

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

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, March 15, 2021

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Please be seated. Good afternoon, everybody.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 221—The Public Health Amendment Act (Banning Cosmetic Eye Tattooing and Eye Jewellery)

Mr. Scott Johnston (Assiniboia): I move, seconded by the honourable member from Riding Mountain, that Bill 221, The Public Health Amendment Act (Banning Cosmetic Eye Tattooing and Eye Jewellery), be read for a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Johnston: Madam Speaker, basically, this bill represents a preventative measure as per information received from the Manitoba optometrists association. The bill is designed to ensure that the safety of Manitobans who are seeking tattoos and implanted jewelry are met.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Bill 222—The Lobbyists Registration Amendment Act

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): I move, seconded by the honourable member for Lagimodière (Mr. Smith), that Bill 222, The Lobbyists Registration Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'inscription des lobbyistes, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Teitsma: This bill will improve transparency, in the public interest and the interest of union members,

about when and how often union representatives attempt to influence government.

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

Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Ralph Eichler (Minister of Economic Development and Jobs): I'm pleased to table the CEDF quarterly financial statements.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

Would the honourable minister please proceed with the statement.

Canadian Agricultural Safety Week

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development): I rise in the House today to bring attention to the farmers and agricultural workers who risk their lives to produce food that is enjoyed by Manitobans, Canadians and people around the world.

The visibility and importance of our food supply chain has been heightened by—in all facets of society during this global pandemic, which is why, now more than ever, we must continue to bring attention to the significance of providing healthy and safe workplaces to reduce the risk of injury.

For more than a decade, the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association, or CASA, has been raising awareness about safety on Canadian farms through the Canadian Agricultural Safety Week campaign. This year, the theme of Lead an AgSafe Canada is—as part of our three-year farm safety campaign called Safe & Strong Farms, aims to empower farmers, farm families and farming communities to build, grow and lead the agricultural industry in safety and sustainability.

The government of Manitoba is pleased to promote a week-long annual event that continues to inspire all of us to reflect on the importance of safety

and ensure safe workspaces across the agricultural industry.

On behalf of the Manitoba government and Manitoba Agriculture and Resource Development Department, it is my honour to proclaim March 14th to the 20th, 2021, as Canadian agricultural farm safety week here in Manitoba.

I ask all of my colleagues in the Manitoba Legislature to raise awareness of this important issue.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): I am honoured to be saying a few words today to acknowledge the importance of the Canadian Agricultural Safety Week.

My colleagues and I acknowledge that folks who work in the agricultural sector face significant physical and mental health challenges, which have now been compounded due to the pandemic. Since they are such an essential part of the economy and people's lives, they often put aside their own health concerns to keep Canadians fed.

Many Canadians who work in agriculture are breaking the stigma around mental health by speaking out, which we hope will translate into better safety and sustainability for the agriculture sector.

The Canadian Agricultural Safety Association says that many injuries today are related to using machinery. Reports estimate that roughly 85 people die each year while working, and roughly 70 per cent of these tragic fatalities are due to machinery. Though the industry itself is one of the most hazardous in the country, basic safety for farmers continues to be overlooked.

It is important that we continue to raise public awareness about safety and ensure that government consults farmers for feedback and advice on what can be done to make the agriculture sector safer.

My colleagues and I thank everyone who works in the agricultural sector in Manitoba and across Canada. Thank you for putting food on of our tables and for the immense contributions to our communities and our economy. Our province simply cannot run without you.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

An Honourable Member: Madam Speaker, I ask leave to speak to—

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, wishing leave?

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, I'm asking leave to speak to the minister's statement.

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

Mr. Gerrard: Canadian Agricultural Safety Week is a very important week. It's a week to acknowledge the important work that farmers in Manitoba to—do, the help they provide, the food they provide, and to reflect on efforts to improve farm safety in our province.

From the number of older farmers in Manitoba, it sure looks to be a safe occupation, but when you look a little closer, a 2017 report in Manitoba says, and I quote, the most dangerous work in Manitoba is in the agricultural sector. Agriculture has had more deaths in the past decade than any other sector. Between 2006 and 2015, 48 deaths occurred in the agricultural sector.

* (13:40)

There are much more than just deaths impacting health in the agricultural sector. The impact of using chemicals, including pesticides, the impact of stress on mental health is widespread from surveys and farmers. This has been exacerbated for some farmers, who are farming on Crown lands, this year by the changes in the government policies.

We have to be aware of the—what's happening with COVID-19 and the fact that in Ontario, migrant workers were at increased risk of getting COVID-19. I looked at the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy for an assessment of health in our agricultural community, and I was not able to find it. But, clearly, it is—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Manitoba Honour 150 Award Recipients

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, today I wish to put the spotlight of two Kirkfield Park constituents recently recognized as honorary 150 recipients, Linda Smiley and Logan Oxenham. These award recipients are recognized 150 Manitobans from across the province who stand out for their roles in making Manitoba such an amazing province.

Nominated by people in their own communities in 2020, these 150 individuals range from representatives that really span the diversity of our province. With volunteer engagements ranging from arts to environment, from health to education, these 150 Manitobans really make our province exceptional and very proud.

Congratulations to Linda Smiley on being one of the 150 people recognized for this honour. Nearly two decades ago, Linda joined the board of her local community centre. Within two years, she became the president, overseeing the amalgamation of the Silver Heights and Sturgeon Creek facilities into one new, improved Sturgeon Heights Community Centre, SHCC.

She was involved in the planning of the new complex and really spearheaded the fundraising drive, Madam Speaker. When the 16,300-square-foot facility opened in 2012, it was the largest community centre gym within Winnipeg at the time.

I'd also like to congratulate Logan Oxenham, who brings a necessary perspective to the justice system as the first openly transgender law enforcement officer in Manitoba. He serves to provide LGBTQ2I+ offenders access to mental health practitioners, medical doctors and community resources within the justice system.

As one of the founders of Trans Manitoba, Logan has brought the trans community members and supports together to acknowledge the concerns of gender-diverse people in Manitoba.

Thank you, Linda and Logan, for your positive contributions to our community, and congratulations to all of the honorary 150 recipients across the province.

Farmers' Protest in India

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Madam Speaker, I rise in the Chamber today to pay tribute to the 248 lives lost during peaceful protests in India due to recent agricultural reforms. My prayers are with those who were injured, beaten, met with water canyons, tear gas and faced police brutality as a consequence of standing up for their rights. The government even cut the Internet in an effort to silence protester voices.

It is no longer an issue of Indian farmers, but a globally recognized movement against corporate power for all injustices committed against common people.

In February 2021, Time magazine said the protests were a turning point for India's democracy. In March 2021, Time talked about the women leading India's farmers' protests. World-famous environmental activist Greta Thunberg tweets: We stand in solidarity with the farmers' protest in India. Celebrities such as Rihanna also show their support on social media.

East Indian communities in Winnipeg, Brandon and Steinbach are disturbed to see their brothers and sisters being treated inhumanely, which has led them to organize peaceful protests locally. Thousands of Manitobans and their families own farmland in India, and their livelihood is being negatively impacted by these so-called ag reforms. To those concerned in Burrows and across Manitoba, I hear you and I share your concerns.

My colleagues and I strongly condemn the government's mistreatment towards peaceful protesters. I expect the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his caucus to utter at least a single word on this issue.

May those sacred souls who laid their lives rest in peace.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Manitoba Honour 150 Award Recipients

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Madam Speaker, I'm pleased today to introduce four remarkable Dawson Trail residents who are recipients of the Honour 150 award.

Jen Plett has resided in Landmark since 1998 and has been a strong advocate for her community. From playgrounds in dire need of upgrades to organizing a fundraiser for a boy in the community that was hit by a car, she often concentrates her volunteer efforts on projects that benefit children and their families. Jenny says her kids inspired her to improve things for the next generation. She is known as someone who does not know the word can't.

Lexi Taylor from Anola began collecting toques and mitts for people less fortunate at the age of nine. Lexi's act of kindness soon flourished into a winter gear drive for people experiencing homelessness. She collects toques, mitts, and pairs them with bags filled with other goodies. Organizers, community volunteers also knitted and donated to her initiative, called A Little Bit of Warm. Lexi is truly dedicated to helping those experiencing homelessness.

Claudette Lavack has lived in Ste. Anne since the mid 1980s. Claudette has worked with the youth

justice committee, also organizes singalongs, baked treats for Villa Youville residents and organizes hampers each Christmas for local food banks. Retired from years of service as a principal and teacher at école Ste. Anne, she continues to volunteer at the school. Her generosity continues to lift spirits of those around her.

Dan Guetre is from Richer, Manitoba. He is inspired to volunteer by his father and carries his spirit when he organizes community events. To help his community, he has shaved his head for cancer; he has also raised over \$400,000 for Richer's ice rink. Dan did not hesitate to jump on board and help organize the annual Richer Rough Stock Rodeo. He is seen as an unstoppable force in Richer.

Madam Speaker, the recipients of this award have a positive effect in their communities. And that is why I am honoured today to call them Dawson Trail heroes.

Hue Nguyen

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, Union Station is a constituency filled with many amazing Manitoba small businesses. Today I'm honoured to rise and share a few words about Mr. Hue Nguyen and his business, Hue Shoe Repair.

At 15 years old, Hue, the son of a tailor, learned how to create shoes by hand. When Hue, who is from Vietnam, came to Canada in 1981, he almost immediately became part of the downtown business community.

Hue spent 28 years shoemaking in a shop in the basement of The Bay and then established Hue Shoe Repair at 413 Graham, where he's been for the past 12 years.

Hue's attention to detail is immeasurable. He completes shoe repairs, leather repairs, orthotics, and sharpens knives and scissors for his customers.

And because Hue refuses to compromise the quality of his work and emphasizes attention to detail, he has clients who travel all the way from The Pas and Kenora to have work completed by him.

Hue's contributions to the Winnipeg and Manitoba community and economy are immense. As soon as you walk into his shop, you immediately feel like you just walked into the living room of a friend or a family member.

I had the pleasure of meeting his son Tony, who smiled warmly and with pride when his dad shared

stories of his journey to Manitoba, about how he was a huge fan of Jets No. 10, Dale Hawerchuk, and cherished memories of his late wife.

Tomorrow, March 16, 2021, officially marks 40 years of Hue being a valued member of the downtown Winnipeg small-businesses community and our larger Manitoba family.

I'd like to ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating Hue Nguyen on this tremendous anniversary.

Hue, may you enjoy many more years of business and connecting with folks in Union Station and across Manitoba.

Thank you.

Manitoba Honour 150 Award Recipients

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): I'm always pleased to have the opportunity to rise, even virtually, before you and our colleagues at the Manitoba Legislature to recognize outstanding constituents in Brandon East.

As we celebrate Manitoba 150, I want to bring to the forefront the excellent choices made by the Honour 150 committee in recognizing two outstanding and very deserving Brandon East residents, Ryan Pandolfi and Tanya LaBuick.

* (13:50)

Madam Speaker, I am sure you have heard the saying that laughter is the best medicine. If this is indeed the case, then I can only say that Mr. Pandolfi would be one of the best doctors on the planet. With laughter as a main strategy in assisting others to deal with mental health awareness, The Pandolfi Initiative offers shows, benefit events and comedy nights dedicated to mental health.

Building on his own personal life situation and his own personal mental health challenges, Mr. Pandolfi has found a way of helping others. He inspires individuals and opens the doors by providing opportunities and relationship building for everyone experiencing mental health issues.

Madam Speaker, when it comes to recognizing community involvement and dedication, there is no better person than Tanya LaBuick. Ms. LaBuick is the principal consultant and owner of LaBuick & Co., a firm that provides projects, companies and Olympic-level experience and works hard to make sure every situation is possible. In addition, she is also an equal

partner with CW2 Construction and Design and Guardian Fencing.

Ms. LaBuick has over 20 years' experience in strategy development, including a guidance and leadership to a number of large-scale events, such as five Olympic and Paralympic Games, several Super Bowls, two FIFA Women's World Cups and numerous other projects on a national, regional and local level.

Both Mr. Pandolfi and Ms. LaBuick are focused leaders who not only work hard in their own businesses, but they also give to others through their ongoing work, by thinking of others and putting it all out there for the benefit of the community.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating both Mr. Pandolfi and Ms. LaBuick and their very worthy recognition as Manitoba one 'fifter' honourees.

Thank you.

Speaker's Statement

Madam Speaker: I have a brief statement for the House.

I would like to—I would like you to join me in celebrating a special anniversary, as today, March 15th, 2021, marks the 150th anniversary of the first sitting day of this Manitoba Legislature.

The first Manitoba Legislature sat from March 15th, 1871, to December 16th, 1874. During those sessions, 43 bills received royal assent, most of them dealing with initial administrative and judicial matters for the new government.

The first sitting day saw the election of the first Speaker, Joseph Royal, Esquire, who was immediately tasked with reading the first Speech from the Throne. This speech had been written by Lieutenant-Governor Adams George Archibald, who was appointed by the federal government and essentially served in the role of premier. Among other matters, the speech introduced instructions for members to draft laws covering the most basic of government functions. Several specific bills were mentioned in the speech, including a bill to establish the Supreme Court and Courts of General and Petty Sessions, and other bills laying the foundation for municipal governments.

Referring to the MLAs as the gentlemen of the Legislative Assembly—the first woman would not be elected to the Legislature for another 50 years—

the speech also instructed members to take over responsibility for the expenditures of the government from the federal ministers. In those early years, the ability of the Legislature to tax was limited, and 90 per cent of provincial expenditures were covered by the federal government.

It is fascinating to peruse the Estimates of Expenditure for the year ending December 31st, 1872. Members may be interested to know that the total budget for the Province of Manitoba that year was \$81,000 and—well, 100—pardon me—\$81,425. Line items in the budget included the following: \$10,000 for roads and bridges; \$6,000 for public buildings; \$7,000 for education; \$2,000 for immigration and agriculture; \$500 for the hospital of St. Boniface; \$9,330 for the operation of the 24-member Legislative Assembly, including allowances for the Speaker, the Clerk and the Sergeant-at-Arms; \$3,395 for the seven-member Legislative Council.

From 1871 to 1873, the Assembly met in a modest log house in the Red River settlement owned by A.G.B. Bannatyne, near the current corner of Main Street and McDermot Avenue. The Assembly met on the main floor, while the upper chamber, Legislative Council, met upstairs.

The first sitting day occurred in that House, and we are fortunate to have in our presence an artifact which was also present on that sitting day and many others. This would be our first mace, which members can see sitting on the Clerk's table today.

I have related to members previously that this mace was replaced by our current mace in 1884. Being so fortunate as to still have it safely in our possession, though, we bring it out for use in the House every year on Manitoba Day and other special occasions such as today.

The 150-year-old artifact you see on the table today provides a vivid and visceral connection to that first sitting day 150 years ago. I encourage you to imagine it sitting on a rustic table in a small, smoky room filled with several dozen men attempting to conduct the business of that first sitting day.

I find that thought compelling and fascinating, and I hope members can appreciate this moment for that reason. I felt it was important to mark this day in the House, and I ask you all to take a moment to reflect on the 150-year legacy of our Legislature.

Our predecessors could scarcely have imagined what the future would hold in store for our province,

nor could they have imagined the complex technological world in which we live.

I would encourage members to reflect on the solemn responsibility we all share to serve our constituents. The same responsibility faced in 1871, and recalled that whatever heated debates we have here are part of a long legacy of service to the citizens of this province.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hydro Labour Strike Arbitration Request

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, let me just begin by thanking you for that history lesson. There certainly are things that we want to keep in mind, and of course there are certainly things that we are definitely glad we have evolved on from.

