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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
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

Tuesday, March 16, 2021

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Good afternoon, everybody.

Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): I am pleased to table the Assiniboine Community College 2019-2020 annual report.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

Agriculture Awareness Day

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development): Today is Ag Awareness Day. We take this opportunity to celebrate the women and men who work hard every day to produce safe and high-quality food while respecting our environment and our animals.

The farm families and organizations involved in primary agriculture and food processing strive to build on the opportunities and advantages that come with a growing demand for food.

One of the strengths in our industry is protein. This strength underpins this year's theme: Protein and Emerging Agricultural Technology. We celebrate the innovation in agriculture, highlighting plant and animal protein production and the processing taking place in Manitoba which sets the stage for future opportunities.

The successful Protein Summit held in February with—and the appointment of Dr. James House from the U of M for research priorities, and a protein

research symposium to be held this summer are just a few of the highlights of the Manitoba protein strategy.

We also want to acknowledge other programs the farm community has embraced with enthusiasm. Our watershed districts are doing innovative work with the GROW and Conservation Trust. Best management practices enable farmers to make improvements to their land while enhancing the environment.

Today's agriculture industry is technologically advanced and ARD's new service centres are designed to meet the emerging technological needs for our client base.

Farm safety is of the utmost importance. We encourage all farm families to think safety as a busy spring season approaches.

The ag awareness virtual event was held this morning. Thank you to the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and to both opposition leaders for your participation, as well as guest speakers Dominique Baumann from Roquette, Ray Bouchard from Enns Brothers, and Brooks White with the Borderland Agriculture.

Thank you to all involved in this most dynamic industry. And a special thanks to the farm community for your generous donations to the food banks, especially in the early days of the pandemic. Agriculture has remained a bright spot in an uncertain world, and together we look forward to even brighter days for agriculture here in Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Madam Speaker, today, on Ag Awareness Day, we celebrate Manitoba producers and their integral contributions to the province. Upwards of 40,000 Manitobans are employed in the sector. They contribute immensely to the economic health of our province.

Farmers are essential to the Canadian way of life. Many of the items found on our tables have been grown right here in Manitoba, such as canola, sunflower seeds, hemp and many different grains. And even though the pandemic has challenged the sector, this government had made it harder for the producers to recover by closing MASC offices and Ag offices and meddling with Crown land leases.

This government's refusal to work with federal officials has made life more difficult for Manitoban farmers. This government has refused to collaborate on a carbon tax that benefits Manitobans, which results in our farmers having to pay tax on grain drying.

This government has refused to implement changes that would make it easier for farmers to access benefits from the ag stability program, such as boosting coverage and eliminating the reference margin limit. With the closure of Ag offices, it will be even harder for farmers to apply to the ag stability program.

As the world grapples with the effects of climate change and the economic fallout from COVID-19, there is a global movement to eat and shop local. Initiatives like community-supported agriculture help reconnect people with the land while supporting local farmers.

We continue to ask this government to commit to leaving MASC offices and Ag offices open and work with the federal government to improve the ag stability program and remove the carbon tax on grain drying to support folks in the agricultural sector.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, Madam Speaker, agricultural awareness day is very important. Indeed, rarely has there ever been such a great need to create better understanding between those in the agricultural industry and all other Manitobans.

During the COVID pandemic, our agriculture and agri-food industry performed in an outstanding fashion, providing a reliable source of food, and they did an incredible job. This needs to be recognized, and the agricultural community is to be thanked.

We have, at the same time, government bills on petty trespassing and biosecurity. And the government needs to do a much better job of explaining these bills, not just to those in the agricultural community, but to the general public, because there is a lot of potential for misunderstandings and problems.

At the moment, in getting markets around the world, markets are changing their approach and highlighting the environmental aspects and the animal husbandry aspects of the production of food. In this climate, we need to have much more emphasis on climate change, but we also need to be promoting what the agricultural industry is doing and providing even better mechanisms for them to get 'carbon'-carbon credits for sequestering carbon.

Animal husbandry is increasingly very important in the marketing of our products, and we need to be recognized for excellence in this area. Sadly, one of the things this government has done is to create incredible stress in the area of producers who are—have been on Crown lands. The government should retract measures which are causing the stress and address this.

Farm safety, as we talked about yesterday, is incredibly important, and we have a long way to go to improve the health of those in the agricultural industry and to make sure that people are safe.

So I say thank you, along with other MLAs, to all those in the agriculture and agri-food industries. Thank you, thank you, merci, miigwech.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Team Zacharias

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): Madam Speaker, I am pleased today to recognize the success and achievements of Team Zacharias, a group of young women from the constituency of Borderland who have become a real force in the world of curling.

The team, coached by Sheldon Zacharias, with Mackenzie Zacharias as skip, Karlee Burgess as third, Emily Zacharias at second and Lauren Lenentine at lead, put their home rink, the Altona Curling Club, on the map, and went 11-0 in the 2020 Canadian junior curling championships in Langley, BC.

It didn't stop at winning the red and white for Team Zacharias. Several weeks later, the team won the 2020 World Juniors in Russia and returned home as heroes.

Despite the cancellation of provincial championships due to COVID, Team Zacharias ranked 11th nationally, and as a result earned a berth at this year's Scotties tournament of the hearts in Calgary, representing wild card 2.

The team went 3-5 and ultimately fell just short of qualifying for the championship round, but they

played well and they brought distinction and honour to themselves, the sport and our hometown, and I'm confident we'll be watching Team Zacharias scale ever greater heights in the years to come.

* (13:40)

Madam Speaker, I want to take a moment to thank all those from the community who have supported and continue to support these young women, and I also want to acknowledge the dedication, commitment and good sportsmanship demonstrated by Mackenzie, Karlee, Emily and Lauren as they've represented our community and our province in games at home and around the world.

Team Zacharias, I wish you all the best and happy curling in the years ahead.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Animal Diseases Amendment Act

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Bill 62 is a regressive step in protecting the rights of animals, agricultural whistle-blowers and animal-welfare activists.

Bill 62 requires individuals to obtain consent before entering and interacting with animals in tightly controlled agricultural areas called biosecurity zones. Bill 62 would see Manitobans who give water to animals suffering on the way to slaughter fined up to \$100,000.

This ag gag bill is meant to cover up and hide acts of animal cruelty on animal farms and punish whistle-blowers and animal rights activists.

