesn't allow for families to have adequate housing unless they're living in social housing, and they often have to top up their rent beyond Rent Assist and what EIA allows. So, you know, the government can go further in supplying some extra Rent Assist as well as some extra assistance to EIA.

You know, this government's used today to push through their legislation. You know, I was coming in here to talk about supporting Manitoba families and getting funds to Manitobans that need it. We have so many businesses that have had to shutter their doors, that, you know, and I see the MLA, one across the way, you know, waving that she's probably had to do the same, and you know my heart goes out to those people who have had to do that, that don't have the capacity to bounce back from this, that are going to have to declare bankruptcy because they don't have a rainy day fund that they can just, you know, pull some money out.

So I want to, you know, just say that we came in the spirit of, you know, really wanting to do what's right for Manitobans, and we were elected, you know, as leaders in this province to lead the way, and here we are in a pandemic and we have bills that aren't even related to COVID-19, that aren't directly, you know, financially providing support to families.

So, you know, what do I say to my constituents and all of the emails that I've gotten over the last couple of days since, you know, Manitobans have found out about this? And they have a right to know what exactly we're doing in this building and, you know, we should be talking about what can we do to support our families here in Manitoba. What can we be doing to support our workers here in Manitoba? What can we be doing to support our businesses? But, instead, you know, we're having to talk about legislation that has nothing to do with COVID-19.

So I'm going to go back again and just say that Manitobans need more support other than a rent freeze, and, you know, at the end of this, people that aren't able to pay their rent once this rent freeze is

lifted, are going to be evicted anyway because they're not going to be able to pay their excess rent that they're in debt for because they have no job, and then that goes on their record and they may have debt collectors coming after them.

So this Province—this government—should be providing some more assistance to Manitobans and we should be in this House talking about direct financial assistance to those who need it in Manitoba.

Miigwech.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): This is—the issue of ensuring people aren't evicted during a pandemic was something that many people brought forward, that it would—this is something that Manitoba Liberals urged the government to do. So we're glad that they picked up on it.

Of course, there are challenges, I'm sure, as for every single MLA in this House. Because of the urgent need for quick action and for major action during this crisis, that often every time the—well, what I have found is that every time the government has offered to solve a problem, it often creates two or three more and many questions from constituents, people who are working, business owners who are extremely concerned about the unintended consequences and implications of what a new measure would be. This is certainly one of them.

One of the things that we're doing in this pandemic is shutting things down, isolating ourselves so that we don't transmit an illness. And one of the things we need to consider in—when we're talking about the economy is that it's not about shutting down the economy. It's about making sure that we don't pass on costs and failures to everybody else, that we're actually making sure that money continues to flow through the economy.

So I do think it's absolutely critical that some form of rental assistance is on the table at some point, whether it's part of the package that we're going to be talking about later on today, but for both—for small businesses and for individuals simply because if we have a situation, essentially, it'll create a domino effect or a—that all those people not paying their rent, or not able to pay their rent can affect small landlords who will then be able—unable to pay their bills.

And I had that exact call from a constituent who's really quite concerned and desperate because the fact that utilities will not be shut off means that—of which he is responsible for as a landlord. He said, look, if his tenants aren't able to pay the bills and he can't pay his

bills, he'll be the one who's blamed when utilities are shut off.

Now that's been lifted as well, which is critical, but the fact is is that we have to do more to continually supply and continually replace the money that's being lost into the economy—not all of it, but some of it so that we are not having renters go bankrupt or go further into debt, we're not having landlords and small businesses go further into debt.

I do think that we're—one of the huge challenges of this crisis is that there is already so much debt and that, as the Premier (Mr. Pallister) himself has said many times, that half of Manitobans are teetering on the verge of insolvency. And that's because their debts—their incomes haven't gone up for a long time and their debts are so high, and it could be credit card debt, student loan debt, household debt.

It's a huge problem because so many people—there are tens of thousands of people who are going to find themselves unable to pay their bills, and we're looking at something much more serious. So it's absolutely critical for that money to keep flowing.

This is a—the decision not to evict people—to suspend evictions is obviously critical as a public health measure, but we are dealing with two twin challenges; enormous public health challenges as well as enormous economic challenges, and it's absolutely critical that this money keep flowing.

We do hope that they, the government, will bring forward some measures to assist beyond EIA, beyond Rent Assist, because I know that even with Rent Assist, the government has taken some measures to raise the income threshold, which has actually some—in some cases, reduced the number of people who are eligible for Rent Assist.

And certainly EIA, in some cases we're looking at 27 or 28 years since there have been increase in rates, and with the average apartment in Manitoba going for over \$1,000 a month for a single apartment, rent is going—is completely unfeasible.

So part of this—part of what we need to focus on, I believe, and we're more than happy to work with government on doing this, is to make sure that we're not just preventing the transmission of sickness, but the—presenting the transmission of economic failure, which is absolutely critical at this time.

* (14:00)

We do think that one of the issues is around when this will expire or when the government should pull

back on this, or lift this suspension of evictions. We do want to make sure that doesn't happen too soon, but it's important that people are able to return to work and go to work and earn money before that happens. So we will—we would like to consider that that should be part of the bill, that there should be specifics around when it's going to be—about when it's going to be lifted and that it not be lifted too soon.