However, the issue at hand today that we want to touch on is the ongoing strike at Manitoba Hydro with the IBEW members. More than 2,300 hard-working Manitobans are still out on the picket line because of this government's interference with Manitoba Hydro.

Now, all these workers really want is a chance to bargain in good faith, and yet this government is interfering with them. We know that Hydro is doing well in the current fiscal year—a hundred and—\$111 million in projected profit. That's before the government even went and increased rates in the middle of the night last year.

Will the Premier allow these IBEW workers to go to arbitration so they can get back to work?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, because we respect the bargaining process, we won't do what the Opposition Leader did and try to get personal promotional opportunities out of going on to a strike line. That's not the right thing to do; it's the wrong thing to do.

It causes, I think, all of us—and we should reflect, after the Wall report, on how negotiations might have gone now and in future at Hydro if they had \$10 billion more, Madam Speaker. But because of the NDP, they don't. They—previous NDP administration decided to gamble, roll the dice, and try to Americanize Manitoba Hydro without benefitting the workers at Hydro, frankly, or any other Manitoban either.

And so, while they put it in the dark and covered it up, we're pulling it out into the light and we're going

to have a look at it and see if we can't fix the mess they made.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, we are proud on this side of the House to stand with the Hydro workers. They're hard-working Manitobans who earn good wages doing a very important job: helping all of us to keep our houses warm in the winter, and helping to power our economy each and every day.

That's why we've announced that we are going to delay the government's Bill 35, because Bill 35 would hide all the interference that this government is carrying out with Hydro. The—it would remove the Public Utilities Board oversight that has stood in the way of this government—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —from increasing rates time and time again. Keep in mind, this is the first government ever to directly increase rates on the people of Manitoba. Bill 35 will compound that failure.

While we have a strike going on, will the Premier not only agree to send the strike to arbitration, but also agree to withdraw Bill 35?

Mr. Pallister: I know, Madam Speaker, and Manitobans know, too, that this member didn't choose to read the Wall report, and I know that he wants to misrepresent it. But he should take the time to read it because it is a document dedicated to strengthening Manitoba Hydro and strengthening the Public Utilities Board.

And if he read it with comprehension, he would know that the Public Utilities Board was ignored by the NDP government when they decided to Americanize Manitoba Hydro at the expense of workers across the province, including Hydro workers, when they decided that they would actually build the Keeyask dam before they went to the Public Utilities Board.

* (14:00)

So, Madam Speaker, any time the member wants to talk about strengthening the Public Utilities Board, I'm all for it, but the fact of the matter is he is the leader of a party that actually totally disregarded the Public Utilities Board in the past, and I expect would do it again if they had the chance.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, the Premier—the member for Fort Whyte—is going to remove the Public Utilities Board's ability to weigh in on Hydro, to have oversight over Hydro, to protect Manitobans from all the terrible hydro policies that, right now, they're currently still dreaming up.

The most significant part of the hydro—or, the Wall report on Hydro, Madam Speaker, was the former premier of Saskatchewan saying that we should break up components of Manitoba Hydro and sell them off.

Partial privatization is completely wrong, Madam Speaker, and in the midst of a strike, you would think that this government would take the opportunity to just apologize for raising rates on Manitobans, commit to sending the strike to arbitration, and of course, until these important matters are resolved, withdrawing Bill 35.

Mr. Pallister: Well, this is pretty consistent for the member. He wanted to pay David Chartrand, what, \$70 million, and he hadn't even read the agreement that we were supposed to be violating, which we of course weren't, Madam Speaker.

Now, he doesn't—he talks about apologies, how about starting with a \$10-billion apology to Manitobans for ignoring them, moving ahead with an Americanization strategy, ignoring the Public Utilities Board, ignoring the Clean Environment Commission, ignoring their own appointees on the Hydro board, ignoring hydro experts.

Madam Speaker, the member claims he knows everything, but Ed Schreyer says he and his colleagues know nothing.

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

Sale of Telecom Providers Quality of Services

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, we know that the Premier did a little happy dance this morning when he saw that another massive telecom company, Rogers, was going to buy out a smaller regional player in the form of Shaw Communications. He just so loves these giant corporations making gains at the expense of the average, hard-working Manitoban.

Remember, just a few short years ago he was the No. 1 cheerleader for the acquisition of MTS by Bell. And where are all these supposed investments in rural connectivity? Anyone who's lagging on a Zoom

meeting as we speak is still waiting. What happened to the lower rates that were supposed to arrive out of increased competition? We're still waiting, Madam Speaker.

Will the Premier admit today in the House that his obsession with rewarding large corporations is only hurting Manitobans and hasn't served connectivity one bit?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I'm really happy the member chose to raise this question, Madam Speaker, because we do rank last in Internet access after 20 years of the NDP having the chance to change that, but we're going to be changing that.

And I'm curious as to the member's ideological attacks, given the reality that when they wasted the \$10 billion up at Keeyask and bipole, they didn't favour Manitoba companies, Madam Speaker, they favoured large international companies to the tune of 80 per cent of the money—80 per cent of the money—that the NDP invested in those foolhardy schemes to drive up hydro rates.

As Ed Schreyer said, we'll be paying for that foolhardy scheme for decades to come. And he's, unfortunately, right, Madam Speaker. The NDP should apologize. They should acknowledge they favour these big companies ahead of Manitoba small businesses; that's who we're behind.

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

Manitoba Hydro Telecom Sale of Fibre Optic Network

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, the Premier seems to think that Bell is a hard-working local Manitoba company, but let me inform him, he's absolutely wrong. It's these huge corporations that swoop in, buy up the public assets and then lay off hard-working Manitobans. That's what happens when he privatized MTS. That's what will happen again when they privatize subsidiaries of Manitoba Hydro.

We own the backbone necessary to connect everyone in Manitoba right now. We own that asset through Manitoba Hydro, and yet they continue to rush headlong into a strategy of selling that off to the highest bidder.

Seeing how terribly the merger of Bell MTS has worked out for hard-working Manitobans up to now, will the Premier admit—or commit, rather, in the

House today, that Bell MTS will not be awarded the Manitoba Hydro Telecom backbone?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I was just reading a review about the Tiger Dams that was done over the last two years. The NDP gave about \$15 million in five contracts away to a friend of theirs, Madam Speaker, without shopping. They didn't tender it and then they covered it up. They didn't post it. They didn't tell anybody about it.

And you know what? It's—I used to think that was a big deal 'til I read about the Hydro thing, and then I realized they gave away \$10 billion, and that \$15 million, symbolic as it is, is a lot smaller.

So, Madam Speaker, I can only say to the member when he talks about being fair and shopping smart, he's not talking about an NDP record that anybody in this province has ever seen.

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

Mr. Kinew: We know that this government is in a rush to sell off public assets to private corporations, and it definitely seems like their obsession with trying to break up assets owned by Manitoba Hydro and sell them off to the private sector is leading towards them fulfilling that cheerleading role that they occupied when Bell bought MTS just a few short years ago.

So right now we know that there are many people across Manitoba who want to see that fibre-optic backbone used to connect people in the province at low, affordable rates. However, this government's strategy to date has absolutely failed them.

Will the Premier simply stand in the House today, admit as much and commit to the people of Manitoba that he will not auction off the fibre-optic backbone to Bell MTS?

Mr. Pallister: I just love hearing a preamble from the member about backbone, Madam Speaker, because I have to say to him, you know, his diatribes against big companies just don't fit with the actions of his party.

You know, we needed Internet services here in the government a decade ago and Gary Doer tendered out for—oh, sorry, he forgot to tender out for them, Madam Speaker. He didn't. Instead, he gave the whole contract for 10 years away—without shopping at all—to Bell.

And now the member talks about how the big, bad Bell is a villain when his government foisted money on Bell, Madam Speaker—tens of millions; didn't

know whether it was a good deal, a bad deal or anything in between because they didn't bother to shop, because when it comes to spending money, the NDP don't care about your money. They just want credit for spending it.

They don't care how much you pay in taxes. They just want you to be higher taxed. They don't care if they get value for money—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: They don't care. They just throw the money away because they didn't work for it. Manitobans worked for it.

Pharmacare Coverage for Diabetics Glucose Monitoring Devices and Medication

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Individuals living with diabetes depend on life-saving equipment and medication to have a better quality of life. Some describe having access to insulin pumps as having a life filled with freedom and peace of mind.

An insulin pump costs \$6,000, which is simply not affordable for the average Manitoban. We know that many Manitobans depend on drug coverage to reduce their costs. However, this government has not shown any commitment to expand Pharmacare for Manitobans living with diabetes. In fact, they've made these medications and devices less affordable in many cases.

Will the minister put the health of those living with diabetes first and add insulin pumps to Pharmacare, add a low-barrier program to Pharmacare and make sure that all-ages insulin pumps—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): I thank the member for their question. Of course, insulin pumps are provided for children, Madam Speaker. We are looking at ways right now to develop a strategy that will address the priority issues within diabetes for both type 1 and type 2.

Madam Speaker, we know that the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health has recently released its assessment of hybrid, closed-loop insulin delivery systems, new devices that include continuous glucose monitor capabilities as well as built-in insulin pumps. We'll continue to work with those internally to ensure that we provide the best care possible to those with diabetes in our province.

* (14:10)

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, I've met with many Manitoba families who, due to lack of coverage, are being forced to make heartbreaking sacrifices just to purchase life-saving devices or medications. That's why we wrote a letter to the minister inquiring about coverage for continuous glucose monitoring devices, insulin pumps and insulin.

Madam Speaker, the minister's response shamefully showed absolutely no commitment whatsoever to adding CGM devices to Pharmacare and starting coverage for all age groups in Manitoba.

Will the minister commit to expanding Pharmacare and ensure that CGMs are covered for all age groups in Manitoba?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I believe the member should have listened to the answer in the first question.

But, Madam Speaker, there is a process in place. Of course, right now the non-insurable health benefits team is currently reviewing that report that they received from the federal government, and we'll continue to work with them to see that, you know—through the process, to see what we can do in terms of providing the best possible services to those living with diabetes in our province.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, I heard the minister's answer. I don't think she heard my question, so I'll repeat it.

All Manitobans living with diabetes deserve to have coverage for life-saving medications and equipment. This government has cut the special drug program and changed its funding for compound medications. They've also cut \$1 million in coverage for blood glucose test strips for type 2 diabetes in Manitoba.

What we see here, Madam Speaker, is a government more invested in making cuts than in preserving the health of Manitobans and making this prescription medication and life-saving equipment more affordable.

I'll ask once again: Will the minister work towards including the coverage of insulin pumps, insulin and continuous glucose monitoring devices in Pharmacare for all age groups?

Mrs. Stefanson: The member opposite is just wrong. We're actually expending more than \$600 million more than the NDP ever did when they were in office, Madam Speaker.

And I will also remind them, Madam Speaker, that they had 17 years to address this very, very important issue for these individuals in our province, and they failed.

Madam Speaker, where they failed, we will ensure that we work with those out there who are suffering with this illness to ensure that they get the best possible solution to their issues. We are awaiting the recommendation of this review and we'll continue to work without the—with those out there in the community as well as our health-care workers.

Advanced Education Administration Act Request to Withdraw Bill 33

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Madam Speaker, this government has spent the last few years stripping power from our democratic institutions. One striking example of this is the government's continued interference and unconstitutional meddling with our post-secondary institutions.

This Premier (Mr. Pallister) and this Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) deliberately interfered with collective bargaining processes, dictated financial terms of the agreement, and now they're bringing forward Bill 33, which gives the minister even more power to regulate and control tuition and student fees.

Will the minister commit today to scrap Bill 33?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): I'm glad to stand up to put a few factual words on the record, Madam Speaker.

Bill 33 will change The Advanced Education Administration Act to provide more flexibility in the oversight of tuition and fees set by a board. Fees set by student unions and associations are not included in the definition of student fees, as they are approved by students in a democratic process.

Madam Speaker, I encourage the NDP member to be factual and stop fear-mongering Manitoba students.

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

Mr. Moses: Madam Speaker, it's clear that Bill 33 actually gives this provincial government far too much power. It actually does undermine university

governments, and it is far too vague about what—the extra power the minister will have.

Despite what the minister says, we know that bill—legislation like Bill 33, what it did to students in Ontario, where it dramatically defunded, their critics were silenced and, eventually, the legislation was ruled unlawful—that it was unlawful interference with the internal governance of universities.

This minister still has time to change course.

Will he commit today to throw out Bill 33?

Mr. Ewasko: Well, here we go again, Madam Speaker: the member from St. Vital, sitting in his spot and being disingenuous with Manitoba students and Manitoba residents.

Manitoba approach will be regulating tuition and fees and will align with other western Canadian jurisdictions, Madam Speaker. Our government is listening and taking action. Student success and quality of programs are absolutely vital and key.

Our government continues to work and collaborate with all Manitobans, including speakers—or, students, Madam Speaker—and the Speaker.

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

Mr. Moses: You know, this legislation will directly impact Manitoban students, and they have the right to both transparency from this government and consultation with this government. The government has provided neither.

We know that placing financial restraints on university administration will lead to disruptions in services on campus. Students are concerned that, with this bill—in terms of their mental health services, food bank levies and other valuable programs. At the very least, the minister should provide assurances that these associations will not experience interference as a result of Bill 33.

Will the minister apologize to students, work with students and faculty, withdraw Bill 33 and commit to bringing in a new bill in the future?

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Ewasko: I'm glad the member brings up collaboration and supports to students. Since we have formed government, Madam Speaker, we've put in \$30 million into scholarships and bursaries to support students, over \$60 million in student loans year after year, Madam Speaker.

We on this side of the House collaborate, listen and support students, Madam Speaker. The NDP gave Manitobans many examples of their inability to collaborate—10 billion reasons.

Immigrant Integration Program Future Funding Plans

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Madam Speaker, the Manitoba Immigrant Integration Program provides funds for programs who are not eligible for federal supports. This bridge funding is important and ensures that newcomers don't fall through the cracks of our immigration system. The funding is year to year and, unfortunately, service providers have yet to receive any confirmation on their status in this new fiscal year.

Will the minister commit to maintaining funding for the Manitoba Immigrant Integration Program?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): It gives me great pleasure to stand up and finally put some facts on the record and get a question from this critic, Madam Speaker. We know that Manitoba is a great place to live, to work, play and, of course, educate and raise a family. More than 130,000 people have come to Manitoba and have called it home.

The Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program, we know that was originated by a PC government—matter of fact, the wonderful PC MLA, Ms. Bonnie Mitchelson, brought forward. And it is a strong program that continues to live and breathe today, Madam Speaker.

* (14:20)

Thank you.

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

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, I know that the minister is new in this portfolio, but the MIIP is different from the MPNP program, okay?

So, the service providers have reached out and they've have been a discussion with the department. They are very concerned. They have staff in place to support this work and they support vulnerable clients. All of this is at risk.

The Immigrant Integration Program fills a gap in federal programming, supporting language and employment training and supports for youth and families. We're now two weeks from the end of the fiscal year, Madam Speaker, and these organizations

still have no indication whether the province will continue to provide support.

Will the minister provide that assurance today?

Mr. Ewasko: And it's nice that the critic wants to stand in her place today and talk about funding for many fantastic people that are coming to our province, Madam Speaker.