Kaitlyn Mitchell, a lawyer with Animal Justice, notes, and I quote, Canada has some of the most-worst animal transport rules in the industrialized world. Instead of protecting farm animals forced to endure days-long journeys without food, rest or water, the Manitoba government has introduced Bill 62, an ag gag bill designed to keep animal suffering hidden from public view. It is not only dangerous to animals, but may well violate Manitobans' Charter-protected rights to freedom of expression and peaceful protest. End quote, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, Manitobans want to know that the food they're buying is ethically and humanely raised. Whistle-blowers and other activists are the very reason why inhumane practices are exposed.

If the Premier (Mr. Pallister) actually cared for the well-being of animals, he would create legally binding standards of care to 'govern'—govern the treatment of

farmed animals. Madam Speaker, it's obvious the Premier's real agenda has nothing to do with animal welfare, but it's all about disenfranchising protestors and covering up animal mistreatment when it occurs.

I call on the Premier to recall Bill 62 and put the welfare of animals first.

Miigwech.

Gardening in Manitoba

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development): Spring is coming, and this year it is appearing even earlier. With the warmer weather come thoughts of planting gardens and flowerpots.

One year ago, at the start of the pandemic, there was a great deal of anxiety about whether greenhouses would be able to open to the public. Fortunately, they were able to open following public health rules.

Last year, there was a renewed interest in the green thumbs of Manitobans. There were record sales of seeds, seedlings and flowers. Many first-time gardeners tried their hand at gardening, with various degrees of success.

It would appear that green thumb mania is alive and well again this year. Some vegetable seeds are already in short supply and our local greenhouse industry is gearing up for another busy season that will follow current COVID protocols—including social distancing, sanitization and controlled access—in place.

Growing your own fruit and vegetables and nurturing your flowers is a wonderful way to connect with nature and relieve the mental stress that the pandemic has imposed on all of us. There is nothing more satisfying than growing and then enjoying fresh homegrown fruits and vegetables from your garden or raised-bed garden. Colourful flower arrangements are a joy to behold.

Midland constituency is home to many successful locally owned greenhouses. Vanderveen Greenhouses in Carman is the second largest greenhouse in western Canada. Many small and expanding greenhouses, such as Prairie Grove Greenhouse near Domain, provide local service for aspiring horticulturists.

Thank you to our Manitoba greenhouse industry for bringing inspiration, flavour and colour to our lives. We look forward getting our hands dirty outside in Manitoba this spring.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Balvir Toor

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): It is hard to believe that it will be one year on March 19th that Balvir Toor was killed on the job at 44 years of age.

Balvir was born on October 1st, 1975, in the village of Bhinder Khurd, in Punjab. He came to Canada in October of 2010, with his three children and wife in hopes of creating a better future for his children. He was a beloved father, husband, son and a friend.

Balvir's wife, Parmjit Kaur Toor, still mourns the loss of her husband and struggles to believe that Balvir is not with us anymore. Two of his children, Manpreet Kaur Toor and Harmanpreet Kaur Toor, study at the University of Manitoba. His third child, Jashanpreet Singh Toor, is in grade 12. Balvir was very fortunate to have an amazing and loving family.

He was an active community member who organized many community sporting events. In May 2011, he began work as a taxi operator and, through determination, he became the owner-operator of Duffy's taxi 390.

Balvir was an honest person. Someone once forgot their wallet with \$450 in his taxi, and he immediately drove back to the Children's Hospital and returned the money to the owner. This is the kind of person Balvir was.

This loss is so tragic. Balvir had so much of his life ahead of him. He was a respectful and honest man who always welcomed people with an open heart.

Balvir, my brother, you will be missed and will stay in our hearts forever.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Pharmacare Coverage for Diabetic Supplies

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): During the pandemic, thousands of Manitobans who have lost their jobs have also lost private medical insurance they relied on to pay for life-saving medications, especially for chronic conditions like diabetes.

Type 1 and type 2 diabetes can both have serious complications, so imagine a drug that could prevent blindness, heart attack, stroke, kidney failure and amputation. It exists: it's insulin. There are devices, like insulin pumps and continuous glucose monitors—CGMs—that can help stabilize blood sugar and keep people safe, and the results can be nothing short of miraculous. I met a gentleman here in the Leg. who first lost his sight because of diabetic retinopathy, but

controlled his sugars so well that his eyesight regenerated.

Yet Manitoba is one of the few provinces that stops providing insulin pumps at the age of 18, and we do not provide coverage for CGMs, although they have been around for 20 years.

Type 1 diabetes, as a mother pointed out to me, is because a person's own immune system attacks their pancreas, the organ that produces insulin. While we—when a person's heart doesn't work, we pay for them for that pacemaker to make sure they stay alive and healthy. We should do the same for type 1 diabetes when a pancreas is not working.

I also spoke with a parent who is considering leaving the province because their child is about to graduate from high school and will lose their insulin pump coverage.

In the long term, we could save tens of millions of dollars or more in health care. But a study in France of 75,000 patients showed it reduced ER visits by 50 per cent, so the reduced costs in ambulance and emergency care are immediate.

And who is rushing to the ER? Mostly families and children. I have met many parents who live with the fear that their child will slip into a coma in the middle of night. I have also talked with seniors in St. Boniface with tears in their eyes about the costs of insulin that aren't covered.

This is something that affects people across Manitoba, in every constituency. It is a straightforward way, in this crisis, to make people's lives better and provide families with peace of mind. I hope the government and all parties will see fit to cover these medications and supplies, in full, as the life-saving medications and devices they are.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

ORAL QUESTIONS

K-to-12 Education System Review Implementation of Recommendations

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, what the Premier did to health care, he's now trying to do to education. And what a mess that was when they made their health-care cuts.

Remember just a few short years ago, they had to hire their health-care consultant a second time to bring them—bring that person back to Manitoba to try and clean up their mess. What that consultant actually said

is that the PCs were so obsessed with saving money that it was causing real damage to our province. Their health-care consultant said that the plan was falling apart because the PCs do such a poor job of implementing their plans.

And now they're at it again. They're embarking on a plan to do the same thing with education.

Will the Premier simply stop his plans to hurt education in our province?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Looks like the NDP leader's got a new toy, Madam Speaker. He thinks that parliamentary privilege means he can just make it up in here and it won't matter. But it will matter, Madam Speaker, when we reform education. It will matter.

And it'll matter to the good, because we're 10th out of 10 under the NDP. Tenth out of 10, Madam Speaker, and the NDP's arguing we should keep this system. Tenth out of 10, dead last, and getting further behind ninth, and the NDP's arguing—they're arguing for the status quo.