And that's it. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further members wishing to speak on debate?

If not, is the House ready for the question.

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 58, The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act.

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

Bill 57—The Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: Moving on now to second reading of Bill 57, The Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Cullen), that Bill 57, The Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to Committee of the Whole.

Motion presented.

Mr. Friesen: It's my pleasure to stand in the House today on a very, very unique day of sitting, possibly one of the most unique days in the nine years that I've served in this Legislature, but—to rise for the purpose passing essential legislation and doing so because of the threat that faces all of us as Manitobans. And that threat being COVID-19.

And all Manitobans know today the extraordinary challenges facing us. I have said publicly and privately that we are seeing these prolonged and significant encroachments into the way that we normally live our lives. And it's not normal and people know it's not normal, but it takes a toll.

It takes a toll when you drive through the streets and see parking lots that should be full of cars and they're closed. It takes a toll when you drive past an

arena or a swimming pool and see the parking lot's empty. It takes a toll when you go past the local library or you go past a shopping centre and it's all closed and shuttered, and people are at home, and it takes a toll.

People have lost their income; they've had their hours reduced; they have children at home who should have been in school; they have university students, children returning to their homes and university students are—college and university students significantly put out of their normal schedules. Interruptions to what those summer plans would have looked like for those individuals, and so many more other interruptions that we have become aware of.

In the middle of that, though, we have a government who is acting, who has acted promptly, who is heeding the advice of the public—chief public health officer in Manitoba, taking actions to protect Manitobans, taking actions to protect people's livelihoods, taking actions to stop the spread of COVID-19 and to do what we can to flatten the curve.

And, Madam Speaker, I can tell you that in Manitoba, it is still early days because we did not have the evidence here of COVID-19 as early as places like Ontario and Quebec and BC had it. That is, in some ways, for us a benefit, because we were able to look and to liaise and to correspond with those jurisdictions and to take measures more promptly in this jurisdiction than otherwise might have been the case.

And we have done that as a government. We have taken those steps, and we have limited travel and we have reduced the ability of people to move around. We've closed non-essential businesses. We have closed schools and universities and work places and it is having some effect. Time is still needed to understand what the efficacy of these measures have been.

Nevertheless, today we are here in order to pass necessary legislation that will form part of our government's response, of all Manitobans' response on COVID-19. I take the time to say that twice for a reason, and I will revisit that in just a moment.

On this bill, on Bill 57, Madam Speaker, suffice it to say that this—these proposed amendments to The Regulated Health Professions Act is part of that response of our government. We need our health-care workers and we need them now.

We never miss an opportunity as a government to say thank you to the frontline workers who are on that front edge of our fight on COVID-19, and regardless

of what fiction it was that the member, the opposition critic was trying to peddle earlier in their question period opportunity, the first opportunity they had in two months to be in this place and ask questions, the fact of the matter is this: that we say thank you at every opportunity for Manitobans.

I also reflect on the fact that that same member took an opportunity on Twitter a couple of weeks ago to suggest that I didn't care because I didn't have family members who were in health care. Madam Speaker, I have to tell you, every time they have the opportunity to go up, they go down.

Madam Speaker, we're so disappointed that when we see other jurisdictions where legislators are actually putting aside partisan attacks and coming together and collaborating—oh, we get lip service from this Leader of the Opposition who says they want to participate, and then they go into the hall and they leak the entire day's order paper. They leak all the information—information trusted to them by the government.

The opportunity for them to step up and actually do the right thing, and what do they do? They suggest that somehow we don't care about health care because we don't have our family members in health care. Let me set the record straight, Madam Speaker. I have home-care workers in my family. I have nurses in my family. I have laboratory technicians in my family, and so does that member, and so does that member, and I bet so do they. So shame on that.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, order.

Mr. Friesen: The Leader of the Opposition tells me not to engage. Well, sometimes I think that's good advice, but sometimes I think that that kind of foolishness has to be confronted, and I confront it today in this place.

Madam Speaker, this bill seeks to extend very reasonable measures—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen:—in our health-care system to help us to get the health-care workers that we need back into the workforce.

The fact is this: right now in Manitoba, we have the ability for regulatory bodies to be able to waive registration and practice requirements for health professionals who would be coming back to the

province from other provinces and territories, and also from the United States.

However, what we do not have in the act is the ability to waive or modify registration, or to be able to invite back those former health-care workers when they were formerly in the profession and now they are not. So they are in Manitoba; they were at one time in the profession; now they are no longer in the profession.

So we find that our regulated health professions act stops short of where other provinces would see that legislation extend to, so we see this as the opportunity to fix this. Why? Because we need the health-care workers now. We are proud, as a government, that we actually were able, two weeks ago already, work in collaboration with the regulatory body for nurses to be able to create the conditions to welcome back into the profession former nurses.

So there was an order created at that time as a mechanism, but this is the better mechanism, which is amendments that would be appropriate to fix the issue not just once, but for all time. Now I would indicate that these amendments would also come in with the ability for the minister to impose conditions on that authority given to health professional bodies.