I know that the members across the aisle, the NDP government—the former NDP government—wasted \$10 billion—\$10 billion—whereas many of those dollars could be put into place in regards to—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: —helping our new—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: —immigrants come to this great province of ours and start a life and build our economy up.

We on this side of the House have a deep appreciation for those newcomers coming to Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I look forward to the critic's next question.

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

Ms. Marcelino: Madam Speaker, the minister is not even giving these newcomer settlement programs the two weeks notice that they need to lay off their staff. The supports for newcomers are needed now more than ever.

These organizations that provide these programs to newcomers are on year-to-year contracts. They have hired staff. The funding runs out at the end of the month. The Immigrant Integration Program should continue. But, Madam Speaker, they tell me that no plan, no direction, no commitment has been communicated by the Pallister government.

Will this minister stand at his place and provide that commitment and assure Manitobans that the Immigrant Integration Program will continue in the coming fiscal year?

Mr. Ewasko: I'd like to thank my critic for the question.

We know that on this side of the House we are putting in funding for many of our programs that we see that are strong and, as the member from St. Johns

is asking further questions from her seat, I know that she'll have an opportunity to do that in a little bit.

When we formed the new Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, we're basically showing the commitment that we have as a government, forming the new department to make sure that is there to support newcomers today and tomorrow and going into the future, Madam Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Child-Care Centres Operating Grant Update

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): Madam Speaker, last week the minister tabled legislation that would rip up the existing child-care act. In its place, the minister has proposed a great deal of uncertainty and the most important provisions of this new bill will be set at the Cabinet table.

And the bill has certainly left confusion amongst child-care communities. A promise announcement on funding levels on Friday failed to happen.

Why did the minister not provide this update as promised, and will she commit to increasing operating funding today?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I do want to thank the members opposite for reaching out to me for a bill briefing. I was very happy to sit down with her earlier, and I thought we'd had a very productive and very collaborative conversation about Bill 47 and the very positive things that Bill 47 is going to do.

She spoke of operating funding, and I'd like to just remind the House and all Manitobans that Budget 2020 had invested \$181 million in the child-care system, which is \$20 million more than the NDP ever did. And I'm looking forward to April 7th, when our Finance Minister tables another budget that will invest even more money for child care in the province of Manitoba.

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

Ms. Adams: Child-care centres are waiting for operating funding so they can keep their doors open. They've been waiting since 2016. Friday has come and gone. It's long past time. The facilities need to—their funding increases so they can continue to provide quality child care.

Instead, this minister has served up a great deal of uncertainty with Bill 47. It defers the most important

decisions to the Cabinet table, yet the KPMG guidelines that the government used to—are being withheld until after the debate.

Why is the minister concealing her true intentions with Bill 47?

Ms. Squires: I would like to take the opportunity to thank the nearly 4,000 Manitobans who provided input into Bill 47 through our survey online through the EngageMB process. I also do want to thank my parent advisory council for providing input and feedback that meet—that I meet biweekly with to provide information into the child-care sector.

And I really want to thank all those in the sector who have been providing information to the government on transformations that they need to see and I just want to thank them for the work that they've done throughout this past year during times of COVID to ensure that their child-care centres are there to provide the service when Manitobans need it the most.

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

Ms. Adams: Madam Speaker, despite the Pallister government exercise in distraction last week, the existing child-care act contains flexibility to allow for part-time centres, overnight facilities and facilities in dance studios. Those legislations are already accommodating in the existing act.

What the new legislation does is—the Pallister government wants is to give money to for-private centres. The fact is that's the primary goal of Bill 47.

Why is the minister set on giving public dollars to for-private centres?

Ms. Squires: I know that the NDP approach was to care more about ideology than creating daycare spaces, in—since we formed government, we have created more than 2,500 new spaces in the province.

I'd also like to point out that perhaps the member should contact her colleagues in British Columbia, which has over 50 per cent of their licensed child-care spaces in the for-profit model. Manitoba only has 5 per cent in the for-profit industry, but her NDP colleagues can school her on the benefits of a for-profit centre, as what they're doing in British Columbia, among many other provinces throughout the country.

Fiscal Stabilization Account Use for Education System

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): School divisions across the province are facing millions in shortfalls because, in the middle of a crisis, they spent the money to keep staff and children safe when this government would not. Schools had to invest in everything from infection control to technology to keep teaching our children under incredible stress, and this government is still sitting on back-to-school funding from September.

Boasts about record funding promises ring hollow when this is a one-in-100-year pandemic. The people who are left behind are vulnerable students and they will need more resources to catch up, not less.

Is this government willing to use the rainy day fund to ensure that emergency COVID costs will be completely covered and to make sure students can catch up, or will the reward for keeping our students safe be a pink slip?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, we're one of the leading governments in the country in investing in education on a per capita basis—I believe we're ranked third, and close to second—but we're tenth in results. And so I'm excited to hear, and I hope all Manitobans who value education will be excited to hear, the plans for education reform, to put our children first and to move education forward in a positive way for our children.

And I would encourage the member to familiarize himself with the recommendations that emanated from months of consultation with well over 10,000 Manitobans. I think it would be worth his time to study that prior to asking his next question.

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

Education System Review Political Influence on Report

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): This government keeps talking about sacrifice, but last year demanded 15 per cent cuts and keeps complaining about top-heavy administration in education. We now have three ministers talking about health, two for education and the Department of Education now has three assistant deputy ministers when there used to be two, and one was bilingual.

* (14:30)

The K-to-12 review will abolish school boards, and it turns out this government will handpick principals. It's clear to us that in the last year, teachers, school divisions and students all pulled through despite this government, not because of it.

Has the Premier ever considered the real problem with our school system is not the teachers or the school divisions, but the politicians like himself who've been running the system for decades? How much did Treasury Board rewrite this report?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): As usual, Madam Speaker, the member left the ranch, went for a run around the entire country and came back without a conclusion.

I can only assume that he wants more administrative costs, not fewer. I can only assume that he wants poorer results, not better.

We want to move the resources that we spend, in abundance, in education to the classroom where they can help our children. That's our focus.

Education System and COVID-19 Provincial Use of Federal Funds

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): The provincial government was provided \$85 million from the federal government to reopen our schools safely for the 2020-21 school year and, evidently, the Province decided not to use all of this money.

The Pallister government claimed that the Remote Learning Support Centre would cost \$10 million, yet—and I am tabling a FIPPA document from this past January proving this—no teachers were hired and there is no record of responses to the request for teachers needed in the remote learning centre.

Would the minister please explain why no teachers were hired and what happened with the \$10 million?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education): Madam Speaker, we recognized the pandemic, COVID-19 was going to cause some stress in the education system. That's why we've set aside \$185 million.

We expect by the end of this school year—the end of June—we will have allocated \$154 million of that 185. We're doing what school boards have asked us to do. We're actually carrying money over into the next year so there will be money available to fight COVID into the next school year.

Madam Speaker, we have close to 100 people already employed at the remote learning centre, and there's more to come.

Centennial Concert Hall Funding for Restoration

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): Madam Speaker, I know that everyone in this House is doing their part to help stop the spread of COVID-19. While we all miss attending cultural events in person, we also know that this pandemic will not last forever.

In the meantime, it is important to support our arts and cultural infrastructure. That's why our government is making investments to support the province's premier venue, the Centennial Concert Hall.

Can the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage please update this House on these important investments?

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage.

The honourable Minister of Sport—would the member please unmute?

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): Okay, I'll try it again.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleague, the MLA for Lagimodière, for this opportunity to share the significant investments our government is making to support our heritage, arts and cultural community here in our province.

Madam Speaker, the iconic Centennial Concert Hall is one of the most prominent buildings in Manitoba and home to our Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, the Manitoba Opera and our famous Royal Winnipeg Ballet.

I'm proud to share with the House today that our government is investing \$12.5 million for upgrades and renovations to restore the Centennial Concert Hall's exterior. This is in addition, Madam Speaker, to the \$16 million we previously allocated in 2019 for capital improvements.

And while the former government left behind tens of millions of dollars of—

Madam Speaker: The honourable member's time has expired.

Rural Agricultural Services MASC Office Closures

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Madam Speaker, two weeks ago, the Minister of Agriculture refused to reverse the plan to close 21 Manitoba Agriculture and MASC offices. He said this is what farmers have been asking for.

However, on the side of—on this side of the House, we have been conducting real consultations with Manitoban farmers, ranchers and community members. The overwhelming response has been that these Manitobans do not believe that losing these offices will benefit them in any way.

Will the minister change course today and commit to keeping MASC and ag offices open?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development): The member should realize that today's service realities have changed over the years, and governments need to keep pace with producers.

Today's farmers are using smart phones and tablets and computers for quick access to information, and we need to make sure that we have that information for them on a timely basis so they can submit their reports on a timely basis in the method that they choose to do it.

That's why our new service centres are going to have both in-person, email and phone—be able to access the information. And it's something that the producers are very much looking forward to, and we look forward to serving our client base in a much better fashion.

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

Mr. Brar: I think the minister should know that these devices need Internet and connectivity for them to be usable. Modernization should not mean that in-person services close to home become completely unavailable.

We know that a big issue for many Manitobans in rural communities is lack of high-speed Internet, and it has caused many challenges during the pandemic. To transition to a greater reliance on online services is simply not realistic for many farmers and ranchers. This is not modernization; this is cutting important services and good jobs in rural Manitoba to save money.

Will the minister commit today to reverse his decision to close MASC and ag offices on April 1st?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): The NDP cared so little about farmers and farm families they put a couple of billion dollars of bipole lines right through farmers' fields all over the province of Manitoba, Madam Speaker, for no good reason except to Americanize our Manitoba Hydro.

But I want to share with the House the Canadian Labour Force survey job numbers for January to February, because it's good news for Manitobans, and I think a tribute to our Manitoba small-business community.

Total jobs edged up by 16,000 month over month. That is more than double the rate for Canada. Our labour force increased by over 8,000 people; that's 10 times the increase—percentage increase for the country. Full-time employment was up more than the Canadian average; part-time employment was up double the Canadian average. Madam Speaker, private sector employment increased by double the rate for Canada.

Good news: Manitoba's unemployment rate is the second lowest in the country. Madam Speaker, Manitoba small businesses are responding to this recovery—a gradual, measured recovery—and they are hiring people back and more Manitobans are working. And, Madam Speaker, that's just the beginning as we spring back into progress in this province together.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Public Child-Care Grants

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background for this petition is as follows:

The pandemic has emphasized the need for quality, affordable and accessible child care that demonstrates that the government has failed to ensure child care is accessible for all Manitobans.

Over 90 per cent of Manitoba children receive child care through non-profit, licensed centres, and yet the funding has been frozen to 2016. These cuts have resulted in many childhood educators leaving the sector.

While child-care centres are faced increasing costs associated with lost parent fees due to

COVID-19 closures, the thousands on PPE, and went to—when open, to keep kids safe, the provincial government has provided no additional financial support.

The government has spent less than 1 per cent of the \$18-million temporary child-care grant, and instead they gave KPMG double their contract, nearly \$600,000, to conduct a review that will raise parent fees and lay the groundwork for privatization.

The provincial government has cut nursery school grants and doubled parent fees for hundreds of families, making child care less affordable.

* (14:40)

The Province introduced Bill 43, a budget implementation and tax status amendment act, which removes the cap on child-care fees for the private sector business.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse changes to the nursery school grants and to end the funding freeze on child-care centres' operating grants while committing to keeping public, affordable child care accessible for all Manitobans.

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

The honourable member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare)?

The honourable member for Union Station?

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): No, it's okay.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard)? The honourable member for River Heights, on a petition? No?

The honourable member for Elmwood?

The honourable member for Elmwood needs to unmute. We can't hear you. Can the honourable member for Elmwood unmute his mic? We will have to come back.

The honourable member for St. Vital?

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): No petition today, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Okay. The honourable member for St. James (Mr. Sala)? The honourable member for The Maples?

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): No petition today, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Okay. The honourable member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv)?

The honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe)?

The honourable member for Elmwood, have the technical problems resolved?

We cannot hear him. We are not hearing any sound—

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I will set up on a different computer.

Madam Speaker: —and the member is apparently not wearing a headset, so there—the sound is not coming through. So I think we're going to have to move forward from petitions today.

Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Could you please call for second reading debate Bill 68, Bill 47 and Bill 40?

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider the following bills this afternoon: Bill 68, Bill 47 and Bill 40.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 68—The Legislative Assembly Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: So, therefore, we will now move to second reading of Bill 68, The Legislative Assembly Amendment Act.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Legislative and Public Affairs): I move, seconded by the Minister of Agriculture, that Bill 68, The Legislative Assembly Amendment Act, be now read for a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Goertzen: This bill would move the reporting requirement for members' allowances, the report, the annual report for members' allowances and indemnities for members from the Department of Finance to the Speaker, Madam Speaker, as it is the Speaker who is more directly responsible for matters of members' allowances and indemnities. And it would also then move the reporting requirement for

severance allowance from members' allowance to the report of the Speaker.

So, again, this is moving things from a place where it doesn't quite align, in terms of who is responsible and most directly answerable for certain things, into the place where it should be, Madam Speaker.

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.

Are there any questions? If there are no questions, is the House ready for the—

An Honourable Member: No, I have a—

Debate

Madam Speaker: Oh—the floor is open for debate.

Oh. The honourable member for River Heights, is there a question?

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): No, I would like to debate the bill.

Madam Speaker: Okay. There being no further questions, then, the floor is open for debate.

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, I just want to say very briefly that we think this measures in this bill are reasonable and are ready to support it. Thank you.

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

Is the House ready for the question?

The question before the House is second reading of Bill 68, The Legislative Assembly Amendment Act.

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

I declare the motion carried.

Bill 47—The Early Learning and Child Care Act

Madam Speaker: We will now move to second reading of Bill 47, The Early Learning and Child Care Act.

The honourable Minister of Families to move second reading of Bill 47, The Early Learning and Child Care Act.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I move, seconded by the Minister of Health, that Bill 47, The Early Learning and Child Care Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Families, seconded by the honourable Minister of Health, that Bill 47, The Early Learning and Child Care Act, be read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

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

Ms. Squires: It is my pleasure to rise and debate this piece of legislation that will enable the modernization of our early learning and child-care sector to better meet the needs of children and parents in our province. Bill 47 repeals The Community Child Care Standards Act and replaces it with a new regulatory framework that is more responsive to families.

Bill 47 enshrines our commitment to an early learning and child-care system that ensures the health, safety, development and well-being of all children; enhances the economic opportunities available to parents; promotes a continuum of child-care options that are responsive to the diverse needs of families; promotes inclusion, respect and diversity; and promotes fiscal responsibility and the sustainability of early learning and child-care services.

Under the current system, parents employed in lower wage jobs and jobs with non-standard hours often experience great difficulties in finding child-care arrangements that work for them. The current act does not enable the types of flexible care that can meet these needs.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the child-care sector has made the necessity for change abundantly clear. We recognize that parents know best about the types of child care that they can access

and that works for them. Focusing on parents' needs as influencing the growth of the early learning and child-care services is central to modernizing our child-care system.

Bill 47 supports this modernization by enabling the expansion of accessible, high-quality early learning and child care within the licensed and regulated sector. The importance of early learning experiences for children is well recognized in terms of supporting and encouraging lifelong learning, health and well-being.

Early learning programs are an essential building block for a child's future success and for the future growth of our economy. Bill 47 provides an increased focus on early learning services. It introduces the concept of early learning into Manitoba's child-care legislation, defining it as a program of learning experiences that supports a child's social, emotional, physical and cognitive development.