* (13:50)

Let the member make that stat up. Tenth out of 10. Dead last. We're going to make the system better. It might work for their friends, the status quo might be perfect for the NDP leader, but it doesn't work for our children and it won't work for us until it does.

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

Education Modernization Act Request to Withdraw Bill 64

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, I'd like to thank my colleague for giving me a 10 out of 10 on my first score, but it's only going to go up from there, Madam Speaker. We're talking 110 per cent from here on in.

We know that the Premier is ignoring the recommendations—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —of the reviews that he actually spent millions of dollars commissioning.

So, he spent millions of dollars on this review. He invited Manitobans to come share their views. Manitobans showed up—only to have their advice for their dreams for our children ignored, Madam Speaker.

So, the Premier has carried out this exercise, completely ignored the review recommendations, and is now implementing his own vision for centralizing education in his office. We know that, given his track record at ruining the health-care system, that he is not going to manage the implementation well.

Will he simply abandon the bill that was introduced yesterday and commit to a real plan to improve education in Manitoba? [*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I should just clarify—the member is providing evidence to the need for us to improve numeracy skills here in the province—that 10 is last, not first.

Madam Speaker, the member's grasping, and he's grasping big time here. [*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: The fact is, the best you could come up with to refute this incredible amount of work—and applause is owed to our Education Minister, Madam Speaker; I'm listening to Manitobans—the best the member opposite could come up with is, parents will have to—if they have concerns, they won't be able to talk to trustees anymore. They'll have to come to me, he said.

He forgot about the teachers. That's where parents go when they have a problem. That's where they go: the front line. And that's where the resources, Madam Speaker, that the NDP squandered on the top of the system—the big top-heavy system, the most expensive system in the country—those resources, they're going to the front line, where the teachers are and where the children need the help.

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

Special Needs Funding

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, we know that the further you get away from the classroom, the worse the decision-making gets. That's why the Premier's plan to centralize education decision-making in his office makes no sense whatsoever. [*interjection*]

Madam Speaker, it would appear that we have a defection, that one of the PCs has now seen the reason of our position that, in fact, decisions are best made, when it comes to local schools, at the local level.

One of the biggest concerns that parents have today, as they wade through the education bill, is the

impact on special needs funding. It's nowhere in the bill, Madam Speaker. And when we turn to the review, there is only one passing reference to funding for children with additional needs. This is a major priority for parents across the province.

Will the Premier commit today that he will not cut additional needs funding, but instead increase it for families across the province?

Mr. Pallister: The problem the member has of making it up as he goes along is that he loses credibility every time he opens his mouth that way, and he's losing it again. We just advanced \$5 million additional in education for special needs children.

We invested \$600 million before COVID, more than NDP ever did, in education, Madam Speaker. Our commitment to education is real, and it's sincere. And I would wish the member to try to pose more sincere questions as we move forward.

He says the further away, the worse. Who's closer to the child: the teacher or the superintendent? Who's closer to the child: the parent or the trustee? He's advocating—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —for more trustees and more superintendents, Madam Speaker. We're empowering teachers and we're empowering families instead.

Madam Speaker, that's the way to a better, stronger system. The way the NDP leader's talking, more trustees, more superintendents would solve all the problems. That's what got him and them 10th out of 10. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, that was quite an unfortunate answer on a question about special needs funding in Manitoba.

But it is consistent—*[interjection]* It is consistent with the Premier's approach.

It seems that the Premier has not read the education bill. I'm doubting that the Education Minister has read the education bill, because if they did take a look at the bill that was distributed yesterday, they would see that there are no mentions of students with additional needs in that legislation.

When you look at the review—which, again, they ignored, because they're ignoring the recommendations of the review—even there there's only a passing reference to students with additional needs. This is at a time when there are more students in the classroom with additional needs than ever before.

Will the Premier commit today to ending his funding freeze for children with additional needs and, in fact, commit to increasing them for years to come? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: I really appreciate the member digging down deep for that question about referencing things. The NDP was always good at referencing things, and he's good at referencing things. We're good at doing things instead.

We're going to fund the needs of our special needs kids. We're going to improve the quality of our education—which I should mention for the member, in terms of his reading skills, were last: 10th out of 10. So he's demonstrating the need for improvement every time he speaks.

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

Education System Improvements Child Poverty and Nutrition Programs

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Yes, Madam Speaker, we prefer a different approach to the Premier's blame-the-kids style of reforming education.

On this side of the House, we don't blame the children, Madam Speaker. Rather, we seek to support them. And if the Premier—one of the two Education ministers, who had their hands at cutting our education system, had actually shown up to listen to teachers, had shown up to listen to educators across the province, they would have heard a message loud and clear: if you want to improve educational outcomes in Manitoba, you have to focus on child poverty.

And yet nowhere in the bill, nowhere in the review, is there a comprehensive plan to try and improve child poverty as part of an overall strategy towards improving education in Manitoba.

Will the Premier admit that his true focus is to cut, at the expense of the children's education in Manitoba, and then simply abandon this plan and introduce a real program to improve education in Manitoba?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, the member doesn't know, but I do, and a number of members of this House do, the challenges faced by modest-income families. We understand the challenges that have to be—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —addressed. We understand that there are difficulties there—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —Madam Speaker, and they're real. But we also understand the vital importance of not using poor—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —children as an excuse for being dead last—not using poor children as an excuse for being dead last—because the potential within each child is real, and because teachers understand that, they understand that poor children are not an excuse, as the member just raised. They are an inspiration to all of us.

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

Mr. Kinew: We have a plan to address child poverty as part of an overall strategy towards improving educational outcomes in Manitoba. One of the pillars of that strategy would be to feed hungry kids at school.

* (14:00)

Now, Madam Speaker, we know that children succeed better when they have a nutritious meal at school. What do the PCs think about that plan? Well, within in the past year, they called the idea of feeding hungry children in schools a bad idea.

Now, that couldn't just be dismissed as a back-bench misfire. That was, in fact, the Premier who doubled down on it and said, I quote: If children are going to school hungry, then parents aren't fulfilling their responsibilities. End quote.

That's not just out of touch, Madam Speaker, that is actively harmful when all the education decisions are going to be made at his desk following the passage of Bill 64.

Will the Premier finally see the error in his ways, abandon this misguided enterprise and instead commit to a real plan that would include addressing child poverty on our way to improving education in Manitoba?

Mr. Pallister: I'm sure the member has good intentions. I'm sure, also, that the previous NDP government had lots of good intentions. I know they had lots of press releases about how they were dealing with poverty.