What kind of conditions would these be? Well, they would be reasonable ones that were informed by our dialogue with the regulatory bodies. In other words, if time is of the essence then maybe in certain cases there would be an ability to accommodate certain things that, in a very formal conventional process, would not be accommodated, things like, you know, that if they were in good standing in their profession, if it was sought to be the case that there was a certain time period placed on the former members' participation in that professional field. Well, these would be things that could be also imposed by the minister.

I would also say that there could be, in certain cases, declarations by the applicant to come back into the workforce, whereby before there might have been very formal checklists and documents that had to be submitted.

* (14:10)

So those things, of course, would be done—competency requirements, the need for ongoing professional education, those things would be done with the collaboration of the regulatory body, but I think that in the end what we're saying is we want

nurses to come back into the workforce. We want former doctors to come back into the workforce.

If there are lab technicians, if there are allied health workers, now is the time for those individuals to come back into profession and for certain of those professions, this is the mechanism by which we can expedite their ability to come back into that profession. Still, with protections and, of course, I would say, of course, at the end of the day, it would be the college that would be responsible to ensure the safety of these things and they would do that.

We have been in contact with the colleges: with the College of Pharmacists, the College of Registered Nurses, the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Manitoba—and all of those conversations are in place. So we see these as very reasonable amendments. We see them as very, very central to our efforts to combat COVID-19.

I would want to update all the House members and indicate that I received new information today that indicates that since June, this government has hired almost 400 nurses into the profession. I've reflected in this place that at one time the opposition party kept saying that we were removing nurses and the fact is that we've hired almost 400 new ones, just since June.

And even while they 'choop'-chirp across the aisle, we still have plans to bring additional nurses into the workforce. It's why we created a portal, Madam Speaker, even for—even to solicit interest from others to come back into Manitoba to help.

So I will end with the following: I believe that all members of the government's side were shocked to hear earlier this afternoon, the Leader of the Opposition say that they're here to help and they're here to assist the efforts on COVID-19 and only moments ago, the opposition blocked second reading debate of what I would consider to be a companion piece to this legislation, which would be The Public Health Amendment Act, Bill 59.

And we're shocked to think that in this legislation are measures that would enable the Manitoba Chief Provincial Public Health Officer to protect northern Manitoba from the spread of COVID-19 by creating the ability to create in the jurisdiction of Manitoba certain limitations on travel for non-essential purposes to regions that could be vulnerable.

And I just heard the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) speak moments ago about protecting vulnerable Manitobans and here is their opportunity to

protect the North. Where is the member for The Pas? Where is the member for Thompson (Ms. Adams)? Where is the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie)?

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Mr. Friesen: Where are these members? Why are they not standing up right now? I'm not reflecting on—

Madam Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Point of Order

Madam Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a point of order.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Yes, just a point of order.

The minister there referred to the presence, location of a number of members in the Chamber and I would just like to remind the House that that is not permitted under the rules.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Finance, on the same point of order?

Mr. Friesen: I'm happy to restate, Madam Speaker.

I didn't reflect on the presence or absence of members in the Chamber. I'm saying in principle, why are the member for Thompson not standing up, the member for The Pas standing up, the member for Keewatinook not standing up? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

This is—yes, actually this is turning into debate and points of order aren't supposed to be used for points of debate. So I would indicate that—*[interjection]* Yes. Probably—*[interjection]* Order.

Considering the measures that have been put in place today where we are looking at a decreased number of members in the House, and by agreement those numbers were based on a calculation of one third, one third, one third. So I would indicate that—well, sorry, one third, one third and one. *[interjection]* And one third, yes.

But I would just urge caution. I don't think that was a point of order because it wasn't—there wasn't a specific reference to people not being here, but I would caution members that it's probably not in anybody's best interest to make reference about members in the House that may be here or not here, just because of the way we have set up the House today.

So I would just urge caution in members bringing forward that type of information for debate.

* * *

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, let me rephrase. I am shocked that the members of the NDP caucus who represent areas of the North did not see fit to stand up against the actions of the House leader and their Opposition Leader—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

Madam Speaker: The honourable—the Official Opposition House Leader (Ms. Fontaine) was rising on a point of order—or, the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) was rising on a point of order.

Mr. Kinew: Yes. Earlier today, one of the leave requests that we considered off the top contemplated limiting the amount of members in the Chamber, at which point there was unanimous consent. Given that that measure was in itself put into place to ensure that we can ensure physical distancing and social distancing, and I would add to the fact that it received unanimous consent of the House, I would suggest that no member be able to be permitted to try a way in or use the provisions of that leave request to try to score some sort of point in debate.

It was an important all-party agreement. It does serve to advance both the government's interest as well as our own function as the opposition, to be able to have that request in place. And so I'd simply ask that members be instructed to refrain from even, you know, trying to take advantage of that as it does violate the spirit of the rule which prohibits us from referring to the presence or absence of members in the Chamber.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Health, on that same point of order.

Mr. Friesen: Not on the point of order.

Madam Speaker: Okay. I'm going to take the leader's suggestion and indicate that we do move in that direction where we are not making references to whether members are here or not. And just caution members, in debate, that there be no references to members here or not here and focus more on the issue that is before us rather than getting into any further arguments about who's here and who's not here.