New provisions will also require licensed centre-based child-care providers to provide approved early learning programming to preschool children. Bill 47 will continue to provide grants to licensed and regulated child-care providers for operations and to support the care and supervision of children.

* (14:50)

As with licensing, the new legislation will enable a more flexible approach that will support a range of future child-care options. Bill 47 also improves accessibility by continuing financial assistance to parents who use licensed facilities in conjunction with related financial supports under other legislation.

Our government appreciates the skills, knowledge and dedication of our early childhood educators and child-care assistants in providing the high-quality child care. I especially want to thank them for continuing to maintain those high standards during the pandemic.

Bill 47 ensures that high-quality early learning and child care will continue within the regulated sector. This new legislation sets out and clarifies the procedure and requirements for obtaining a certificate, allowing baseline requirements for certification and varying those requirements for more flexibility where necessary.

Finally, Madam Speaker, Bill 47 modernizes Manitoba's child-care legislation by updating provisions that were introduced more than 30 years ago. The new act is streamlined and structured to

make the provisions easier to understand and apply. Maximum fines are updated in line with levels in other provincial statutes and in child-care legislation and other provinces. Processes such as reviews of decisions and inspection processes are also updated and clarified.

Bill 47 is a vital part in the modernization of Manitoba's child-care system and also in Manitoba's economic recovery and growth. Just as importantly for parents and children, Bill 47 will enable the expansion of choice, options and supports to meet the diverse needs of families, especially those most in need of early learning and child-care services.

I look forward to further discussions on Bill 47 in committee and the support of the House in passing this new legislation that will support the creation of a modernized early learning and child-care system in Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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.

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): Last week, the minister suggested that this bill enables overnight child care, part-time daycare and daycare in dance studios.

Is the minister aware that the current Community Child Care Standards Act facilitates all of this currently?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I think it is incumbent on our government to continue to accelerate options for families in accessing child care that meets their needs, whether it's in the evening, weekends or during the day.

I would like to highlight that when we took office, we were operating—we were providing operating grants of \$99 million to child-care centres. That grant was \$119.6 million in last fiscal. Our fully funded spaces rose from 30,000 when we took office to 34,796 today.

That's a trend we're going to continue, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Adams: The heartbeat of this bill is really about allowing for-profit child-care centres to receive funding from the Province of Manitoba.

Can the minister point to any research that suggests that this would improve the quality of care in Manitoba centres?

Ms. Squires: It's really unfortunate that the member doesn't understand quality assurance in our child-care spaces. If a child-care space is licensed, it will adhere to the quality control framework that is in place. It doesn't matter where that licensed space is. If it is licensed by the Province of Manitoba, it has the same strict adherence that all spaces do.

And so, quality assurance, whether it's in one centre or at home, whether it's in a for-profit or a non-profit, the quality assurance framework remains the same. It is about building a consistent, reliable child-care network for families that have a variety of needs throughout the province of Manitoba.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, I have a two-part question, and the first is why the KPMG report has not been released when we're debating this bill already. This doesn't seem to make any sense.

And second, how is the minister going to streamline the certification process for early learning and child-care providers?

Ms. Squires: I did indicate on Friday that I would be releasing the KPMG report along with the parent survey that includes survey respondents—4,000 respondents—into our Manitoba EngageMB survey. I'd be releasing that within 30 days. I did need to give my department some time to collate those responses that we heard from families, and then we'll be releasing both of those reports at the same time.

And I'd like to come back to his other question in my next—at my next opportunity.

Ms. Adams: Today, in the briefing, the staff from the department suggested that they were considering implementing a new classification of worker.

Will the minister use this to enhance the amount of trained staff in child-care centres or an opportunity to lower the standards?

Ms. Squires: And again, I do want to thank the member opposite, who did come to my office and we did have a very productive, collaborative briefing on this very important bill. And I do also want to thank

her for bringing to my attention a successful initiative in Thompson right now that is a joint partnership with University College of the North. And I'd like to take an opportunity to thank them for their hard work and for implementing a program, along with a work placement that is, according to the member, very practical.

And I do look forward to hearing more about what is being instituted in Thompson, on the ground, as I understand that it works very effectively in looking at other options for maybe in-rolling that out in other parts of the province, if parents want that and if the sector requires it.

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, let me go back to the second part of my first question, which was streamlining the certification process for early learning and child care.

Precisely how will the minister do this?

Ms. Squires: Right. I want to thank the member for the question and his patience in allowing me an opportunity to get around and answer that question in the time allotted to me.

So, as the member knows, right now there is a wide chasm between child-care aide and an ECE II, with no ladders in between, and we just want to create the opportunity for there to be laddering for different entry points for people to enter the career if they wish to work in the sector. And this legislation is enabling legislation, but those details, of course, would be in regulations that we would work along with our—the ministerial consultation table, parent advisory councils, all—and all Manitobans.

Ms. Adams: How much of the \$18 million for funding announced last year in child-care centres has been spent?

Ms. Squires: So, Madam Speaker, we have been providing additional streams for our child-care sectors—streams of money that wasn't available to them before—and we were very happy to announce 11 and a half million dollars that went into a child-care sustainability trust that is being managed through The Winnipeg Foundation, and we were—are offering an annual intake.

The intake is currently open—or pardon me, it closed just the other day, and we are looking to roll out that money very soon to child-care centres who have applied to this brand-new child-care sustainability trust to receive money for supplies that they might need in their centre. And we believe that

it's a really good program that will help child-care centres when they need it the most.

Mr. Gerrard: Just to follow up to my last question, I understand that right now, often, somebody who starts in child care, who may have a psychology degree, would be treated, from a salary prospective, the same as a health care—or a child-care aide.

Is it the minister's intent, then, to change the funding ladder so that somebody who comes in, for example, with a psychology degree, would be treated as somebody who has more advanced knowledge than somebody with just a child-care aide?

Ms. Squires: I'd like to thank the member for that question. And that's exactly what we're trying to get at with Bill 47, is to create a framework that is more flexible and adaptive. And right now, there is very few entry points and there's very few adjustments to be made in that—the trajectory of a career in a child-care centre.

We also know that—we've heard from some parents and some families who are saying that maybe that emphasis on early learning isn't as important in a before and after program as it is in an early—as it is in a preschool program, where their main source of learning would come from the child-care centre as opposed to—we know many of the before- and after-school kids are—they've had a full day in class and maybe they need other types of supervised activities.

* (15:00)

So we really do need to consult with the industry to learn more about the requirements.

Ms. Adams: With regards to nursery schools, instead of cutting the funding to child-care centres to level off funding, why didn't this government simply increase funding to all other child-care centres?

Ms. Squires: We were very proud to announce a few weeks back that 96 nursery school programs in the province of Manitoba had received a 100 per cent increase in their funding. Their operating grant nearly doubled for this year, and that money was retroactive to January 1st of this year.

We felt that it was very important to create an equitable, level playing field for our very important nursery school operators in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, to the minister, I understand that it's the minister's intent to provide additional incentive guidance in terms of early learning. Could the minister

clarify what additional early learning requirements there might be in child care?

Ms. Squires: Of course, I do not have the answer for that, because we would be consulting with Manitobans, we would consult with the sector, my parent advisory council, the ministerial consultation table, which is comprised of sector leaders from the province, to gather and to provide advice to myself and my department, and as well as our qualifications team.

There are a broad range of people that we would want to hear from before making any type of decision in that regard. And I certainly would also want to hear input from the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), as he has come to this floor with some good ideas from time to time and I really do look forward to hearing more of them on how we can make a more robust sector.

Ms. Adams: When will the minister announce operating funding to non-profit child-care centres? She said last week that this information will be released on Friday, but that time has come and gone.

When will she inform the public?

Ms. Squires: Our government was very pleased to partner with the federal government in a bilateral agreement, and—on enhanced money for our child-care sector and we will continue to work with the federal government. And I'm looking forward to further news on our bilateral agreement and our co-operation and collaboration with my colleague in Ottawa on enhancing our child-care sector in the province of Manitoba.

Ms. Adams: During the pandemic, the Pallister government chose not to provide additional and enhanced funding to child-care centres when needed. Instead, they went to the private centres.

Why was this decision made? Why not enhance funding to non-profit daycares so they can stay open?

Ms. Squires: While the member once again has it wrong, our government did provide significant supports, including 1.6 million individual PPE items, \$1.4 million through the Risk Recognition Program.

We flowed \$90 million in operating grants—even if the centres were unable to remain open, we still flowed their operating grants to them—as well as over \$15 million through a one-year extension of the bilateral agreement with the federal government and a \$2.4-million grant in response to COVID-19

expenses to help the child-care centres with their COVID-related expenses.

So I'd ask the member to reflect on that before she makes another assertions that we were not supportive of the child-care sector during COVID.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, a follow up to one of my earlier questions. The minister may not have tabled a KPMG report, but perhaps the minister could explain how the KPMG report influenced the current legislation.

Ms. Squires: We received a lot of input from a lot of sources. This is something that is incredibly important that we get it right. I know myself, as having raised five children, I wouldn't have been able to go to work and I know that many people in this Chamber wouldn't have been able to go to work on a regular basis if it weren't for the commitment, the dedication, of our wonderful child-care sector.

And we recognize the importance of having a strong sector, and so we've listened to input from a variety of sources in terms—and a variety of voices to make sure that we get it right.

Ms. Adams: Inclusion supports availability in child-care centres have dropped every year for the past four years. In 2020, only a bare majority of centres offered inclusion supports.

Will the minister commit to ensuring a much larger number of centres are able to provide inclusion supports for children?

Ms. Squires: Once again, Madam Speaker, I would ask the member to do a little bit more research in terms of what our government has been doing to support our children who attend our early learning and child-care centres, as well as the support that we've been giving them.

We know that we inherited a broken system from the former NDP government and it is taking a lot of work to get it—to fix that system so that it is adaptive and responsive to the needs of Manitoba families and also reflective of the sector's desire to have a robust sector that can provide the needs to all Manitobans.

So we're going to continue to do the work that wasn't done under the previous NDP government in enhancing strong early learning and child-care sector here in Manitoba.

Ms. Adams: Will the minister commit that her government will commit to increasing general funding for child care?

Ms. Squires: I am very pleased to provide more information about some of the work that we have done since we formed government and, of course, I shared with the member how we have increased child-care spaces—funded child-care spaces—by nearly 4,796 since we formed office. Plus, we've also flowed more than \$20 million a year more into child care than the NDP ever did.

So I acknowledge that the member is congratulating, in some sort of backhanded way, our government for the supports that we've done. We know that more needs to be done. Our child-care sector has gone through a lot of challenges in the last year, as many sectors have, through the COVID-19 pandemic, and we're going to be here to support them so that they can open their doors and be robust in the days to come.

Ms. Adams: Madam Speaker, I'm going to ask the minister again, how much of the \$18 million announced last year has been spent on child care? I know she gave an answer of announcing a new program, but my question was how much of the \$18 million that was announced last year has been spent.

Ms. Squires: Well, we know that that temporary child-care grant for home-based centres created 180 spaces this year and that we've also announced that \$4.7-million child-care development centre development tax credit, which will create another 216 new spaces in workplaces in Winnipeg, Selkirk and Altona.

We know that a lot more work needs to be done. We need to continue creating new spaces as well as ensuring our sector is strong and stable, and that is something that our government is committed to. That is something that Bill 47 will do, and I look forward to further debate on this very important bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The time for this question period has ended.

Debate

Madam Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): I'm very happy to rise in this House and debate Bill 47. This bill does not address the needs of Manitobans. This bill does not address the needs that is needed in child care. All this bill does is open up the door to privatization for child care.

And what do we know with privatization? When private sector gets involved in the care sector, services go down and fees go up.

This is not about protecting families. This isn't about making child care more accessible for Manitobans. This is about making it so their rich friends can make more money. That's all that this is about.

We've seen what happens in personal-care homes when the private sector gets involved. How many disasters and outbreaks did we have due to COVID-19—with COVID-19 in the personal-care-home sector? A lot. And a lot of it could have been avoided if there was more involvement from the public sector.

We know when the public sector has control that there is more investment, more accountability, and children and families would be put at the centre.

That is not the case. What is happening with child care in this province is a disgrace under this government. They have continued to cut year over year. They have cut funding levels to 2016 levels. It's 2021. It's five years. They've kept them to 2016 levels, whether the member from Kirkfield Park wants to like it or not. He's the one that made the cut. He made—the one that made the funding freeze.

So, I would ask if—the members opposite, why aren't they supporting families? Why aren't they supporting children? This is a government that is not prioritizing our children. This is a government that is prioritizing their rich friends. This is not going to help child care in Manitoba.

* (15:10)

Manitobans need quality, affordable, accessible child care. They need to know that when they are dropping their children off to go to work, that they are going to be receiving quality, affordable and accessible child care. They need to know that they can go to work and make money and not have to work to pay child care.

We need to have child-care fees be low in this province because it helps everybody. When parents aren't having to pay so much money for child care, that means they can go out to eat and get their hair done and spend money in other places, which helps drive the economy.

We can look at what happened in Quebec when they made child-care fees really low. What happened? More women participated in the workforce. This

government recently talked about low unemployment. How much of that is—how much—how many women are not working due to the pandemic?

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

There is many women that are not working due to the pandemic because they are having to take care of kids, they are having to work and do—they're having to do homeschooling and navigate that—all of that. And this government hasn't done anything for Manitoba families, especially when it comes to child care.

What is happening? This government is making it harder for child-care centres, they're making it more difficult for families and this is unacceptable. Families need to know that child care is going to be there for them. We have child-care deserts in this province—large spots of this province there is not accessible child care.

Families are not able to get the child care that they need, meaning they're relying on family and friends. The bill—that this bill introduces does not address any of those issues. Manitoba child-care centres were able to access, if they wanted to be open on Saturdays and evenings and weekends.

I toured a daycare in Dauphin that was able to do that. So obviously it's already in the act, so this bill is a red herring. This bill is just about lowering standards and making it easier for the public—private sector to get involved.

And that's unacceptable. Manitoba is known for having a wonderful child-care system. Yes, everything can be improved, but this isn't the way. This bill is not addressing anything that is needed to be done.

And I would say to the members opposite and the minister that if they really wanted to engage in—with Manitobans, I would have them read the millions of emails I've been getting about this issue—*[interjection]* Well, I've been receiving—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms. Adams: I've been getting lots of emails—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Adams: I've been getting many emails from families that have been expressing concern and outrage over this government. I had families that are telling me that they're not able to go back to work because child care wasn't available to them because they closed the centres, and they said only home daycares could open. And then they changed their

minds and said, oh, wait, no, maybe we'll let this happen.

They've caused so much chaos and confusion during this pandemic with child care. It's a disgrace. And now they've entered this Bill 47, where we're not even getting to see the KPMG review which has drafted the legislation.

That is just unacceptable. That's not democratic. Why won't they release the KPMG review? Why? Because they're—don't want Manitobans to know what's in it. They don't want Manitobans to know that they are making it easier for the private sector to get involved.

What happens? Why are we giving our tax dollars to private companies? This is corporate welfare. That is unacceptable. We need a strong, strong public sector child care in this province.

And Manitobans expect that. This is not what child care they need. They need to know that when—with increased funding, they can give wage increases. Child-care sectors, they go—ECEs go to school for two years and are paid barely minimum wage. That's unacceptable. Two years worth of school? You should be receiving a lot more money so that way you cannot have to have a part-time job so you can afford to make rent and pay bills.