But the fact remains, they were 10th out of 10, and we are not. And the fact remains that we have been addressing and will continue to focus—with hundreds of millions of dollars of additional targeted investment, we've been focused on addressing the issues of poverty, including a \$5-million investment to help families prepare meals for their children in their own homes when they weren't in school. When their children were not in school they were able to be fed at home because of the foresight of our government.

And the members opposite seem confused about the reality here, Madam Speaker. The reality is our school system needs to improve. And it needs to improve because we're dead last under the NDP, and we are not going to stay there, because we want a better opportunity for our children in our schools. And that's the focus of our plan.

Small Class Sizes Government Priority

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): Teachers and parents are quite concerned by the growing size of classrooms in this province. For several years, class sizes have been getting bigger, not smaller. Unfortunately, because of inappropriate provincial funding, classroom sizes are set to get even larger. This is the approach of the Pallister government, and this is one that will be going forward.

Bill 64 won't change this. As a matter of fact, the government has made absolutely no commitment to address this issue. In fact, they are headed in the opposite direction.

Why won't the minister commit to keeping classroom sizes small?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education): Well, Madam Speaker, I think we should have a look at the NDP track record when it comes to education and, in particular, the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program.

So, back in 2007, where were we? Middle of the pack: sixth in reading, fifth in math, eighth in science. Go to 2010 under the NDP, where were we in reading? Tenth. Where were we in math? Tenth. Where were we in science? Well, we were only ninth. But, by 2013, we were also tenth in science.

Madam Speaker, that's it under the status quo NDP. Our students deserve better.

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

Mr. Altomare: Parents and teachers appreciate the one-on-one time small class sizes provide their children. And teachers recognize that small class sizes help them meet the varied needs of the children they support.

Yet, the Pallister government's priority: let's put political partisans in charge of this new provincial über-system, and giving the veto—a veto to the minister on the appointment of school—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altomare: —superintendents and principals.

And it's going to get ugly. And it's completely—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altomare: —removed from the priorities of Manitoba families.

So I'm going to ask again: Why aren't small class sizes the No. 1 priority of any plan for our schools?

Mr. Cullen: At the heart of this transformation in education is taking money from the top bureaucracy, heavy administration, moving it down to the front lines for our students and for our teachers.

Let's look at what happened under the NDP government. The empires—in fact, members opposite were actually on school boards that put high-level, expensive superintendents in place across school boards. Just three years ago, superintendent—chief superintendent, Winnipeg School Division: \$270,000; and he had three assistants making over \$180,000 at the time.

Let's take that money and put it where it's deserves, at the front line.

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Transcona, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Altomare: Madam Speaker, let's talk about the priorities of Bill 64, and the one priority is to put control firmly in their hands right over there.

But what have they done so far with the powers they have? Every year, they're funding less and less than the rate of inflation. Every year they provide

funding that is inadequate for rising student populations and rising needs. This means each and every year, schools have had to cut, just like we've seen in these past budgets.

Class sizes have gotten bigger. They will continue to get bigger, just as we've seen in recent years.

So why is the minister, then, set on centralizing control and increasing class sizes across the province?

Mr. Cullen: Well Madam Speaker, what happened under the NDP? More and more taxpayers' money went into high-paid expensive bureaucracies in the school boards. That's not where it's needed. It's needed at the front lines, and that's exactly where we're going to reallocate this money, to the front line where it's needed.

Madam Speaker—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Cullen: Madam Speaker, we invested a record \$1.35 billion in education this year alone, a 1.56 per cent increase alone, and we're not done yet. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Education System Improvements Child Poverty and Nutrition Programs

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): One of the most disappointing aspects of the education bill is the fact that poverty doesn't appear anywhere in that bill.

Madam Speaker, we know that during the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) administration, and even prior to the pandemic, Manitoba had one of the highest rates of child poverty in Canada, and the pandemic has made it only worse. *[interjection]*

And I'm glad that the Minister of Health thinks that that's funny, Madam Speaker. Poverty is a major impediment to academic success for many Manitoba students, and we know that poverty does not impact all students in the same way.

Will the minister commit to addressing poverty in a meaningful way so that our children can do their best in school?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education): Well, Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is, when we came into government, we had the highest child poverty rates ever in Manitoba. What our government has

done in the last five years: we have reduced child poverty by 31 per cent.

Madam Speaker, that's taking 15,000 kids out of poverty. That's a great start, and we're not done yet.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. John's, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Fontaine: Recommendation 45 of the K-to-12 education review mentions, and I quote, improving access to nutritious food for Manitoba students and expanding the health-promoting meal programs. End quote. However, we know that, despite vague recommendations made here, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has continuously cut funding to schools, forcing them to eliminate healthy, nutritious programs.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, last year we called for a universal breakfast program, and this government called it, and I quote, a bad idea.

Will the minister reconsider their position and commit to funding a universal healthy meal program so that all Manitoba students have access to nutritious food?

* (14:10)

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I appreciate the member's question, as it does allow me an opportunity to stand in my—in this House and talk about our early-learning nutrition—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: —program.

This year we have provided \$5 million in the home nutrition pilot project, which has put breakfast on the table to more than 5,500 children throughout the province.

We know that there's more work to be done. We know that when we formed government, we inherited poverty that had grown every year under the NDP watch. We're moving forward to ensure that all children can be lifted out of poverty, and we know that this is a good start.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Fontaine: It's clear to Manitobans the consultation done on this review was not meaningful.

Nathan Martindale, the VP of the Manitoba Teachers' Society, said that they submitted a list of 17 recommendations of their own to the Province, and

the top three dealt with poverty. But the minister did not make this a priority in his announcement, Madam Speaker.

We know that in order to address inequities in our education system, addressing poverty must be a-prioritized.

Will the minister commit to addressing poverty and creating a more equitable education system for Manitoba students?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker, we clearly recognize there's inequalities across the province, and those are exactly those types of inequalities that we're trying to fix with this legislation and funding, quite frankly.

We had thousands of Manitobans engaged in the consultation process, and I want to tell you that we are going to continue to engage with Manitobans, and we're going to tackle—*[interjection]*—we're going to tackle the tough issues like poverty and all those other issues that have been laid out in the K-to-12 report.

Madam Speaker, we're not afraid to take on those challenges. The NDP were afraid to take—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cullen: —on those challenges, were satisfied with status quo. Madam Speaker, that's not good enough for our kids. There's more hard work to do, and we're prepared to do it.