So I'd just urge caution to all members and that we refrain from getting into debate on this issue. It—there are significant issues that we need to deal with this afternoon, so just a caution to members.

* * *

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, let's try this one more time: there is a members of the Legislative Assembly constituency information sheet. It lists three NDP members from outside of Winnipeg. One is the member for Thompson (Ms. Adams), one is the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie), and one is the member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin), and what—[*interjection*—there are three members who represent, in this House, areas of northern Manitoba—there are—in the NDP caucus.

No one is reflecting on their absence or presence in the Chamber today. I'm saying they are elected to serve their constituents. Regardless of where they are today, there are—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

Madam Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a point of order.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, and it is a similar point of order to one that I have previously raised on two previous occasions, and that I believe you ruled on.

Again—and I'm sharing this piece of background simply for your consideration, Madam Speaker, I believe that the spirit of the rule which prevents us from being able to reflect on the presence or absence of a member in the Chamber—the spirit of that rule is so that we wouldn't potentially name somebody's constituency or portfolio at a time at which they could not fairly respond, either during debate, question period or some other procedure of this House.

Seeing as how we have previously agreed by unanimous consent to leave provisions limiting the number of members here today, I do think that what the minister is trying to rephrase multiple times violates the spirit of that rule in the House, because there may be members who are prevented by the leave provision that he and his party have agreed to from being here and therefore, consequentially, are not able to stand in their places and either respond, defend themselves, or maybe add relevant information to the record.

* (14:20)

So I'd ask for some some direction simply for the minister to perhaps abandon this line of inquiry.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on the same point of order.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, I've listened carefully to the comments by the Minister of Health and the Leader of the Opposition who continually refers to people's absence in the House, but that is certainly not coming from the Minister of Health. His comments, and particularly his last comments, were specific about the actions and the previous statements by a particular member.

All of us are held accountable for the things that we do or don't do in this House or not in this House. I've been held accountable by the members opposite many times about what I've said or not said. That—if that isn't fair to speak about, about the actions of a former member not attached to their absence or presence, that takes away a significant ability to have debate.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on the same point of order.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): On the same point of order, can I suggest that we just get back to debate.

Madam Speaker: And I'm going to agree with the member for Tyndall Park. I think I have made enough comments on this already. I have given direction to the House and I would ask the Minister of Health not to make reference to the—those particular members. I understand that he was not indicating presence or absence and so that isn't a—*[interjection]*—order.

So it isn't a specific point of order because there was no reference to their absence or presence, but by bringing that into debate here, it is inflaming the debate and we're moving off the focus of what needs to be before the House.

So, in order to encourage everybody to move forward on this important legislation, I would ask that this particular topic, which I have commented on now a few times, be left and that we move on to the specifics of this particular legislation.

* * *

Mr. Friesen: In any caucus there are both rural and urban members, except for the Liberal Party. Not reflecting on any of those members, but some reside in rural and some reside in urban.

Today, the NDP blocks debate on Bill 59, which would allow the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer to create protections for people who live in northern Manitoba that would appropriately curtail the ability for people to travel for non-essential

reasons to the North. This is the bill that the NDP leader and House leader are blocking.

Reflecting on no one's presence or absence, I would submit that an MLA who lives in the North would have an interest in the actions of this opposition leader and House leader and I imagine whether those individuals, who shall not be named, suddenly, are in this House or not in this House, it matters.

Madam Speaker, there are rules of this House that would allow this party to get the information if they had questions. They could have used question period today to ask specific questions about the bills that had just been introduced in this House.

The opposition party could have allowed these bills to come to second reading to hear about the bills. As a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, there's a question and answer period that now forms part of our legislative debate process that was only entered into by agreement about three years ago that would have allowed them 15 minutes for pointed questions on any concerns they had about the bills.

This bill is designed to accompany the federal Quarantine Act and allow the provincial public health officer to also—to create appropriate provisions to ban people coming back to Manitoba from other provinces or territories from—to go home, to self-isolate.

And today, the NDP has said that doesn't matter. Today, the NDP is saying they don't need to be kept safe. Today the NDP is saying no one has to follow the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer's orders because they won't allow to pass them.

If the NDP had allowed second reading debate, they would have allowed me to say that Newfoundland and Nova Scotia and BC have these provisions under their public health act to allow the chief to do these things. So let us understand that the NDP today could have stood on the side of democracy, they could've respected the rules of this House but, more importantly, they could have done what they said they were going to do.

They said they wanted to partner, they said they wanted to co-operate, they said they wanted to hear COVID-19-specific bills, the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) 20 minutes ago said she took umbrage with one of—the Finance Minister—can I name the Finance Minister? I hope I can name the Finance Minister—the Finance Minister who may or may not be in the House—she took umbrage with the Finance Minister, complaining that we should be focused today on bills pertaining to COVID-19. And

the same party that says that 20 minutes before, prohibited Bill 59 to advance to debate where all of their questions could have been answered.

Madam Speaker, I cannot fail to express my exasperation and outrage on behalf of all Manitobans who have been doing their part, who have been staying home, who have been self-isolating, staying home from work, forgoing their wages, forgoing their children's entertainment, and they have been complying. And to—they have been co-operating, and we thank every Manitoban for their co-operation and their compliance.