This is not what we need. They need to know that this government—that a government is there for them, and this government has abandoned child care. This government has caused nothing but chaos and confusion, and they should be ashamed of themselves as how they've treated child-care workers. And it's unacceptable.

They sent expired masks to child care and are refusing to investigate how that happened. I can tell you on this side of the House that that would not stand, that we would not allow for expired masks to get handed out to the care sector, and if it did happen, we would investigate on how that happened so it didn't—wouldn't happen again.

And that's just not what's happened. I asked the former minister about that and the minister did not indicate that they were going to investigate. She said, what happened happened. Well, that's not acceptable on this side of the House, and what's—that's what's happening.

On the child-care bill, with Bill 47, we're putting more stuff at the child—they're putting more stuff at the Cabinet table. Well, we know what's happening at that

Cabinet table: nothing. They don't care about Manitobans. They're only putting themselves and their friends first.

What about other Manitobans? There is more to Manitobans than just the people who voted for them. And I'm hoping—and by all accounts—that next time, it'll be reversed. We'll be on that side of the House, and we will be in government, and we will put Manitobans first, unlike members opposite who do not care about Manitobans, and they have shown that.

Bill 47 is a disgrace to child care and it should not stand.

If this minister is so proud of the—of her bill, she— they should be tabling KPMG report to show the—and be transparent. That is not transparent. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms. Adams: This bill is atrocious to women. This bill does not address any of the issues that families are facing. This bill is—women are predominantly in the child-care sector, and this is unacceptable.

This bill needs to be—they need to throw the bill out and restart and actually consult with Manitobans, actually consult with child-care workers because this bill does not address any of that. All this bill does is open up the private sector, and we have to look at other provinces where people are paying hundreds and hundreds of dollars for child care.

There's provinces where people are paying over \$1,000 for child care. That's not acceptable. That's not affordable. Nobody is able to afford to pay for—pay over thousands of dollars in child-care fees. That is what this government is proposing. That is why they're not showing the KPMG report. That is why they're not addressing the issues today.

Manitobans need to know that child care is a priority, and I can tell you, on this side of the House, child care is a priority. On that side of the House, child care is just an afterthought in how they can make more and helping their friends make more money, which is unacceptable. Manitobans did not vote for that.

This government has been doing all 'soats'—sorts of things under the table and secretly, which is why it can't just—decisions can't be made at the Cabinet table. If you're so proud of the decision, show it the light of day. They tabled this bill in November, and it's now been how many months and they're now just showing it.

It's unacceptable, and this government needs to be held, and I'm proud to stand with the side of the—this side of this House that is showing and holding this government to account and stopping them from doing their horrible legislation and their secret agendas, because that is unacceptable.

It is a secret agenda when you table legislation in November and don't disseminate it until Friday or Thursday. That's unacceptable. Why is the minister ashamed of this bill? Well, because it opens the door to privatization. It opens the door to lowering standards. It opens the door to making it so child—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

I just want to remind—also remind the member to speak to the Chair when they're—when discussion on the debate.

Ms. Adams: This bill is not what Manitobans need. Child care is something that is very important to families. I know from my own experience with working the—working on a board of a child-care sector that child care is so needed, and when I was part of a child-care board that needed supports, this government wasn't there. This government left our child-care sector just out there.

We had applied for a grant so we could renovate our child-care centre and our new location, and this government had frozen C-D-F funding. When we went to—for support and called on for assistance, they just weren't there.

And that's what's happening now is child-care sector workers are saying, we need help. We need a government that's going to stand up for us. We need a government that's going to be there for us. And this government's not. This government has, once again, abandoned child-care workers. They've abandoned families. They are not putting Manitobans first, and it's a shame and it's disgraceful, and they should be ashamed of themselves.

This is not what Manitoba is about. Manitoba is about making sure everybody has access to quality, affordable child care. Manitoba was on the forefront of public child care. We are the—one of the envies of the country when it comes to child care, and this government, in a stroke of a pen, is proudly standing up and saying, we don't care about child care in Manitoba; we don't care about Manitobans; and we are more interested in supporting our rich friends and our rich donors to make more money off the backs of Manitobans.

* (15:20)

And that is unacceptable, and I stand in this House and I am going to say I will proudly vote against Bill 47, because it doesn't address the needs for Manitobans.

And I look forward to the day when we are on this—the other side of the House, and we are getting rid of Bill 47 and implementing a bill that will actually address the needs of Manitobans.

Thank you.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Is there leave of the House to revert back to petitions for the member—Elmwood?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there leave from the House to revert back to petitions for the honourable member for Elmwood to present his petition? *[Agreed]*

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

(Continued)

PETITIONS

(Continued)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Elmwood, on a petition.

Diagnostic Testing Accessibility

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

The background of—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Could the honourable member for Elmwood, please put his mic on, because we can't hear you very well.

Mr. Maloway: We're not getting anywhere here again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Maloway: It worked before. Hello.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We just have to speak louder, then.

Mr. Maloway: Oh. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That's better.

Mr. Maloway: —so you can't—you can hear me a bit then.

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by many Manitobans.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

(Continued)

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I'm asking leave of the House, after consultation with the Official Opposition House Leader (Ms. Fontaine) and the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), to bring forward a motion regarding a Sessional Order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it will of the House to bring the—is there leave from the House—is it leave for the

House to interrupt bill amendment—Bill 47, and go back to government's motion for Sessional Order?

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

GOVERNMENT MOTION

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I thank members of the House.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Agriculture, THAT the following Sessional Order applies for the 3rd Session of the 42nd Legislature, despite any other rule or practice of this House.

THAT in the event of a discrepancy with the existing rules, the provisions of the Sessional Order are to apply.

Deadline dates

1. To be considered specified, government bills before the House must be distributed to all members by 5 p.m. on March 16, 2021.
2. The deadlines for specified bills will be moved to the following sitting days:
 - (a) Second reading—March 24 and 25, 2021
 - (b) Official opposition designation of five bills—March 24, 2021, to be announced at the beginning of orders of the day
 - (c) Committee stage—April 27, 2021
 - (d) Committee reports—April 28, 2021
 - (e) Report stage—May 11, 2021
 - (f) Concurrence and third reading—May 20, 2021
3. On March 24 and 25, 2021, if the House has not reached orders of the day by 3:30 p.m., the Speaker will terminate routine proceedings and proceed directly to orders of the day.

Debate

4. On March 15, 16, 17, 18 and 23, 2021, during orders of the day, government business, the Government House Leader may only call for debate second readings of bills which may be considered specified.

5. On March 22, 2021, the House will consider Interim Supply, with the House to not see the clock until royal assent of the interim appropriation act is granted. If royal assent occurs before 5 p.m. the Government House Leader may only call for debate

second reading of bills which may be considered specified.

6. On March 24, 2021, starting at the beginning of orders of the day, government business, the provisions outlined for limited debate on specified bills in rule 2(10) will apply, with the exception that after each debate concludes the Speaker shall put the question.

7. The hour of adjournment on May 24, 2021—seven, the hour of adjournment on March 24th, 2021 will be midnight.

8. On March 25, 2021, starting at the beginning of orders of the day, government business, the provisions outlined for limited debate on specified bills in rule 2(10) will apply, with the exception that after each debate concludes the Speaker shall put the question.

9. At midnight on March 25, 2021, for any remaining specified bills, the ministers shall move the second reading motions, and the Speaker shall put the questions immediately, without debate, the division bells shall ring for no more than one minute on each question, and the House shall rise following the consideration of the last motion.

General Provisions

10. A recorded division on any item referred to in this Sessional Order cannot be deferred.

11. During the limited debates outlined in items 6, 8 and 9, matters of privilege and points of order will be deferred until 1:30 p.m. on the next sitting day.

12. The adoption by the House—12, after adoption by the House, this Sessional Order may be amended only by:

- (a) unanimous consent of the House;
- (b) passage of a subsequent Sessional Order by the House; or
- (c) written agreement of all House leaders, if the House is not sitting.

13. This Sessional Order will expire when the House rises on June 1, 2021.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member—the honourable Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen), seconded by the honourable Minister for Agriculture,

That the following Sessional Order supplies for the third—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Dispense? And dispense is so ordered.

Is the pleasure—is there any speakers? No speakers?

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

So the motion is accordingly carried.

SECOND READINGS

(Continued)

Bill 47—The Early Learning and Child Care Act

(Continued)

Debate

(Continued)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now we will resume Bill 47, The Early Learning and Child Care Act. Any speakers?

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to speak for a few minutes on Bill 47.

It is surprising, to start with, that this bill has one of its main organizing approaches based on a report from KPMG. Furthermore, that report from KPMG is not available to us as we debate the bill. This is a little difficult to understand why this has happened because the bill was introduced at first reading November 2nd, and so the ministers had more than four months to get things together so that the KPMG report and the survey could be released when the bill is released, and we would be able to be in a better position to debate this legislation and discuss it. I hope that the minister releases the KPMG report and the survey material before it gets to committee stage because it would be really, really bad if that material is not available before it comes to committee.

* (15:30)

The second thing I want to talk about is the wait-lists. We all know that the length of the waiting list was atrocious under the NDP—that there were more than 15,000 children on the waiting list under the NDP government and that they never really made an attempt to address the need that was there. They did a little bit here and there, but they left a huge gap.

The situation has not improved much under the Conservatives—we are still far short of the number of spaces that we need. The Conservatives seem to be

ashamed of what's happening, so they have actually hidden the wait-lists and tried to cover up the fact that the need for child care is much greater than the number of child-care spaces available.

It is estimated, based on that wait-list that we had in the past, that there's probably a need for another 15,000 spaces. We don't know for sure. That number is increasing as more women, in particular, would like to be in the workforce, and we want to create a society in Manitoba which is more equal and allows more women to be working, should they choose.

Certainly, if we compare Manitoba to Quebec or to many countries in Europe, we are far short of the number of child-care spaces that we should have. That is a marker which we should be trying to achieve, to have numbers of child-care spaces which are more comparable to countries in the Scandinavian countries, for example, which have much higher rates of child care and much more availability of child care.

The goal, then, is not set in this legislation. It has not been set by this government. The government continues to fund new spaces, from what we can see, primarily using federal government funds, which, thankfully, are generous in these areas and are, thankfully, helping considerably.

We're at a time now and in the coming months where the—our economy will be opening after the COVID-19 pandemic, and at that point, we want to make sure that it is an economy which is welcoming to women, that—there's a feeling, generally speaking, that the COVID pandemic was harmful to the interests of many women and that more women than men lost jobs, and that we need to do a correction as we emerge from the COVID pandemic; whether it's in the next two or three months or in the next six months or in the next year.

And in that respect, we need to be working very, very vigorously to increase the number of child-care spaces and to pay more attention to child care and to make sure that women have better opportunities. And in the long run, I think that this is better for our society. And we know, indeed, that there are many men who are participating more in looking after kids. But the bottom line is that we need to have more child-care spaces. And we're not seeing here the sort of vision or goal that I would have expected, which would be to move us closer to 50,000 child-care spaces from where we are now, which is less than 35,000.

All this being said, I asked questions about the streamlining of the certification process. What I heard, in terms of the streamlining, was positive.

From what I've been hearing, in terms of some of the needs in child care, that there needs to be a slightly different ladder so that people, for example, who come in with a psychology degree or another advanced degree are actually recognized for that because that psychology degree can be very helpful, particularly on identifying children with behavioural learning problems.

One of the marvellous things that can happen in early learning and child care is that children with learning or behavioural problems can be identified early and they can be helped.

We know, for example, that children who have exposure to lead are children who are more likely to develop learning or behavioural problems. We also know that if they are identified early on that those children can be helped and some of the future problems and complications of lead toxicity can be avoided.

So, this is an area where child care and early childhood education can play a major, major role, and it is really important that we have more psychologists who are knowledgeable about the behavioural issues and growth and development, and the learning issues of children are involved in child care.

So, this has the potential to be a—an important step forward.

I asked the minister in the question period about the approach to learning for children. The minister answered that she was still developing her ideas in this respect. It is little troubling that, since the bill was brought in at first reading more than four months ago on November the 2nd, that more has not been done in that time frame.

It would have been nice to get more information on what the minister is planning, in terms of having enhanced learning for children in early learning and child care, and what that means.

There is concern that this bill may favour attracting more for-profit child-care operations into Manitoba. While not everything that is for-profit is bad, there are concerns and concerns have been raised in the past in this area. And it is something that we will be watching, because the bottom line is the quality of early learning in child care, not necessarily

the ownership, but the quality and the standards and making sure that our children are doing well.

And I think it's quite important that we have a child-care system which is really, really good, because you can make an extraordinary difference for children if you help them early on. It can make a difference that lasts a lifetime; it can change and improve a child's life trajectory; it can make a big difference. So getting this right is very, very important.

It was disappointing to see the current government provide expired masks to child-care centres. I think that's quite disappointing that they wouldn't consider the child-care centres more important than this—just to have discarded—expired masks.

It is important in the development of our child-care system that we have a system which provides salaries which are more competitive and which attract and retain workers. I've heard far too many stories of people who are working in child care moving on to become, for example, educational assistants in the educational system because they could earn more money there.

We need to emphasize the importance of early learning and child care and getting it right. There are numerous, numerous studies which have shown a big difference if you can help children early on. It can make a lifetime of difference; it can mean that they do better; it means that they have less interaction with the criminal justice system, for example, and do better in school.

* (15:40)

So, let's focus in a major way on child care and early childhood education in Manitoba. Let's reap the benefits from that. Studies have shown in some instances a return of \$7 for every dollar invested in child care and early childhood education. Let's get it right. Let's help children all over Manitoba get off to a—the best possible start that they can. It will make a big difference to all of us, and it will save money down the road, and it will increase the prosperity of Manitoba by having children who got a good start and who do well and learn well as they grow up.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to put these remarks on the record. Merci, miigwech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there any further speakers on the bill? Is the House—

An Honourable Member: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Oh, there is?

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do just have a few thoughts that I would like to share.

The member from River Heights raised some questions during the question portion of this legislation and, unfortunately, there wasn't a lot of clarity on the questions being answered, and it would be nice to have some more clarity on that before moving forward with the bill. And I'm hopeful that the minister will put a few more words on the record or have someone else from the party be able to confirm just some of the questions we have, and I'll make a reference to them throughout.

But I know myself, like, I hear from constituents all the time that they're struggling to find child-care spots, and oftentimes child care that is affordable can be a real struggle, so accessibility and affordability—and we know that our centres, our child-care centres are doing everything that they can to be able to accommodate, but there are standards and there are rules, and we know that they are in place and we need to respect them.

We also know that more child-care spots need to be created, and we know that we need to take into consideration affordability of these spots.

I've actually heard from several different daycare workers over the last few days, and these are from different daycare facilities, specifically in Tyndall Park, and I'm sure many MLAs are hearing from their constituents, and I just wanted to share the letter.

The letter that I received was also sent to the minister responsible.

It says: Dear Miss Lamoureux, Manitoba's early learning and child-care sector is a well-established, highly regulated, quality licensed system all of us can be proud of. I work at—and in this case, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's Stanley Knowles Children's Centre—and have a child that attends there, as well as in your constituency.

As a supporter of child care, I'd like to bring attention to the strengths of the sector and re-enforce these assets. This is important information to share, as the Department of Families looks at transforming child care in our province.