Menstrual Product Availability Request to Supply Schools

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, one tangible change this government can make to improve attendance rates at schools and address systemic inequities would be to provide free menstrual products to all Manitoban students.

And Manitobans agree. In less than a week, nearly 2,000 people have signed a petition calling for free menstrual products in schools.

Now, sadly, within the minister's new plan to take control over all of our schools, there is no mention of providing free menstrual products to improve attendance rates, which would improve performance.

So today I'll ask the Minister of Education (Mr. Cullen): Will you commit to making menstrual products free and easily accessible for all Manitoban students? Yes or no?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): Madam Speaker, I believe we answered these questions of the member last week and the week before.

And, of course, Madam Speaker, this is a very important subject. We do take it very seriously. And I can tell the member opposite that obviously it is left up to the individual schools. There are monies that flow to the school divisions, to the schools. And if they want to make this a priority, they can make this a priority.

And many schools actually do make it a priority, Madam Speaker. And so it is the independence of those schools to make those decisions and make those choices, and that's where it should be.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, just this morning, the City of Winnipeg unanimously passed a motion which will bring free menstrual products to all civic facilities, and I commend Councillor Santos for bringing the motion forward.

We all know it's doable. This government simply lacks the willpower to address gender and health inequities in our school system.

The good news is that this government still has time to change course and truly modernize our schools. We could be provincial leaders, Madam Speaker, in creating equity for all students who have their period.

Will the ministers of Education and Health work together and commit to making menstrual products like tampons, pads and DivaCups free and accessible to all Manitoba students?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, what we're committed to is providing a much better education to our children in the province of Manitoba. And unlike—under members opposite we were dead last in the country.

That is not the approach that we're taking, and I commend the Minister of Education (Mr. Cullen) on his announcement yesterday. This will be a good thing for students in the province of Manitoba.

With respect to the question of the member opposite, I have answered that question. There is—there are monies that do flow to individual schools, Madam Speaker, and they make those decisions and those choices at that level.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, I think it's indicative of the issue when members opposite are blushing at the mere mention of menstrual products and itemizing what they are.

It was in 2019 that we campaigned on making pads and tampons free for students. The proposal was so popular that this government said that they were considering it. Almost two years later, and with a full revamp of our education system, we have seen zero efforts to make that a reality.

Now, I've heard from educators—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: —school support staff, parents and students, all of which who believe having these products accessible in schools would reduce barriers for students, improve attendance and help them succeed academically. It's simple.

Why won't the minister just commit to this—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, unlike members opposite we have respect for decisions that are made at the local level in—within the schools. And what I will say also is under this new system, there will be parent councils will—that will have the opportunity to also make these decisions much more at the local level.

And so we continue to look at those and respect—have respect—*[interjection]*—I know the member for St. John's (Ms. Fontaine) doesn't have respect for teachers and front-line workers, Madam Speaker, which is unfortunate. And if she would listen to the answer to the question, she would know that those at the local level—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —within the schools have the opportunity to make these decisions, and we thank them for doing that.

Education Modernization Act Equitable Education in the North

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Earlier this year, the Pallister government proposed a vaccination site be located at the Thompson airport: inconvenient for thousands, inaccessible for hundreds. The problem, as usual, was they didn't listen to northern communities.

Now we're headed for a much worse disaster with Bill 64. Local accountability is ripped up. Now, priorities will be set by whatever minister and his partisan appointees happen to cook up down here in Winnipeg.

This is a disservice to northern communities.

Madam Speaker, why is the minister focused on his own power instead of priorities for the North?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): Madam Speaker—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Health.

Mrs. Stefanson: Oh, thank you, Madam—sorry, I didn't hear you over that, Madam Speaker—the noise from the members opposite.

But what I will say with the—with respect to the member opposite mentioning our vaccine super sites: we will be opening up the next super site in Morden in two weeks' time, Madam Speaker.

What I will say is that, for the vaccine super sites in the North, obviously what we want to do, according to public health 'exers', our best strategy at combatting COVID-19 is to execute a robust vaccine strategy, and we're doing just that.

In fact, in Maclean's magazine just last week, it said that our efforts on the vaccine rollout are herculean, Madam Speaker. It said—

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

The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Lindsey: We've seen the disaster that got created with centralized health care, and now we see this government going down the same path with trying to centralize education services. We need an education plan that works for northern communities. We need northern communities to be able to have that voice, which they don't have with Bill 64.

* (14:20)

Madam Speaker, we need a plan that addresses barriers to students who face things in classrooms every day, who face things in order to get to classrooms every day. This bill doesn't address any of those issues for northern Manitoba.

Why is the minister undermining any attempt at equitable education in the North with Bill 64?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education): Well, Madam Speaker, the member opposite is just, frankly, wrong. I hope he takes the opportunity to read all 303 pages of that bill.

Madam Speaker, in fact, I had a note from a long-time Manitoba teacher—teacher, leader and curriculum developer: Please accept my heartfelt congratulations on the release of the province's K-to-12 review. As a report it is forward-looking, student-centered, and achievable—a teacher from northern Manitoba, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I would ask the minister that, when referencing a letter, that it be tabled in the House—*[interjection]*—I don't need any help to get my point across. I think I've stated it very clearly.

The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Lindsey: Northern Manitoba, I realize the minister may not realize this, is as large as many countries. The minister proposes no local accountability for education decisions across that entire region. Instead, it would be decided down here on Broadway, in the Premier's office, I guess, because that's who makes the decisions, not the minister, right.

This same government couldn't figure out where the Thompson airport was; now they're trying to figure out how to conduct education in the North without listening to people in the North—another disaster in the making.

Why is the minister trying to take control over northern education, and will he withdraw Bill 64—a disaster in the making—today?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I note, Madam Speaker, the member had trouble reading that question written for him by his leader.

I should mention, though, that—this is a quote: Objective is to get resources into the classroom. I'm very, very supportive of ways that'll increase administrative efficiency and free up resources for the classroom.

That's a quote from the NDP minister of the day, Drew Caldwell, in respect to the NDP's amalgamation strategies, Madam Speaker, which failed miserably. These will not. The objective is the same; the results will not be the same for the people of the North, the south, the east, or the west. Children will benefit from these reforms where they did not under the NDP.

Education System Review Public Education System

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): There's a huge gap between the recommendations of the K-to-12 review—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamont: —and what the government is actually doing in its legislation. The review says to keep school boards, but this government is scrapping them.