Let us understand that even while they sit across the aisle now and heckle and laugh, they know the truth and the truth is this: that it is they who are not complying and they who are co-operating with Manitobans, and I think that they have done a disservice today to all Manitobans.

Madam Speaker, I commend Bill 57 to you. I think it is worthy of debate today. I only wish I could also be commending Bill 59 for debate in this House today.

Questions

Madam Speaker: A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held.

Questions may be addressed to the minister by any member in the following sequence: first question by the official opposition critic or designate; subsequent questions asked by critics or designates from other recognized opposition parties; subsequent questions asked by each independent member; remaining questions asked by any opposition members; and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Other jurisdictions have set out restrictions on how long individuals can be out of practice in order to return to practice. It appears that in Manitoba, colleges are setting up their own requirements around this.

I'm wondering, though, if the minister can let us know if he's had any conversations with colleges to ensure that each of these folks are—and by folks I mean colleges, rather—are setting out reasonable guidelines around that specific criteria.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Yes, I have had these conversations with the regulate—regulatory bodies. I have no concerns that they are not proceeding in good

faith and setting reasonable limits for the return of these people to the profession.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'd like to thank the minister for bringing forward the bill.

I do have a question. I represent the constituency of Tyndall Park, and I know in Tyndall Park we have a very high population, for example, of the Filipino community. A lot of people who have immigrated from the Philippines, they have a background in health care, they worked as nurses and physicians in the Philippines, they've continued on as home care here in Manitoba.

Will the minister consider broadening his legislation to allow health-care workers from other countries aside from Canada and the United States to also be able to bring their hands on deck while we need them most?

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for Tyndall Park for the suggestion.

The member, and all members of this House, know that the issue of acknowledging and licensing internationally graduated medical professionals into Canada is a tricky one. It is a long-standing issue of engagement to understand what the credentialing is, what the training is in those jurisdictions.

I can tell the member I've had these conversations with the regulatory body in respect of this bill, understanding that this question would probably arise today. I can also say I have noted, with interest, that some other jurisdictions have been making some forays into this. I have yet to see any Canadian jurisdiction granting the ability to license without creating strong parameters around that.

* (14:30)

I think that for the scope of today's debate and today's legislation, it is simply a bridge too far to contemplate. But we welcome everyone to come back in as volunteers and assist our health-care efforts during COVID-19.

MLA Asagwara: Can the minister answer whether or not the regional health authorities will be providing any type of training for the health-care professionals that will be returning to the field to practise?

Mr. Friesen: So these are individuals who have been in the profession and who have only exited more recently. As the last question articulated as well, in that case we have had the conversations with the regulatory bodies about what kind of training, if any,

and in this case they're saying that because this is a limited re-engagement in the profession, that they are willing to monitor and then to make modifications as required for things like ongoing practice requirements.

So it is the basis of the extent to which they were in good standing with the profession, their interview, other paperwork that would be processed that would give people that high level of confidence they would need to have these people re-engage in their profession.

MLA Asagwara: Can the minister provide information around specific areas where the health professionals who re-enter the field will be returning to work specifically?

Mr. Friesen: I would say to the member that they would be returning to the field all across the province wherever they are needed in our response to COVID-19.

MLA Asagwara: Can the minister identify any specific areas that had been flagged as having greater need for folks re-entering the workforce in this capacity?

Mr. Friesen: Well, I would say that looking across the globe at places like Hubei and north Italy and Spain, New York, Portland, Oregon, and others causes us to believe that we must do everything we can to be able to slow the spread of the virus, but, clearly, there is an impact on our health-care system.

So, while today we would assess the system and say that we have capacity, it all depends on the trajectory of COVID-19 in jurisdiction. So we continue to say that we need a broad array of health-care professionals at each level to be able to assist our levels—our efforts because we do not yet know what the level of impact will be in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: There any further questions?

Debate

Madam Speaker: If there are no further questions, the floor is open for debate.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): First, I would like to thank the minister and the government for bringing this legislation forward. I do think it is, especially in this time, critically important that we have the support of as many health-care professionals as possible, recognizing that we very well may need their expertise in a number of areas during this

pandemic and, hopefully, in Manitoba we don't see that need.

We hope in Manitoba that we flatten the curve, we all do our part, we stay at home, stay in place, practise physical distancing, self-isolation and self-quarantining when needed and necessary, you know, we follow public health orders and keep our groups and our numbers to what they should be in order to limit the transmission of the virus but, certainly, it is a good measure to introduce a way to make easier for health-care professionals to be able to re-enter the workforce as health-care professionals, should that time come.

I'd like to also thank the minister, Madam Speaker, for his efforts during this pandemic. It's—I can only imagine around-the-clock efforts to ensure that things are coming together as they need to, and I certainly want the minister to know that I appreciate his efforts. I can only imagine how hard he's working during this time as are so many other folks within the system.