Child care's playing a huge role in getting Manitobans back to work by offering parents an environment that is safe and conducive to learning

while meeting the workforce's ever-changing demands during the pandemic.

Parents who are working to protect us, first responders, health-care workers and essential workers need child care to ensure they can go to work. Child care is integral to healthy learning and development. Parents depend on early childhood educators to help raise healthy children and set them up for future successes.

ECEs are much more than just babysitters. Manitoba needs to invest in the early learning and child-care workforce to attract and retain the best and brightest ECEs to provide the highest quality of child-care services.

Early childhood educators have the same needs and priorities as educators in the school system. Decision-makers, especially during the pandemic, should keep this in mind, especially when it comes to the risks that they may face.

Manitoba has a strong, long-standing child-care system offering care to children from as young as three months up to 12 years. The strength of the sector has been apparent throughout the pandemic, while Alberta and Ontario and child-care sector has broken down and facilities have had to close.

There is room for flexibility and choices and a potential child-care reform, but let's not forget the strong infrastructure already in place in Manitoba. We should not abandon the existing system, which is already serving the needs of 38,000 children and their families. I encourage the government of Manitoba to carefully consider these strengths when developing a plan to transform child care in our province.

That's the end of the letter, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I suppose it's really important that we're raising it just because a lot of conversations are happening right now within our child-care facilities.

And further notes, just on the legislation itself. Section 36: allowing—the provincial director may provide financial assistance in accordance with the regulations to or for an eligible parent for early learning child-care services provided by a licensed provider.

We're curious about how far this will extend. Will it be for all parents, Mr. Deputy Speaker? What will determine eligibility?

We'd like to hear the minister provide more on their vision for this, as well as from Manitobans at the committee stage.

And on section 36—allowing the provincial director to provide financial assistance in accordance with the regulations to or for an eligible parent for the care and supervision of an individual with a disability under the age of 18—just lots of questions around this. For example, clarity about those who have a disability and are over 18. Maybe it's covered under Community Living disABILITY Services, but this should be clarified to us before we move forward with the legislation.

There's a section in the legislation talking about providing the services to not more than four children at any time and not more than two of the children are infants, as the numbers are determined in accordance with the regulations, or section B, the provider meets the prescribed requirements for an exception.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what are the exceptions for licensing? What is the rationale behind there being exceptions? Again, I think there needs to be a lot of clarity around this. There's just too much uncertainty. I know we all want to move forward and create and bring forward legislation for child care here in the province. I think that it is extremely important that we are doing this, but there needs to be more clarity for it.

Thank you.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I'm very happy to have an opportunity to respond to this bill and to put some words on the record.

This bill, frankly, is really bad news for families in this province. And, as a father who's used child care, whose family's been heavily reliant on it, as somebody who's spoken with a lot of parents and daycare employees over the last several months, I can say that this bill does not in any way reflect the needs that are present in our child-care system, because Manitobans—Manitoban families want to ensure that they have access to affordable child care, and this bill does nothing to improve that.

They want to ensure that they have access to accessible child care. When we say accessible, that means child care in our communities, in our schools.

And they want to ensure that that child care is high quality, that if their son or daughter are heading to a child-care facility, that they know that the experience that their kids are going to have will be of

high quality and that their kids are going to be well taken care of.

And this bill does nothing at all to help to ensure those things. As much as the minister tried to suggest otherwise today, we know that that's not the case.

Frankly, this bill is actually, even more concerningly, a massive—a massive—wasted opportunity, because, right now, we have a unique situation where we have a federal government that is at the table, that is willing to make significant investments in improving child-care accessibility in this province. That is something we haven't seen for some time, and instead of leveraging those investments, this provincial government, the PCs and this minister, are flushing that opportunity down the toilet, and they're doing that at the expense of ensuring that Manitobans can have access to quality, affordable child care in this province.

It really is a huge, wasted opportunity, and that can't be emphasized enough, the horrible irony of having a PC government in place right now when there's this once-in-25-, 30-, 40-year opportunity that's come along.

* (15:50)

To have a PC government that's busy looking down at their shoes and trying to figure out how to shuffle over child-care services into the private sector at a time when we have a federal government that's at the table and that wants to help to improve access to public child care in our communities, it really is not only unfortunate, but it's just such a massive lost opportunity for us. And I think that's really upsetting to a lot of people in this province, and it just shows that this PC government, even with this huge opportunity sitting right in front of them, that they're obsessed with doing, frankly, whatever it is that their KPMG report tells them to do.

What this bill does do, and it's been touched on by some of my colleagues—actually, before I go any further, I just want to highlight my colleague, Danielle Adams, the rep. for—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

I just want to remind the member for St. James to—when you want to mention somebody—member in the Legislature, is either by their constituency name or their—if they're a minister of—so I'll get the member for St. James to move on on his debate.

Mr. Sala: I'd like to thank my—the member for Thompson (Ms. Adams), my colleague and the critic

for child care because—I just want to emphasize right here during this speech, and we saw this today—Manitobans could not ask for a more forceful, more passionate supporter of child care. And she is fighting every single day on this file. So I just want to use this moment right now to thank her for all of her incredible work.

But I do want to say that this bill, it does achieve a few things and I'll highlight those right now. One is that it allows this government to shift dollars from regulated and publicly supported child care to unregulated environments: unregulated nannies, unregulated care by relatives and unregulated providers of home-based child care.

And maybe the biggest and most important change that this bill introduces—and it's tough, it's hidden away in there and this isn't the kind of thing that I think most people are going to be able to see very clearly here, but it is stated in this bill—this bill will allow grants, including operating grants, to be made to any child-care facility.

That means for-profit centres will be able to receive any form of grant that this government wishes to give them.

That is a massive change that really is at the heart of this bill, that we all need to sort of come to grips with here, and that is a huge change in direction in the province in our approach to child care. Previously, operating grants would be restricted to non-profit centres, non-profit licensed centres.

This bill makes a massive change, and this is something I know that this minister and I know that this government is hoping will fly under the radar, but it's not going to. We're going to make very clear about what this bill seeks to achieve.

And what this bill seeks to achieve is to open the door to sending public dollars to private, for-profit centres at the expense of publicly funded centres that are currently meeting our child-care needs in this province.

That is a massive change, and Manitobans need to be really concerned about that, because we can be guaranteed that funds that are supposed to be supporting our publicly funded child-care centres are now going to be sent to support for-profit operations.

The bill also changes the wording on child-care subsidies to a broader term, which is financial assistance. And while it's not clear yet, because some of these things need to be determined in the

regulations, I think it is pretty clear that this government likes to look to other jurisdictions where their PC buddies are in government to look to examples of how things have been done there.

And this changing, this broadening of that term child-care subsidy to quote, unquote, financial assistance, as it says in the bill, is very clearly opening the door to using tax credits as a means of helping them move dollars towards privately funded or private-operated centres. And we know that tax credits, the one that was unleashed in Ontario in 2019, the 2019 child-care tax credit there, did absolutely nothing to expand access to child care in that province and it did absolutely nothing to increase the affordability of child care in that province.

This bill is just so incredibly disheartening in so many ways to so many people. And I say that really having spoken with a lot of people in Manitoba about what their hopes were for our child-care sector in Manitoba, and this bill just fails on every single account. There really is nothing redeeming in this bill to speak of.

And, you know, this is coming on the heels of this government's having attacked child care, you know, in ways that are hard to describe, since the beginning of the pandemic, but frankly, they've been undermining child care since they got into government.

If you speak with executive directors around this province and you speak to child-care leaders, you speak to ECEs, people working in the sector, they will tell you about the impact of five years of frozen operating grant funding and what that has done to their ability to serve children in our communities.

They are forced to significantly reduce the number of ECEs working in their facilities, and instead, they're lowering the quality of their staff teams by bringing in more assistants, who are, you know, there to do a great job, but frankly, they just simply do not have the same training as more highly qualified ECEs. And centres are forced to reduce the number of properly trained ECEs just so they can make a go of things.

That's a direct result of this government's five years of freezing funding for child-care centres. And that is impacting the care of—and quality of care delivered to our children in this province. That is absolutely shameful.

ECEs are leaving the sector because of the shamefully low pay that they get access to. They're

heading off to become teaching assistants. We're losing employees in a sector that we desperately need to grow, that we desperately need to see expand.

So at the very same time that our federal government is bringing dollars to the table, is offering us this opportunity to expand access to child care to Manitoban families, this government has been doing their very best to ensure that people leave the sector through continued low pay, and to their continued emphasis on working towards increasing the role of the private sector, lowering wages and, ultimately, lowering the ability of people to organize around ensuring that they do get the better wages that they deserve.

And, you know, since the pandemic, adding to these multiple years of neglect of the sector—since the pandemic—I think back to when things first started happening in March of last year: this government was threatening child-care centres with the loss of operating grant funding if they didn't open on a schedule that was aligned with what the government sought them to do.

They were literally dictating direction, creating chaos for non-profit-managed boards, boards of volunteers, parents in our communities, who are in no position to make determinations about whether they should be open or closed. Again, this government forced them to make these kinds of decisions.

They've done nothing to support these centres through huge increases in their costs of operations: major increases in the cost of cleaning supplies, in PPE, in staffing. They've received no increases. This government has completely and totally failed to consult with the sector. You speak with sector leaders and they'll tell you this government has not once come to them and said, what is it that you need to help be supported throughout this pandemic?

This government does not care about publicly child—publicly funded child-care centres, and they are doing everything they can to shift supports away from that model, from that incredibly important community infrastructure that we all depend upon. And they're looking to further undermine it, and they're looking to move those funds to the private sector, and that's exactly what this bill achieves. And that's about all that this bill achieves. It manages to ensure that they can start sending public dollars to the private sector, to private operators.

So this government should be ashamed, I think, of what they've put forward here. This is, again, is a

massive lost opportunity. And, you know, building on all of this right now, their proposed cuts to nurseries in this province and their willingness to take away nursery supports for families in need, mostly racialized families or low-income families, to rip that opportunity away from those families by doubling their costs of getting care, are disgusting. It's absolutely disgusting to see what they're willing to do.

And I know that this government won't talk to any families or won't talk to the centres that are providing that care, but you just have to have one conversation to have an understanding about the costs of what they are doing in our child-care sector.

There is no way we should be supporting this bill. This bill needs to stop dead in its tracks. And we need a government that can work towards bringing in universal child care in this province to make sure Manitoban families can get access to the care that they deserve: quality care, affordable care and accessible care. And this government needs to go back, go back to the drawing board, start listening to the community, start listening to practitioners and understand that this bill is completely offside from what Manitobans need right now.

* (16:00)

Thank you very much, Madam—Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I move, seconded by the member for Thompson (Ms. Adams), that the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 40—The Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation Amendment and Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now we'll go on to Bill 40, The Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation Amendment and Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act.

The honourable member for Crown Services—Minister of Crown Services.

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Crown Services): I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal Relations (Mr. Johnson), that Bill 40, the Manitoba liquor and lotteries corporation amendment and liquor, gaming and cannabis control act, be now read for a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Crown Services, seconded by the Minister of Municipal Relations, that Bill 40, The Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation Amendment and Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to the committee of this House.

The honourable member for Crown Services—the honourable Minister for Crown Services.

Mr. Wharton: This bill amends Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation Act to follow—to allow for increased private sector opportunity in how liquor is retailed throughout Winnipeg and Manitoba, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In the Throne Speech of October 7th, 2020, our government committed to less expensive, expanded convenience and more choice in retailing of liquor in our province. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this legislation amendment will meet this commitment by allowing a wider range of businesses to retail liquor.

Our mandate as Minister of Crown Services includes modernizing our wine, beer and liquor retailing systems in a manner that enhances the role of the private sector while providing safe, enjoyable experiences for Manitobans. The legislation—or the legislative amendment supports our government's mandate, responding to Manitobans' request for better and less expensive access to liquor retailing, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Manitoba has one of the most diverse liquor retailing systems in Canada, with hotel beer vendors, rural liquor vendors, deputy—or duty free stores, restaurant licensees, off-sales, speciality wine stores, retail manufacturing licenses, temporary retail locations such as farmers markets, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and Liquor Marts.

The legislative amendment seeks to build on that strength of diversity and—in liquor retailing system by allowing businesses that choose to sell liquor as one of their product offerings the ability to do so. This amendment will open up opportunities for private businesses across the province to expand and meet customer demand in liquor sales, as has been done in many provinces right across Canada, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Restarting and growing the Manitoba economy is an important goal for our government over the near term and the future. This legislative amendment will help support job growth and businesses expand into new lines of product offering under liquor sales.

Businesses will be able to open new storefronts or renovate their existing stores to offer liquor sales to Manitobans. Businesses will be able to hire more staff to manage and sell the new products that they are offering to their customers every day, Mr. Deputy Speaker. These are just a few economic benefits that this initiative will bring to the Manitoba economy.

Bill 40 is another step towards our government's priority to reducing red tape and to provide more choice and convenience for our consumers and greater opportunities and flexibilities for businesses. Businesses will no longer need to be located in a rural area to retail liquor in the new modernized liquor retailing system, creating a new, less regulatory burdensome environment for businesses.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this legislative amendment will position Manitoba for success moving into the future, and I look forward to its passage through this Legislature.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Questions

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

The first question—*[interjection]*—the critic, okay. The honourable member for—the honourable member for St. James.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I'd like to ask the minister: Why has the M-L-C-C-MLLC previously only been able to enter into agreements that authorize third parties to sell liquor in rural areas?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Crown Services): The member likely knows that we have a very vast assortment of retailing liquor in this province, and one of them is local liquor stores in small communities. As a matter of fact, in my community, in St. Clements, and another one up in Gimli, where I also experience, Mr. Deputy Speaker—where they actually sell liquor out of their grocery store, perhaps a convenience-store-type model.

So, there's lots of opportunity outside of Winnipeg for retailing liquor, but certainly, in the city, it's not as open as Manitobans would like to see, and that's what we're looking at.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Yes, I have a question. I mean, look, growth ultimately means you have to be selling more product or hiring more people.

Are there actual projections about increased alcohol consumption or increased alcohol sales, or is this just going to cannibalize the existing market from the Manitoba liquor?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly, what this bill will do is give more choice and more convenience to Manitobans right across the province, particularly in the city of Winnipeg. That's what we've been hearing from stakeholders, from Manitobans at large, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that they want more choice and they want the ability to be able to go out and potentially shop, pick up their needs and their requirements, whether it be food or liquor or other products, and simply return back home to their families and ensure they get on with their daily routines.

Mr. Sala: What are the benefits of adding a new class of retail liquor licence to third parties who enter into these agreements with the M-L-C-C?

Mr. Wharton: Well, certainly, again, we inherited a very broad range of licences, Mr. Deputy Speaker, right across the board. Some of them are several years—actually, decades—old licences. For instance, you can own a hotel and have two different licences: operating and retailing—not retailing liquor but potentially actually serving liquor and retailing out of a local beer vendor.

So we know that the licensing needs to be looked at as well, and certainly, in dealing with our stakeholders, as we have been for several months now, we understand that concern from them and we're certainly prepared to action that.

Mr. Lamont: Here—just for clarity here, because—look, if it's going to be pitched as being something that's essential for economic growth after a pandemic, the real question is what the size of the alcohol market is in Manitoba. And there are real downsides to expanded sales, right, that there are—there—it's a hazardous product in all sorts of ways.

So are there extra projections? Are we just stealing from Peter to pay Paul? Because that's often what privatization does. It just means that private people will be selling something that used to be sold somewhere else.