The Education Minister yesterday said the pandemic is an opportunity, and that's exactly what the former minister said last year to a webinar with a who's who of the global alt-right: an organization run by a spokesperson for a Russian oligarch who financed the invasion of Crimea; Ted Cruz; government reps from Brazil; and a German member of the European Parliament from a neo-Nazi party whose members include Holocaust deniers, who actually, as this documents shows, followed the member's advice.

Why isn't this government learning and listening to the K-to-12 review, as well as the pandemic, instead of using it to dismantle public education?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Too bad his image consultant couldn't have written some questions for him, Madam Speaker.

The fact of the matter is that there was a review done—an independent review that was done by the previous NDP government—in respect of school divisions and their ability to function effectively.

The review said this of one board, quote: Embarrassing, shameful, reckless, extremely detrimental to the division, and the very idea of boards of trustees. That comment was directed to the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw), who was the chair of the Winnipeg 1 School Division at the time.

Madam Speaker, we value the work of trustees, but the work of trustees was predominantly to set tax rates, which will now not be needed. The second aspect was to negotiate with teachers, which will now, with centralized bargaining, not be needed—as was the recommendation, for years, of the Manitoba Teachers' Society.

So, when the member speaks of the need for trustees, he speaks for the need to waste resources, that could be put at the front line, on higher up the system. And that would be a mistake we won't make.

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

Mr. Lamont: I see the Premier's recommendation is—he's still running the government based on spite.

Now, it's very clear that when it comes to Manitobans—and the Conservatives should know their history—when the US moved to end segregation of Black and white students, the Conservative response at the time was to try to dismantle the public school system and offer vouchers and choice. That is the history.

In the Deputy Premier's home constituency, he did not draw the line based on race, he drew the line based on 2SLGBTQ+. And the lines couldn't have been more clear, because back in 2019 in this House, he praised Alex Mitala, a pastor from Uganda who's known around the world for his 2006 kill the gays bill. I table Hansard and an archived copy of the member's endorsement.

This is not about disapproval; this is not about sin. The Deputy Premier hosted and praised someone who wanted gays put to death—

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

Mr. Pallister: The member's romp to bizarre land just moves him into irrelevance faster than anyone else could do. Just self-destructive to listen to. Incredibly personal and incredibly damaging, not; because no one believes a word he's just said.

Madam Speaker, I'm not sure why the member chooses to take this tack in this House. We're talking about the education of our children. None of us would be where we are today without the opportunities of public education, or in some cases private education, have given us. [*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: And the number of heckles from his seat about tin-hat theories, when he could be talking constructively about the betterment of education for our children.

No one in this House has done more and cares more about public education and our children than that member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) right there. And he deserves our support, and none of this lunacy from the member opposite.

**Education Modernization Act
Indigenous Reconciliation**

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, in 309 pages, Bill 64, the new education act, uses the words Indigenous and reconciliation only once; the word First Nation only three times; and the words Métis and Inuit are never used.

For years, there has been an important partnership between the provincial education system and Indigenous education system, and yet it is not adequately described.

I ask the Premier to withdraw this bill and to rewrite it to better include the relationship with Indigenous people, to mandate learning about the history, culture and languages of Indigenous peoples, and to address the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I do sincerely appreciate the member raising the issue of our Indigenous students.

Our Indigenous young people have been short-changed for years under the system. It needs to improve. It needs to improve markedly. The drop-out rates for Indigenous students are absurdly high, and it's totally unacceptable. We need to take major steps and major actions. A number of these—as the member might have known if he had reviewed—bothered to review the report—were addressed in the report fully.

And, in fact, in our consultation, there was extensive consultation with Indigenous groups, individuals concerned about making sure that we change our system for the better for Indigenous young people. This is one of the cornerstones of the purpose for these reforms. It is to make sure that we get back to an equality of opportunity in our province, something we have deprived Indigenous people and others of for too long.

And it's an important motivation—it should be an important motivation for all of us; it most certainly will be for us going forward. And I'd ask the member for River Heights to depart from his leader's absurd arguments and move in a supportive way to improving the quality of education for all of our children in this province.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Thompson (Ms. Adams)?

The honourable member for Transcona.

Public Child-Care Grants

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

The background for this petition is as follows:

(1) The pandemic has further emphasized the need for quality, affordable and accessible child care and has demonstrated that the government has failed to ensure child care is accessible to all Manitoba families.

* (14:30)

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

(3) While child-care centres have faced increased costs associated with lost parent fees due to COVID-19 closures and spent thousands on PPE when open to keep kids safe, the provincial government has provided no additional financial support.

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

(5) The provincial government's cuts to nursery school grants is doubling parent fees for hundreds of families, making child care less affordable and accessible.

(6) The provincial government has passed bill 34, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, which removed the cap on child-care fees for private sector businesses.

We therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by Lindsey Driver, Amy Baizley, Corrie Foster and many more Manitobans.

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

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

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

(1) The pandemic has further emphasized the need for quality, affordable and accessible child care and has demonstrated that the government has failed to ensure child care is accessible to all Manitoba families.

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

(3) While child-care centres have faced increased costs associated with lost parent fees due to COVID-19 closures and spent thousands on PPE when open, to keep kids safe, the provincial government has provided no additional financial support.

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

(5) The provincial government's cuts to nursery school grants is doubling parent fees for hundreds of families, making child care less affordable and accessible.

(6) The provincial government passed bill 34, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, which removed the cap on child-care fees for private sector businesses.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse changes to the nursery school grants and to end the freeze on child-care's operating grants while—while committing, rather, to keeping public child care affordable and accessible for all Manitoban families.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights.

The honourable member for River Heights, on a petition?

Cochlear Implant Program

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I wish to present the following petition to the Manitoba Legislature.

The background to this petition is as follows:

People who suffer hearing loss due to aging, illness, employment or accident not only lose the ability to communicate effectively with friends, relatives or colleagues; they also can experience unemployment, social isolation and struggles with mental health.

A cochlear implant is a life-changing electronic device that allows deaf people to receive and process sounds and speech, and also can partially restore hearing in people who have severe hearing loss and who do not benefit from conventional hearing aids. A processor behind the ear captures and processes sound signals which are transmitted to a receiver implanted into the skull that relays the information to the inner ear, the cochlea.

The technology has been available since 1989 through the Central Speech and Hearing Clinic, founded in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The Surgical Hearing Implant program began implanting patients in the fall of 2011 and marked the completion of 250 cochlear implant surgeries in Manitoba in the summer of 2018. The program has implanted about 60 devices since the summer of 2018, as it is only able to implant about 40 to 50 devices per year.