I'd like to also extend a thank you to all of our health-care workers. Thank you to our chief public health medical officer, Dr. Roussin, and our chief nursing officer, Lanette Siragusa, who continue on a daily basis in whatever capacity folks are working to ensure that Manitobans have access to all the information that they need in order to keep themselves safe and healthy and informed, and alleviate the anxieties that many people—I'm sure, including members of this Chamber—experience related to this global pandemic.

Madam Speaker, I think it's really important for me to address comments made by the minister in regards to my amplification of the voices of Manitobans who have been expressing concerns, and to also speak to a comment made by the Premier (Mr. Pallister) earlier in this Chamber.

I find it, to be completely honest with you, confusing. I am the critic for Health, Madam Speaker, it is my responsibility within being elected in this role to amplify the concerns and also the criticisms of all of our constituents.

And during this global pandemic and before this global pandemic, as the critic for Health, as the representative for Union Station, people have brought forward concerns to me in regards to decisions made under this and by this government and by this Health Minister. It would be irresponsible of me as the critic for Health and as the representative for Union Station

to not amplify their voices and ensure that their voices are heard, the concerns acknowledged, and that we're working collectively to do whatever we can to address that.

Madam Speaker, I find it incredibly problematic that the minister would attempt to assert that I would in any way, shape or form believe that any member of this Chamber doesn't care about the constituents of Manitoba. In fact, my efforts to ensure that their voices and concerns are heard and their needs met reflect the exact opposite; they indicate that I do in fact believe and know that every member of this Chamber cares, and that I respect the constituents of this province.

And I feel it's very, very important and critical to put on the record. And, Madam Speaker, as the person elected in this role for Union Station and as the critic for Health and seniors and active living, I will absolutely continue to do that work. I will absolutely continue to use every platform to my avail, including that of social media, to ensure that people have access to the information and the resources they deserve as Manitobans to have access to.

I'd like to acknowledge that this bill is being brought forward because we know that health-care workers do, whether they're in practice or not, actively under their licensure, that they do what they do best: they help people, Madam Speaker.

I think it's so fundamentally important for us to acknowledge that the reason why we are supporting this bill is in fact because of the outstanding values that lie with all of our health-care workers, our nurses, our frontline service providers, who would of course during a global pandemic, who would of course when it's their health and the health of their families and their loved ones who would be at risk by going into environments where COVID-19 exists, that of course they would be the ones to stand up, raise their hands, and answer that call for assistance from their fellow health-care workers and Manitobans, Madam Speaker.

And so again I reiterate my thank you to those people who have expressed their desire to re-enter the workforce under their licence. I would like to thank the colleges for working very hard to do whatever they can to make that process expedient and as easy to navigate as possible for those who would like to do so. It is certainly a collective effort to ensure that we have the resources in place to continue to battle this virus and this global pandemic that we're seeing impact so

many people absolutely everywhere in the world, and over the last several weeks right here in Manitoba.

And with that, I'd like to express my condolences to the families and the community members and the friends of those who unfortunately have lost their lives to this very terrible virus. And I extend my care and my best wishes and my love, Madam Speaker, to all those who are currently battling COVID-19, who have family members who are in hospital due to COVID-19.

And express my tremendous amount of gratitude to all of those folks who are working in non-for-profits, who are working in charities, who are working day in and day out, Madam Speaker, within the confines of the realities of this global pandemic and the measures that are in place to help keep us all safe, but continue to do work to ensure that.

And whether it's nurses or health-care aides or, like I said, folks working in community organizations working with very limited resources—and very little assistance from this government, quite frankly—who continue to deliver critical services to those who most need it: to those Manitobans who are targeted, who are marginalized, and who are without the capacity and the resources to do what many of us take for granted, and that is follow public-health protocols to the letters of isolate and quarantine when deemed important to do so or necessary to do so.

* (14:40)

That is: to practise social distancing and physical distancing, to go to the grocery store only once a week, to make decisions to keep ourselves and our neighbors safe, and doing so with ease because we have the capacity and the privilege of being able to do that without really having to overthink it.

I commend the front-line workers who work within those community organizations, who are doing this work to ensure that all Manitobans have what they need in order to keep themselves safe during this pandemic and to hopefully negate ever experiencing COVID-19 personally in terms of their health and the health of their loved ones.

I'd like to acknowledge, you know, I've heard from a number over the past handful of hours, really, I guess—24 hours or so, maybe less than that, Madam Speaker—I've heard from a number of people in that sector who are very, very concerned about recent announcements from this government. And I want those folks to know that we value their work, their

expertise and their contributions to the safety of all Manitobans in this province.

And I believe it's on all of us to work collectively to ensure that every single person who is putting themselves at risk to ensure that the wellness of all Manitobans is maintained, that we work collectively to ensure that those folks are protected, that they are lifted up, that they are acknowledged, they are respected and they are equipped to do not only their jobs, but to take care of their health and the health of their families.

That is the collective responsibility that we share, and it's a collective responsibility that is beyond just this legislation in Bill 57, which we support—it is a collective responsibility in other pieces of legislation, which I'll have a chance, I think, to speak to later, Madam Speaker.