Mr. Wharton: I thank the member from St. Boniface again for the question, and again, to be clear, this bill will improve choice and convenience.

So, social responsibility we take very seriously as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and during the process of communicating and—with our stakeholders and discussing these issues with them, these kind of issues are very important.

Especially as we go forward with this bill, naturally we need to be concerned. Safety is very important, of course, with all of—whole-government approach, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We'll continue to go down that path.

Mr. Sala: How will this new class of licences be differentiated from current types of licences?

Mr. Wharton: I thank the member for St. James (Mr. Sala), and I would ask him to stay tuned as we're going down that path now, and certainly provide more information as we continue to go down that path.

* (16:10)

Mr. Lamont: I mean, there is a question here. Again, if all—if this is just about choice and we're not actually increasing anything, then the economic argument is gone. But the other thing about it is that, look, there's lots of studies that show that alcohol has a much more serious impact on people's lives than meth.

So I'm wondering why—look, if we're actually going to see an increase and we're going to be pushing alcohol sales, are we not also going to be seeing the downside of that in terms of mental health, addictions and hospital costs? How has that been factored into this?

Mr. Wharton: As I mentioned to the member from St. Boniface earlier, again, social responsibility plays a very large factor in this process, much like when we were—when we opened up cannabis retailing here in the province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There's a huge focus on social responsibility and to ensure that proper areas are put in place to ensure that Manitobans are safe and protected, and again, a focus on responsible consumption is very important. Of course, drinking and driving we know is very deadly and we want to ensure that Manitobans continue to work towards that very important social responsibility aspect of this.

Mr. Sala: Mr. Deputy Speaker, how do people or organizations apply for this new class of licence?

Mr. Wharton: I thank the member from St. James for the question. The bill that we're debating today, again, is Bill 40, and this particular amendment in Bill 40—or bill—or section 34 of Bill 40 will allow more private

sector involvement with more choice and convenience throughout the province, particularly in Winnipeg, and certainly happy to answer any questions regarding that.

Mr. Lamont: I'm just wondering if there were any discussions with people who already are buying, store owners or anything like that, in Winnipeg, prior to this bill, because I know this was a part of the 2019 platform.

Is this something that was—who's been—who exactly has been pushing for this? Are there people who are wine store owners who are looking to expand into beer and liquor?

Mr. Wharton: Well, that's a good question. I really appreciate the member asking that question.

And what it does is it puts more tools in the toolboxes of current providers of liquor throughout the province and in Winnipeg. It gives them the opportunity to versify—diversify their businesses. Of course, the member may know, but when we ran our business, our small business here in Winnipeg for 30 years, we looked at opportunities to diversify our product and our sales and our service and we did that.

And you have to continue to move forward, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to ensure that you're meeting today's environment, and that's exactly what this bill does. It allows Manitobans the opportunity for more choice and better convenience as we go forward.

Mr. Sala: Will allowing third parties to sell liquor affect the price at all for consumers?

Mr. Wharton: Again, during our consultations with our stakeholders, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've had discussions on exactly that: what model may work best for Manitobans. And I can assure the member from St. James that that's exactly what we'll be doing, is ensuring that Manitobans' interests are looked after, and again, allowing them for better choice and more opportunity.

Mr. Lamont: Yes, I was wondering if—were there any discussions with Banfield [*phonetic*] and Jones in particular about this? Tina Jones, I know she's been a supporter of the Progressive Conservative party. Does she have a position on this?

Mr. Wharton: Well, first of all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I certainly wouldn't want to just single out one particular provider or private wine store. All our private wine stores are fantastic operators. I've met them all, I've met with them on several occasions, but I've also met with beer vendor operators as well, and

hoteliers and restaurateurs and even our craft and liquor sales folks, who are getting more and more involved in the market. Local, made-in-Manitoba product here that we want to make sure that gets to market and I know that there—the crafters and brewers want to see that market expand as well.

So, we're looking at everybody—all stakeholders—to ensure that they get their product to market, but also enjoy more convenience and more options for Manitobans.

Mr. Sala: Will there be any restrictions on what types of liquor can be included in these agreements?

Mr. Wharton: Well, again, good question, and certainly, a question that was—come up in many discussions and—we're absolutely ensured that, you know, the stakeholders will have a, you know, a very, very important role in determining what that'll look like, and that's exactly what we're doing, and that's why we consider—continue to consult with our stakeholders—again, whether it be the private wine stores or the beer vendors or the hoteliers or the restaurateurs.

We're going through the process, we're enjoying that process and we're learning a lot from our stakeholders, and we'll continue to learn to make sure that we make a Manitoba home-grown solution to this issue. Thank you.

Mr. Lamont: I'll pass for now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. The honourable member for St. James.

Mr. Sala: Private business will likely be driven by profit more than anything, so I'm wondering if the minister can clarify what assurance will be offered to ensure that liquor will not be sold to minors by new retailers?

Mr. Wharton: And, again, we speak to that social responsibility issue, and it is a—definitely been a concern, you know, to make sure that we, you know, stores are properly ID'ing when they come in—we currently do that in rural Manitoba in our private stores; private wine stores do it currently and Liquor Marts do it.

So, I don't see that being a serious concern. The stores are well-prepared to move forward, ensuring that folks that walk in there are of age to consume and, much like they do in the cannabis space, they're ensuring that folks are legal—when they come in, they're of age, and to ensure their safety as they consume and purchase the products.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. James. Any further questions?

If there's no further questions, time for debate.

An Honourable Member: Oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Oh.

Mr. Lamont: Thank you. One more—one—my apologies. One last—just—is there any view to—or, impact on either—on M-L-C-C or M-L-C expenditures or profits expected? Has there been a business analysis of the impact of this?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly, all aspects of moving to a model that expands choice and selection and convenience for Manitobans is on the table. Everything will be considered; there's no doubt about that. It is continuing to be worked on, and we, of course, want to ensure that Manitobans—again, the investments are still coming in to support things like health care, education and social services as the current model does in Winnipeg.

And remembering that we have over 66 per cent of our retailers currently in Manitoba that are privately run and run by small-business owners here in Manitoba and in Winnipeg, and certainly we're here to support them and again, our Liquor Marts, as we go forth in this process. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There's no—any further questions?

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We'll go on to debate.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Mr. Deputy Speaker, happy to have a chance to put some words on the record about Bill 40.

I think the only way to start is, here we go again. I mean, this is—this bill, and the purpose of this bill, is simple, and this is about privatizing at another one of our key Crown corporations; it is that simple.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

And in this case, instead of privatizing key aspects of Hydro, or instead of giving away profits to their friends in the insurance broker business on the MPI side, here, we're planning on giving away millions and millions and millions of dollars that go directly towards paying the cost of social services in various important functions of government.

We're going to be putting those in a box, putting a bow on it, and handing it over to their friends in the

private sector. Why on earth would we want to change a system that is working as well as our system is currently working? If it's not broke, why are we trying to fix it?

* (16:20)

Well, we have a pretty good sense of why they want to fix it. This government sees a huge opportunity here, of course, to hand over wealth from the public sector to the private sector, as they love to do, as they're doing with Hydro, as they did with MPI.

But, frankly, they also love the idea of degrading and slowly whittling away at the Manitoba liquor corporation as it stands, and the reason for that is because this government, as they've shown all across the board, wants to shrink the number of jobs within our Crown corporations. They shrink jobs at Hydro, and we know that they're looking to do the exact same thing here, and a great way to do that is to destabilize and interfere in Manitoba liquor and to ultimately reduce sales and transfer some of those sales over to the private sector.

The amount of profits we're talking about here are massive. M-L-C-C earned \$280 million in profits last fiscal year. We're not talking about tax revenues, so this government is talking about shifting these things over to the private sector. And, you know, they'll say, well, we're still going to get tax revenues. We're talking about \$280 million in profits that we would be handing over to the private sector. That's \$280 million that goes towards paying addiction services, treatment and a whole variety of different social programs that those profits go to fund. That is a huge amount of money.

And, of course, that's what this government does, that's what they're doing in other Crowns, and this is no different.

So, how much do they want to hand over? I mean, we don't know at this point what this means. We know that there are significant profits to be made. And this government will argue that this is all about choice, this is about improving Manitobans' ability to access, you know, liquor when they go shopping, et cetera.

Manitobans don't have an issue with their ability to access liquor in this province right now. The system is working incredibly well and that's been shown over and over and over again.

You know, we've seen what happens in other provinces. The minister alluded to—other provinces have done this, and what happens? Well, we've seen

what happens in other provinces. When you have this—you go in this direction and you increase the ability to sell in private environments. Maybe we'll start with, you know, a few privately operated stores that will open up shop.

But what's the direction of this? Ultimately, these liquor sales will start more and more to be conducted out of Sobeys, Superstore, Safeway, through private retail in those environments. And those dollars, instead of not only helping to ensure Manitoban jobs, good-paying Manitoban jobs continue to be in place through our Crown corporation, but they also allow the profits of those sales in those big box stores, where liquor will increasingly be sold, to be shipped out of province.

So they have this double-whammy effect of not—they're not creating economic opportunity in the province, more private sector economic development opportunities. What do we see elsewhere? We see that the sales end up moving over to big stores where those profits get shipped off to Toronto or elsewhere and they leave our province.

And I know these guys have a hard time understanding basic economics, but we want those dollars to stay in Manitoba and we want them to cycle around. We want to let those dollars help to support good-paying jobs in our liquor commissions. We want to help those dollars help to support addictions supports, addictions programs, other social programs.

Those \$280 million of profits are going to be placed at risk, and we're talking about those dollars leaving the province of Manitoba. It's absolutely nonsensical to go in that direction. If the system isn't broken, don't try to fix it. People are very satisfied with the services they get at our Manitoba liquor commissions right now.

You know, as much as the Premier (Mr. Pallister) likes to say otherwise, we know that he, like, in an unprecedented manner, went out and insulted every single liquor-store employee in this province by suggesting that Manitobans didn't get good service in those environments, forcing the head of the liquor commission to actually come out and issue a statement of support for their employees after they were insulted by the—supposedly the highest leader in this province.

You know, people are satisfied. The satisfaction rates with services in our liquor commissions are extremely high. They're over 90 per cent, over and over again. And that demonstrates that Manitobans

are really happy with the system we have in place. There's huge selection, the prices are good. Why do we need to alter that? There's no issue with accessibility in this province, the accessibility to liquor.

We know why they want to do this. Because it will help them to shrink our liquor commissions and shrink the need for them and 'ultilly' shrink the number of employees working for government, which is what the PCs are all about, shrinking government, cutting, destabilizing, reducing the number of direct employees, reducing the number of Manitobans who have good union jobs in this province. And it also will serve to send money to the private sector and, in many cases, as this goes forward, right out the door to other provinces. It's just absolutely nonsensical. It makes zero sense at all, unless we deal with the reality of it, which is they want to cut jobs and send money to the private sector.

You know, all of this, this attack on our liquor commissions, is happening at a really strange time. This is such a weird time to be attacking our liquor commissions, after M-L-C-C employees went through a lot. I mean, the theft issue that was a huge challenge in our liquor stores was brought under control, through the help of liquor store employees, who went through an incredible amount of struggle for a period of time there. That was helped to be brought under control through their efforts. They've done great work in helping to minimize that.

Why do we want to create more of those risks by opening more private sector stores and create more risks like that, when we've demonstrated that we can control those risks in-house, with our talented and capable civil servants that are working in support of all of us, in these great jobs that are helping—that are helped and funded through these liquor sales? There's no reason to do that, to undermine that.

We also know that one of the biggest costs to privatizing liquor sales, to more privatization in this area, is ultimately more health risks for Manitobans. And, you know, starting with liquor sales to minors, the M-L-C-C has a really excellent record of preventing sales to minors. And what happens when you start introducing greater numbers of private retailers in the province? What's going to happen when we start to see, you know, small shops opening up on corners or wherever, that are not as easily governed? We're going to see increases in the risk of liquor being sold to minors and that creates significant

health risks for our youth. And that's an issue that's currently under control.

Or what's going to happen when these private retailers are confronted with individuals who are coming to them who are intoxicated? We're not going to be able to govern that to the same degree as we are right now. That's going to create significant additional risks to Manitobans to their health, to their well-being.

There's no evidence of moving—that moving to a private model in any way supports increasing health or increasing safety for citizens. This is not the right direction to be going in that respect.

And you know, right now, the \$280 million of profits that I referenced earlier that M-L-C-C brings in on an average year, a significant portion of those revenues are going to help to fund addictions services and treatment. And what happens when those funds start to dry up?

You know, the minister, in some of his responses there, alluded to how important social responsibility is and how they're going to continue to ensure a commitment to that. But that's not clear, how we can possibly hope to fund those things if we're sending the profits off to the private sector and maybe even right out of the province. How do we continue to fund those things when those funds dry up? Do we just start drawing from general revenues? Do we start taking from other social programs, other cuts that this government is going to make? How are they going to do that? Where do we pay for those things?

Right now, we have this unbelievably privileged situation where we, as Manitobans, are the biggest beneficiaries of alcohol sales and we use those sales and those profits of those sales to help to pay for some very significant costs that we need to be investing in, to help to ensure Manitobans get the supports they need if they have alcohol addictions issues—that they get the supports they need if they need to go into treatment.

Those are not cheap programs to operate and we're paying for them right now out of those profits and those profits are being placed at risk. Why would we want to put that at risk? It makes zero sense to anybody.

* (16:30)

There's—it just—it clearly conveys the purpose of this bill. I mean, again, everybody is left shaking their heads. There's \$280 million of profits on the table. Every single PC MLA out there, I'd ask you: challenge

yourself, talk to your friends, ask what—do you really think that Manitobans support handing those profits over to the private sector?

We're the beneficiaries of this right now. We, as Manitobans, are getting these profits. We've got a great situation right now. Why do we want to get rid of that? It makes zero sense. Nobody believes the story that's being put forward here.

You know, and the impacts of alcohol abuse are carried, of course, indirectly by government, more broadly. They're carried in the costs of other programs or other health costs that we carry in our health-care system, in our justice system. Right now, those costs are supported indirectly through profits we're making through this unbelievable privileged situation we have, which is as—essentially as the monopoly retailer of liquor in this province.

And, you know, it doesn't matter if sales are private. Those problems won't go away. We're still going to have to deal with those issues—those health issues. Why would we want to then reduce our ability to pay for the costs of those concerns that are generated through alcohol consumption. It makes zero sense. There's no reason to be looking to shift these sales over to the private market.

So, the minister and the government will continue to talk about choice, but Manitobans are satisfied with what we have access to. We're satisfied with our current choice. Nobody is begging to be able to buy liquor in more places. It's widely available throughout our communities, and it's available in professional, well-run environments, by knowledgeable people who are getting paid fair wages for important work in support of us.

So again, you know, not only does this send dollars over to the private sector, but they're undermining those important well-paying Manitoban jobs.

You know, the MGEU has been operating a campaign, a keep liquor public campaign. And if we want to talk about the degree of support for liquor—public liquor in this province, we don't need to look any further than to see the success of that campaign. Thousands and thousands and thousands of emails were sent on behalf of Manitobans who did not want to see—who do not want to see our liquor sales privatized to the degree this government is seeking.

There's thousands and thousands of emails that went to the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) office, to the email addresses of ministers and to MLAs across both

sides of the aisle that stated very clearly: we do not want to see liquor sales privatized in this province. There is no shortage of support for public liquor in this province, and there's no reason to be going in that direction.