There are no upfront costs to Manitoba residents who proceed with cochlear implant surgery, as Manitoba Health covers the surgical procedure, internal implant and the first external sound processor. Newfoundland and Manitoba have the highest estimated implantation costs of all provinces.

Alberta has one of the best programs with Alberta aids for daily living, and their cost share means the patient pays only approximately \$500 out of pocket. The Assistive Devices Program in Ontario covers 75 per cent of the cost, up to a maximum amount of \$5,444, for a cochlear implant replacement to aging sound processors through the Sound Processor Replacement program. This provincially funded program is available to those cochlear implant recipients whose sound processors have reached six to seven years old.

The cochlear implant is a lifelong commitment. However, as the technology changes over time, parts and software become no longer functional or available. The cost of upgrading a cochlear implant in Manitoba of approximately \$11,000 is much more expensive than in other provinces, as adult patients are responsible for the upgrade costs of their sound processor.

In Manitoba, pediatric patients, under 18 years of age, are eligible for funding assistance through the Cochlear Implant Speech Processor Replacement Program, which provides up to 80 per cent of the replacement costs associated with a device upgrade.

It is unreasonable that this technology is inaccessible to many citizens of Manitoba who must choose between hearing and deafness due to financial constraints because the costs of maintaining equipment are prohibitive for low-income earners or those on a fixed income, such as age old pension or Employment and Income Assistance.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide financing for upgrades to the cochlear implant covered under medicare, or provide funding assistance through the Cochlear Implant Speech Processor Replacement Program to assist with replacement costs associated with a device upgrade.

Signed by Jeff Hansen [*phonetic*], Merv Loewn, Garry Broden [*phonetic*] and many others.

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

People who suffer hearing loss due to aging, illness, employment or accident not only lose the ability to communicate effectively with friends, relatives or colleagues; they also can experience unemployment, social isolation and struggles with mental health.

A cochlear implant is a life-changing electronic device that allows deaf people to receive and process sounds and speech, and also can partially restore hearing in people who have severe hearing loss and who do not benefit from conventional hearing aids. A processor behind the ear captures and processes sound signals which are transmitted to a receiver implanted into the skull that relays the information to the inner ear.

The technology has been available since 1989 through the Central Speech and Hearing Clinic, founded in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The Surgical Hearing Implant program began implanting patients in the fall of 2011 and marked the completion of 250 cochlear implant surgeries in Manitoba in the summer of 2018. The program has implanted about 60 devices since the summer of 2018, as it is only able to implant about 40 to 45 devices per year.

There are no upfront costs to Manitoba residents who proceed with cochlear implant surgery, as Manitoba Health covers the surgical procedure, internal implant and the first external sound processor. Newfoundland and Manitoba have the highest estimated implantation costs of all provinces.

* (14:40)

Alberta has one of the best programs with Alberta aids for daily living, and their cost share means the patient pays only approximately \$500 out of pocket. Assistive Devices Program in Ontario covers 75 per cent of the cost, up to a maximum amount of 5,444, for a cochlear implant placement speech processor. The BC Adult Cochlear Implant Program offers subsidies replacements to aging sound processors through the Sound Processor Replacement program. This provincially funded program is available to those cochlear implant recipients whose sound processors have reached six to seven years old.

The cochlear implant is a lifelong commitment. However, as the technology changes over time, parts and software become no longer functional or available. The cost of upgrading a cochlear implant in Manitoba of approximately \$11,000 is much more expensive than in other provinces, as adult patients are responsible for the upgrade costs of their sound processor.

In Manitoba, pediatric patients are eligible for funding assistance through the Cochlear Implant Speech Processor Replacement Program, which provides up to 80 per cent of the replacement costs associated with a device upgrade.

It is unreasonable that this technology is inaccessible to many citizens of Manitoba who must choose between hearing and deafness due to financial constraints because the costs of maintaining the equipment are prohibitive for low-income earners or those on fixed incomes, such as old-age pension and/or Employment and Income Assistance.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide financing for upgrades to the cochlear implant covered under medicare, or provide funding assistance through the Cochlear Implant Speech Processor Replacement Program to assist the replacement costs associated with a device upgrade.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Diagnostic Testing Accessibility

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

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. Residents now have to travel to different locations to get the 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, be it hot or cold. Moreover, these long lineups have resulted in longer wait times for services and poorer service in general.

(6) Manitoba residents value the convenience and efficiency of the health-care system when they're 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 that Dynacare maintain all the phlebotomy, blood sample, sites existing prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency, and allow all Manitobans to get their blood and urine tests done when visiting their doctor, thereby facilitating local access to blood testing services.

This petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Vital?

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

Madam Speaker: Okay.

Menstrual Product Availability

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Many individuals have faced challenges in obtaining and affording period necessities.

In Manitoba, women, non-binary individuals and trans people have been denied free access to essential period necessities, such as pads, tampons, menstrual cups and reusable options.

The lack of free access to period items results in the perpetuation of poverty and deprives individuals of reasonable access to a basic health-care necessity.

This petition aims to ensure that these items are free to access in public schools and within Manitoba's health-care system, and that no individual who requests them can be denied on the basis of gender or sex identity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to implement free access to period necessities within public schools and Manitoba's health-care system.

To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to acknowledge the prevalence of people within Manitoba who are unable to afford essential period items.

This petition has been signed by Dan Rugg, Tracy Rugg, Brooke Rugg and many other Manitobans.

Public Child-Care Grants

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

The background for this petition is as follows:

(1) The pandemic has further emphasized the need for quality, affordable and accessible child care and has demonstrated that the government has failed to ensure child care is accessible to all Manitoban families.

(2) Over 90 per cent of Manitoba children receive child care through non-profit, licensed centres, and yet

funding has been frozen since 2016. These cuts have resulted in many early-childhood educators leaving the sector.

(3) While child-care centres have faced increased costs associated with lost parent fees due to COVID-19 closures and spent thousands on PPE, when open, to keep kids safe, the provincial government has provided no additional financial support.

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

(5) The provincial government's cuts to nursery school grants is doubling parent fees for hundreds of families, making child care less affordable and accessible; and

(6) The provincial government passed bill 34, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, which removed the cap on child-care fees for private sector businesses.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for The Maples?

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

Madam Speaker: Okay.

Dauphin Correctional Centre

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government plans to close the Dauphin Correctional Centre, DCC, in May of 2020.