So just a few other comments I'd like to make on this particular bill, Madam Speaker. I just want to again thank our health-care workers. I want to thank all of those folks who are re-entering the workforce in order to help during this global pandemic, and I hope that after this pandemic passes and we get through this collectively as Manitobans, that we do more than thank our health-care workers, that we do more than just thank our nurses, that we take action and informed decisions are made in this Chamber that see choices made like no longer having their wages frozen, like no longer having them work exorbitant, mandated hours of overtime, like no longer delaying the opportunity for them to access personal protective equipment under their decision making and their expertise in order to keep themselves safe.

Madam Speaker, we need to more than just thank them, we need to action what they're saying they need.

Thank you.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I, too, just want to echo a couple of the remarks that the member from Notre Dame made. Those were wonderful remarks and very, very well said.

Madam Speaker, we will be supporting Bill 57 in that it waives registration and practice requirements from health professionals from other provinces, the US and former health-care providers. However, we strongly urge the government to also consider it essential that the bill must be broadened to include physicians from other countries, as well.

There was a time when previous governments recognized that there was a shortage of doctors in

Manitoba. The response was to call 1-800-South Africa and recruit many physicians from South Africa. There have been times when Manitoba has seen physicians come here from England, from Egypt, from Syria and many other countries. Why is this government locking the door to those from other countries while accepting only physicians from the United States and Canada?

Madam Speaker, I will be introducing an amendment at the Committee of the Whole stage to address this, and I hope that the government will accept the amendment.

And, you know, Madam Speaker, I heard what the minister said in response to the question and answer portion, and while I respect that, nothing prevents Manitoba from taking the lead. Take the initiative and show other provinces and territories we don't always have to follow; we can take the lead as well.

This bill will provide individuals to practise under supervision during the pandemic. This supervision must be under an individual who is qualified and who will provide a report on the performance of the individual at the end of the crisis period.

Madam Speaker, we believe that individuals who come forward and perform—practise under supervision, should be enabled and further encouraged. We are living in a time where we really need all hands on deck, as the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has said. And if we can implement this safely with supervision, we should be taking all the help that is offered. And that extends to other countries outside of Canada and the US.

I think about all the health-care providers who practised in their countries of origin, but their education may not have been accredited here in Manitoba. These health-care workers should be able to practise here at this time where we desperately need health-care workers under supervision. This government is walking a very fine line in excluding an—many amazing health-care professionals here in Manitoba because they're not from Canada or the US.

I also think about all the health-care students we have. There are students who are set to graduate in just a couple of months, and if they are willing to work with supervision during this pandemic we should work to safely enable this, and once the pandemic is over, to use the reference or references from supervisors toward a path which could lead to full practice in the future.

We will be supporting this bill because we believe it is critical at this time, but we do urge the government to further improve it.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further members wishing to speak on debate?

Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 57, The Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act.

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

Bill 56—The Family Maintenance Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: We will now move into the next bill, second reading of Bill 56, The Family Maintenance Amendment Act.

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Families (Mrs. Stefanson), that Bill 56, The Family Maintenance Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a Committee of the Whole.

Motion presented.

Mr. Cullen: Madam Speaker, this bill amends The Family Maintenance Act. It provides the Maintenance Enforcement Program, which is the government program that enforces the payment of child support and spousal or common-law support, with greater flexibility to respond to the needs of its clients, in particular, those Manitoba families that are experiencing difficulties arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Family Law Modernization Act passed in June of 2019 provided the program with authority to make certain administrative determinations to reduce the need for families to make court applications. Now more than ever, in the light of the increasing demands for the program to assess cases and make appropriate administrative determinations, the program needs to be flexible and transparent in making these determinations. Greater flexibility will enable the program to focus its resources appropriately.

The amendments eliminate the current time restrictions respecting inquiries to determine if a maintenance obligation for an adult child remains eligible for enforcement. In appropriate circumstances the program can cease enforcing support for an adult

child and, in some cases, to enforce reduced child support, for example, when the eldest child is no longer dependent but support continues for younger dependent siblings.

Providing the Maintenance Enforcement Program with the authority to make requests as necessary will allow the process to be streamlined and free up resources for the urgent work required due to the pandemic, such as payment collection and the processing of administrative suspensions of enforcement.

The amendments also provide that when a request is made for an administrative suspension of enforcement, each party is entitled to a copy of the information submitted by the other party with any sensitive information deleted. This will ensure that the decisions are made with the best possible information from both parties and that the parties have access to that information, similar to what would happen in a court application. This is particularly important at a time when access to the court is limited.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

Questions

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Madam Speaker, the limits of the ability of the debtor to access information if, in quotations, the frequency of requests for information by the debtor is unreasonable. End quote.

Can the minister share what is considered unreasonable and where will this be outlined?

* (14:50)

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I appreciate the question.

Clearly, we made significant changes to the Maintenance Enforcement program with the changes in legislation just last year, and this is in response to making the program more efficient, more open to Manitobans. And clearly, we want to make sure the

process is transparent, and by sharing information between the two parties, we think things will move much quicker, more appropriate and we think it's a better outcome for Manitoba families.

Ms. Fontaine: Again, I think it's important for the minister to share with the House today, under these extraordinary circumstances, what would be considered unreasonable by the department or by that particular program. And again, Madam Speaker, where will this list of what is considered unreasonable, where will that be outlined?