There is some great research that CCPA did in 2016 looking at Manitoba, BC, Alberta and Saskatchewan, and there was some very important findings that I think this government should take a really close look at before they continue to push forward with this bill.

One thing that they found was that we had the lowest deficit in government revenue obtained from alcohol sales. Another important thing they found was that we had the second lowest impaired driving rates out of all the provinces that were looked at. We had some of the lowest per capita expenditures on alcohol. Why do we want to increase those expenditures? Why do we want to make that available at more and more places? This is something that is a net positive.

And frankly, out of all those provinces, one of the most exciting things they found, we had the highest revenue and net government revenue per capita. Why do we want to throw that away in the middle of a pandemic when we could use every one of those dollars to help us with our economic recovery? We could use those dollars to support families who've been struck by COVID. We could use it to support small businesses that have been forgotten by this government. We could use it to help support our child-care centres that are getting absolutely ground down through this government's lack of support that they've provided.

Why don't we think about other ways of using and harnessing this incredible asset that we have instead of giving it away to our friends in the private sector? It makes zero sense at all.

And, you know, there are also some important questions to be asked about a review that was supposed to be conducted in 2019 by the M-L-C-C chair, Randy Williams, on, quote, markup policies on liquor produces—that liquor produces to ensure current practices support economic development in Manitoba.

So, big question: Where is that review that was done? Has it been completed, and does that review show any evidence that privatization would be better for all of us? Because if it did, I have a pretty strong feeling that we would've heard about that; that that review would've been released to the rest of us.

You know, at the end of the day, it's clear that this government is just simply looking to hand over those profits, they're looking to shrink the size of the M-L-C-C and, frankly, this is just reflective of their broader pattern of interference in our Crown corporations.

Their interference in MPI by stopping MPI from being able to do what Manitobans, frankly, want them to do, which is to digitize services and lower our costs of service. Instead, they're handing profits again over to their friends in the insurance-broker business without any purpose against the wishes of almost all Manitobans.

You know what they're doing at Hydro. People have heard me talk about that enough, so I won't dig into too many details there, but again, endless interference. Privatizing Teshmont, shutting down Manitoba Hydro International's incredibly profitable international consulting wing. And now, of course, our fibre optic line in Manitoba Hydro Telecom are at huge risk; we're about to learn about that really soon.

Endless interference there and, here we go, more interference in the world of liquor here in Manitoba.

This bill will do one thing and one thing alone. It will help to destabilize liquor, and it'll help to destabilize the ability of this Crown corporation to create profits for all of us, to support important programs, to support the things that Manitobans need.

And it is not needed. We do not need any of the provisions in this bill, and Manitobans can be very proud of our current, almost monopoly system that we have over liquor sales in this province. It's working incredibly well. We can also be very proud of the employees that work in our liquor commissions that are doing really important work and that are serving all of us in good union jobs that ensure that they can take care of their families and live good lives in our communities.

We shouldn't be working to steal that away. We should be proud of what we've achieved with the liquor commission and with liquor sales in this province. We should be proud of the balance we've struck between meeting service needs for Manitobans and their desire to access liquor and meeting really important social responsibility, health and safety needs in this province.

We've figured out that balance. This system is not broken and we should not be touching it. This bill is a terrible idea for this province and, frankly, I hope that this government goes back, that they go back to the

drawing board, that they take some of the insights that have been offered here today and they, frankly, either decide to dispose of this bill, or they go back and find better ways of trying to improve services for Manitobans, because this isn't it.

This does nothing but erode our public safety net through eliminating important revenues for the government at a critical time, and they should go back to the drawing board. We will not be supporting this bill.

I appreciate the opportunity to put some words on the record. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Boniface.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Thank you—*[interjection]*

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

The honourable member for Flin Flon. The honourable member for Flin Flon?

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): It is my great pleasure to be back in this Chamber to try and hold this government to account for some of these bills, like this very one we're about to discuss, that we have been discussing, that they introduced this bill and claim that it's what people wanted, that it—but probably another one of their make-believe consultation processes where you can go online and answer questions that they've designed specifically to get the answers they want and supposedly justify what they're trying to do.

Now, this particular piece of legislation before us, as my colleague from St. James so clearly laid out, is just part of their path to privatization, part of their path to destroying the province of Manitoba and, make no mistake, Madam Speaker, that's exactly what they're trying to do here. They want to make sure that only certain individuals will come out ahead with the legislation that they're introducing.

* (16:40)

You know, I listened to the minister when he was introducing it and answering questions, and one of his comments struck me as odd, to say the least. He said that safety is very important. I'm not sure it's very important to him. It certainly doesn't appear to be very important to the CEO of Liquor and Lotteries.

We've got extreme safety issues at some of our liquor stores outside the city of Winnipeg. We've been trying to get those addressed and so far, nothing. Employees have machetes held to their throat and

the minister's response is, well, maybe we'll get to providing securer access someday, somewhere, but not—[interjection] The minister seems to have something to say, I'm sure he'll have the opportunity to address these issues because he's already had the opportunity to address them and hasn't.

So if, as minister, he fails to protect citizens and workers in the present system, how, pray tell, does he plan to address safety for consumers and workers in a private system, where we've already seen so many serious concerns about the absence of those very issues being addressed in the private for-profit.

Something else that the—both this minister and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) talked about was job growth. And what we see is the job growth in part-time jobs—low-wage, no-protection, part-time jobs. We see a government that won't stand up and fight for a decent minimum wage or an acceptable wage for working people in this province. We see a government that continues to attack organized labour that has provided those protections, those good-paying jobs for Manitobans. And that's part of what's going to be missing as this government progresses with this piece of legislation.

Who will speak for those workers that are part-time, precarious work? Certainly not this government. It will make it harder for organized labour to speak for those people who they don't represent, which is really what this government wants. It's part of their whole privatization plan, is to really decimate the ranks of working people so that everybody's part-time and spends every waking moment trying to figure out how they're going to pay the bills, how they're going to put food on the table, rather than being able to stand up for their rights in this province.

And this is just one more step in the degradation of those rights in this province because, Madam Speaker, this government clearly believes that if you're in the class of owners of businesses, you have more rights than if you're in the class of people who work for those businesses. We've seen this with their forays into free trade. We've seen it with their forays into destroying working peoples' rights.

So, job growth is not the same as full-time, good-paying job growth, and that's what's missing from this minister's speech when he talks about the benefits of this particular piece of legislation, because the downsides far outweigh the benefits.

I don't want to spend a whole lot of time belabouring what all this government has done wrong with

this piece of legislation because it's just part of every other piece of legislation that they've introduced that really leads us down the wrong path for Manitobans.

You know, the minister talked about safety and I've touched on it a little bit, but one of the things in a piece of legislation that disturbed me was his plan to hire underage, I guess, superspies to ferret out nefarious wrongdoing and, yet, here we have the minister that is breeding the grounds to encourage that nefarious wrongdoing.

Because we know, from study after study, that for-profit, private liquor sales do not offer the same level of oversight for selling liquor to minors, for ensuring that liquor is distributed in a safe manner.

So we know that everything that this government says basically has to be taken with a grain of salt and look at really what drives them, and what drives them is the privatization.

Whether we're talking about Manitoba Hydro, whether we're talking about MPI, whether we're talking about Liquor & Lotteries, everything this government does is their blind, ideological belief in a private, for-profit system that only helps a very small number of Manitobans.

And, in many cases, they won't even be Manitobans that are profiting from this. It'll be out-of-province, out-of-country owners that profit while working people in the province fall further behind, thanks to this government and their blind, ideological take on the world.

So, with having said that, I could go on for quite a while about what's wrong with this particular piece of legislation and, you know, when we were in government we tried to take a reasonable approach that allowed some private sales, particularly in places where maybe it didn't make the best economic sense to have the public distribution system.

But then this government comes in and just goes completely wild with their ideas of privatization rather than being reasonable.

And perhaps that was our mistake, was trying to be reasonable, knowing full well that a bunch like this might come in and do things that are unreasonable. And that's what we're seeing here today, Madam Speaker.

So, I think I won't belabour the point any longer. I put my comments on the record and I will continue to stand up for working people in this province. I will continue to stand up for young people coming up that

need a government that respects and protects people, not just profit.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Boniface. The honourable member for St. Boniface there?

The honourable member needs to turn his video on. Is the honourable member for St. Boniface connected to us?

Mr. Lamont: Thank you, Madam Speaker, yes. This is a very problematic bill on a number of ways. I tried to address some of them in the—in my questions.

* (16:50)

It isn't just a question of ideology when we talk about privatization. Really, with privatization, I have real issues with it, not just for ideological, but for very practical, reasons. And that practical reason is that it doesn't actually cause growth in any way.

What you're doing is taking assets and jobs and economic activities from the public sector and you're putting them in the private sector. It's just a—it's a shift or a reshuffling. It doesn't actually increase growth. It doesn't increase—really increase investment in any serious way. And there are real downsides to it as well.

This is—right now, we have a system where we have a reasonable control over alcohol, which is, frankly, a very dangerous addictive substance. We tend to be very casual about it because it's so accepted, but many experts have written and acknowledged that the impact of alcohol is much more serious than many other 'substances' which we consider to be hard or addictive drugs.

Everyone's family has been touched in one way or another by addiction. I have relatives who also suffered terribly from alcoholism, and it has terrible, terrible effects. It's like a freight train running through people's lives—or not just running, but derailling through people's lives.

And it has a knock-on effect; it can ruin families. And we really have to take those issues of addiction and access to alcohol very, very seriously; more seriously than we do.

The other issues around privatization are obviously the question of where, ultimately, the funds flow, whether the funds are flowing to the—to a Crown corporation and to government or whether it's flowing into private hands and whether that—those private

hands of the ownership is not in Manitoba, which is very much the case.

Right now, we—part of what we need to emphasize and to—more and more, is that governments are—if we say, well, government needs to run like a business; well, this is a local business that's owned by all Manitobans. MPI is a local business owned by all Manitobans, and the same is true of all our Crown corporations.

And for that reason, that's what is part of what is good about them. The challenge is is that we want them to run without being too profitable because otherwise we're just profiting off ourselves. This is one of the paradoxes of dealing with publicly owned Crown corporations—or, sorry, with publicly owned corporations.

But the temptation is there to say, well, what if we were to privatize this, that we'll be saving public money, which we won't—but really, we won't be seeing any gain in growth; it's a net zero gain.

And I'm quite certain, you know, because we live in a political environment, there is a partisan aspect of this. And it's the perception that—because if they're public sector unionized workers, that they might support the NDP and that if they're private store owners that there might present—support the Progressive Conservatives, and therefore—and really, what we're just doing is shifting assets and income from one group to another based on political preference. And clearly, that's no way to run an economy, either.

But I do actually want to just touch very quickly on the results from this in Alberta, because they're, of course—this experiment did happen in Alberta. It's been sometimes hailed as a success.

But this is from 2013 on its 20th anniversary, and, just very briefly, what happened there is that, you know, you'd have choice, you'd have—it'd be like Pottersville. You have liquor stores everywhere, but the employees tend to be poorly paid, the small liquor stores cannot—and independents generally cannot compete in the same sort of way that the large ones can, so it increases inequality right away.

So someone who had a good job with a good wage, that—somebody doing that same job is all of a sudden going to be paid less in a private store. And instead of people being paid a moderate amount in the administration, you have an owner who ends up reaping all the benefits.

So, in Alberta, you had a massive concentration of wealth, because one person owns 70 of over 200 liquor stores.

A clerk named Ed Fong, he—who was running his own store, said the small independent stores cannot compete because we may not have multi-million dollars in credit to buy three pallets of Baileys, or may not have the warehousing space.

He owned his own store, asked if he would open a general liquor store, and his answer is a flat no. He said most people who open liquor stores in this ultra-competitive cutthroat market are essentially buying themselves a minimum wage job after they factor in the hours; the margins for liquor and beer are the thinnest compared to fine wine.

Another study said that Albertans are worse off after two decades of privatization because they are paying higher prices at private liquor stores than publicly owned ones at the same time that the government is receiving less tax revenue.

Privatization seriously hampered the ability of the government to collect revenue from liquor sales. Once privatization occurred, there was a precipitous fall in the effectiveness of the liquor tax in the province. The Parkland Institute estimated that Alberta had forgone \$1.5 billion in liquor revenue since 1993 by switching to a flat markup system from percentage markups.

And so this is actually—this is more than just saying, well, people—it's nice to give people a little bit of choice so they can buy beer at the grocery store. This is the sort of decision that can have major, major impacts on the bottom line of this province and how much we have to borrow, and whether we're borrowing or we're in surplus or in deficit.

It is not—the fact is that this is not something that should be proceeded with lightly in any way. I—we will not support it. I think it's a terrible idea. But the fact is, this is a bill that has the potential to have colossal, significant fiscal impacts on the bottom line of this province in the tens or hundreds of millions of dollars, because that money that once flowed into Manitoba liquor's coffers and after that into the government of Manitoba's coffers, will not be there; it simply won't.

And I'll return to the fact that there are very, very serious consequences from alcohol—social consequences. We see them every day with people on the street, both physical—both for the individuals who are addicted and the families around them and the people who support them.

It is not something we should be saying, well, we're just going to be opening this up and making it a lot easier for people to buy booze and drink. This is very much an argument from 1993 Alberta.

So, again, the idea that this is modernizing our liquor sales, I once again have to question, because there are an awful lot of bills that this government introduces which claim to be modernizing, which are, in effect, usually stripping away about 60, 80 or more years of progressive legislation that created the modern era and is going back to a time of much less regulation.

But the fact is, is that when you have less regulation, you have more risk. There are real risks associated with this, real social risks, real financial risks that have to be taken into consideration and I simply don't think they have been.

I think that this has been a very narrowly construed idea that we're going to say, well we're going to do this and it'll inconvenience some workers that—who work for—in public liquor sales, or the idea that we should have been having—and it'll go to the private sector instead.

The fact is, a job is a job is a job, and a job in the public sector that—the money that people handle and the people where—and the places where people spend their money, they can't tell the difference between someone who has a government job and someone who has a private sector job. That money is all the same.

So, part of this is to say, if we're going to step back and not be ideological about it, let's have a serious debate about the actual fiscal impacts of how this would work.

So, again, we're skeptical to the nth degree about this. I do not think that it will have a—the positive impacts. It will almost certainly have many negative impacts that are easily foreseen.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I do recognize that there is only a few minutes left here, but I do want to put a few words on the record and really just echo some of the words that have already been put on the record from this side of the House. And that is to point out how clearly and obviously ideologically driven this piece of legislation is.

At a time when Manitobans, when Canadians, when people around the world are thinking about COVID, thinking about the pandemic, thinking about ways that government can help them in their lives, this

government has been completely ideological to continue their agenda of privatization, of austerity and of cuts across the board.

Now, we saw today in their education bill, which I'm sure we'll have lots of time to debate before the House—and I don't want to be called for relevancy here this afternoon—but this bill further highlights how this government has been solely focused on this kind of agenda, in this case on privatization, where, as my colleague from St. James clearly pointed out, there's been no call for this.

Where are the people lining up to call for this change and for this government to push forward this agenda at a time when people are worried about

vaccines, they're worried about health care, they're worried about so many things with regards to COVID; about their livelihoods, Madam Speaker?

So, this government continues to push forward. Now, what does this bill do? This bill actually takes some power away from the ability to look at alcohol sales as a health issue—

Madam Speaker: Order.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 28 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, March 15, 2021

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