Mr. Cullen: The process here is to assist Manitoba families. We recognize there are changing circumstances that Manitoba families are facing in view of the 'pandemic'-pandemic we are facing. Clearly, these changes taking place quite quickly. These provisions will allow a staff within the Maintenance Enforcement Program to take that information in, make the assessments, make the determinations based on the information that they get and moving forward on those assessments in a expeditious manner as things change quite quickly.

The member will acknowledge that the previous provision had a six-month timeline in the previous legislation.

Madam Speaker: Any further questions?

Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Madam Speaker: Oh, sorry, I'm jumping ahead.

Debate

Madam Speaker: As there are no further questions, the floor is open for debate.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Madam Speaker, as you are aware and as everyone is aware in the Chamber, we are sitting today for specifically to deal with COVID-19 legislation, and I would have to submit to the House that I do not see how this Bill 56 specifically pertains to COVID-19. I know that the minister said that Bill 56 specifically, in quotations, and I quote: those families—it will help those families dealing with COVID-19. I'm not sure how Bill 56 is helping with families dealing with COVID-19.

In fact, Madam Speaker, I would suggest to the House and I would suggest to the minister that there have been concerns that have been outlined in respect of child maintenance and they are as follows: as everyone knows, not only here in Manitoba but certainly across Canada and certainly across the

globe, many, many citizens have lost their jobs. They have been either laid off or fired in many cases where there is no employment, and what that translates to in respect of child maintenance is that there are parents who are required to give monthly maintenance in support of their children, but it may be that that particular parent has lost their job and so nowhere in this legislation do I actually see any measures on how child maintenance is actually going to deal with whether or not a parent is able to pay their monthly maintenance fees to their child.

We know and we have seen many, many instances of parents co-parenting and trying to find the right way to co-parent during a global pandemic when we are meant to practise social distancing, and so there are many parents that are dealing with that.

There are many parents, Manitoba parents, that are dealing with the stress of co-parenting and also trying to mitigate and navigate their children's stress as well and so to that end, we don't see anything in Bill 56 that would help mitigate any of the financial stresses that families and, in particular, parents who have child maintenance orders are facing.

Madam Speaker, we know that when parent—a parent does not pay their monthly child maintenance fee, it has direct consequences on the child that that money is meant to support. We don't see any consideration of those scenarios that we know Manitoba families are facing, in fact, today as we sit here.

Madam Speaker, I think that it's important to put on the record, as well, there's some concerns in respect of what is deemed reasonable. And I will just read this out. The explanatory note says it enables maintenance enforcement officers to make more frequent inquiries to determine if a maintenance obligation for an adult child remains eligible for enforcement, but it also says that it can refuse these requests if the frequency of the request for information by the debtor is deemed unreasonable.

We have no sense of what unreasonable means and I—that is problematic in the sense that, actually, there are—oftentimes when there are child maintenance conditions and child maintenance fees that are owed to family members, to parents, that one parent has less power, more often than not, than the other. And for there just to be an open-ended definition of what constitutes something being unreasonable, I suspect is—and I would submit to the House—problematic for that particular parent that may not have the same amount of power in the relationship.

So, Madam Speaker, we will be supporting this bill today. However, I do think, for the purposes of Hansard and for the purposes of folks that will go back in Hansard to understand the rationale for Bill 56 in the midst of a pandemic, it has not been proven to the House today that in fact this does support Manitoba families who have those monthly fees owed to them or those monthly child maintenance.

In fact, I would suggest and I would disabuse the minister that this in fact is in any way, shape or form, related to COVID-19.

Miigwech.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Il y a des difficultés avec ce projet de loi. Une des choses qui est un problème, c'est qu'il n'y a pas de date de—quand ça termine.

Translation

There are problems with this bill. One of the problems is that there is no expiry date.

English

There is no date at which this, if I'm not mistaken, that this is—there's no end date anticipated or the idea that this should be lifted at some point. So this is not something, clearly, that should become a permanent part of our law that this is—if this is going to be enacted, it needs to be an emergency provision and a temporary provision and not a permanent one.

There are serious concerns about everybody's ability to pay their bills during this crisis and we certainly don't want the pain to be passed on to certain—to mothers or in—adult children where a parent has a responsibility, often a father, to care for his children. That being recognized, we also—we want to make sure that this is being done responsibly.

Again, there are those reservations that we want to make sure that—in particular because when you look at the statistics and the reality that women in—often living in poverty, that there have been challenges

around maintenance orders in the past and this shouldn't in any way be seen as being a free pass for those—for people who are able to pay and that they don't end up avoiding their parental responsibilities as a consequence.

That being said, I do think that, in terms of imposing undue financial burdens on people during this crisis, that this bill does appear to do that, that it does appear to lighten the load, but we would like to see this—an end date in sight, an expiration or sunset clause considered.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 56, The Family Maintenance Amendment Act.

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

Bill 55—The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: We will now move to second reading of Bill 55, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act.

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 55, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act, now be read a second time and be referred to the Committee of the Whole.

Motion presented.

Madam Speaker: The hour being 3 p.m., the House will now be recessed and stands recessed until 4 p.m., and when this matter is again before the House, the honourable minister will have unlimited time.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

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