(2) The DCC is one of the largest employers in Dauphin, providing the community with good, family-supporting jobs.

(3) Approximately 80 families will be directly affected by the closure, which will also impact the local economy.

(4) As of January 27, 2020, Manitoba's justice system was already more than 250 inmates over capacity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Justice to immediately reverse the decision to close DCC and proceed with the previous plan to build a new correctional and healing centre with an expanded courthouse in Dauphin.

And this has been signed by many Manitobans.

Thank you.

Public Child-Care Grants

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The pandemic has further emphasized the need for quality, affordable and accessible child care and has demonstrated that the government has failed to ensure child care is accessible to all families. Over—

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

(3) While child-care centres have faced increased costs associated with lost parent fees due to COVID-19 closures and spent thousands on PPE, when open, to keep kids safe, and the provincial government has provided no additional funding support.

* (14:50)

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

(5) The provincial government's cuts to nursery school grants is doubling parent fees for hundreds of families, making child care less affordable and accessible.

(6) The provincial government passed bill 34, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, which removed the cap on child-care fees for private sector businesses.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse changes to the nursery school grants and to end the freeze on child-care's operating grants while committing to keeping public child care affordable and accessible to all Manitoban families.

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

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I have a couple of announcements first before announcing government business.

Pursuant to rule 33(7), I am announcing that the private members' resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for McPhillips (Mr. Martin). The title of the resolution is Commending the Provincial Vaccine Roll Out Staff and Volunteers.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the private members' resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for McPhillips. The title of the resolution is Commending the Provincial Vaccine Roll Out Staff and Volunteers.

Mr. Goertzen: I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Justice will meet on Monday, March 22nd, 2021, at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 24, The Legal Profession Amendment Act; Bill 31, The Horse Racing Regulatory Modernization Act (Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Act and Pari-Mutuel Levy Act Amended); and Bill 50, The Legal Aid Manitoba Amendment Act.

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* * *

Mr. Goertzen: Could you please call for debate this afternoon Bill 14, Bill 33, and Bill 37.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider the following bills this afternoon: 14, 33, 37.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 14—The Minor Amendments and Corrections Act, 2020

Madam Speaker: I will therefore call the first one: second reading of Bill 14, The Minor Amendments and Corrections Act, 2020.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Legislative and Public Affairs): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding), that Bill 14, The Minor Amendments and Corrections Act, 2020, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Goertzen: This bill is a routine and annual bill that typically deals with correcting typographical errors, numbering errors, and minor drafting and translation errors in legislation in Manitoba.

Questions

Madam Speaker: A question period of up 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 not, is the House ready for the question? *[interjection]* Oh.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, just very briefly. I have reviewed this bill. We are in agreement with this bill passing. Primarily, it updates names of departments, which have changed recently, and also it changes where there's a reference to private schools, to independent—

Madam Speaker: I would just like to ask the member, is he speaking in debate? This is question period.

Mr. Gerrard: No, I was speaking in debate. I'm sorry.

Madam Speaker: So, to clarify then, there are no questions?

Debate

Madam Speaker: And I believe, though, in order to move debate forward, I would first have to recognize—or, are there any speakers wishing to stand in debate?

I will turn it back over, then, to the honourable member for River Heights.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Okay, Thank you. Just to complete my remarks, many of the changes were late to the change from private school to independent school and, for future reference, the independent school is one which is registered under the act and provides a structured learning environment in a school outside the public education system to children of compulsory school age who do not reside in the same home.

We're in agreement with these changes and look forward to this bill passing.

Thank you.

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

If not, is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 14, The Minor Amendments and Corrections Act, 2020.

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

I declare the motion carried.

Bill 33—The Advanced Education Administration Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: I will now call second reading of Bill 33, The Advanced Education Administration Amendment Act.

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): I move, seconded by the Minister for Agriculture and Resource Development, that Bill 33, The Advanced Education Administration Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'administration de l'enseignement postsecondaire, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Ewasko: I'm pleased to rise today to provide some comments on Bill 33, which makes amendments to The Advanced Education Administration Act.

The overarching goal of this bill is to ensure that post-secondary students have access to high-quality, affordable, post-secondary education today and into the future. This bill brings additional oversights and protects students from significant increases to student fees, such as registration fees and library fees, as well as course-related fees such as instrument and equipment or practicum and field experience by institutions.

Student union fees would not be affected by Bill 33. In fact, fees set by student unions and associations are approved by students themselves through their own democratic process and are not included in the bill's current definition of student fees.

Bill 33 would not affect student-group funding or services such as the transit U-Pass, campus newspapers, food banks, safe walk programs and campus social event programming, just to name a few, Madam Speaker.

I know these services for students are very important, and they are paid for by student union fees. I have heard directly from student groups that the existing wording of Bill 33 is not as clear as it could be in specifying that proposed guidelines do not apply to fees set by student unions and associations.

* (15:00)

In response to these concerns and in the spirit of open dialogue and collaboration, we are looking at options to resolve this issue, including a possible amendment to the bill.

Madam Speaker, Manitoba students continue to enjoy Canada's third lowest tuition rates and the lowest tuition rates west of Quebec. Maintaining high quality educational programming is dependent on a timely and fair approach to the setting of tuition and fees.

Going forward, our policy on tuition and fees will adapt to the changing needs of students, institutions, employers and the labour market. This flexibility is of particular significance as we continue to work with our post-secondary partners to move forward from this pandemic, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Proposed changes will provide our systems with additional certainty, maintain student affordability

and help universities and colleges adapt to meet the ever-changing needs of graduates and employers.

We recognize that Manitoba's post-secondary programs are not all the same. Flexibility and the ability to choose programs from a wide range of delivery modes for all types of learners is vital to a strong and responsive post-secondary system across this great province of ours. For this reason, a policy-based approach is needed to set clear guidelines for tuition and student fees. Differences may include the institution type and whether the program delivered is for an undergrad, graduate or professional student type.

A policy-based approach also aligns Manitoba with other Canadian jurisdictions who regulate tuition through policy, if they do at all, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

By offering greater flexibility in the setting of tuition and fees, our post-secondary institutions can continue to meet their mandate to prepare students for the economic opportunities of tomorrow.

I look forward to the bill proceeding through the Legislature and receiving unanimous consent.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Questions

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

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Looking forward to the discussion on Bill 33 today.

The minister has mentioned in his preamble that there's a vagueness in the bill that he introduced into the House, and that he's discussed with individuals on how to clarify that. He also mentioned the possible-possibility of an amendment.

Does the minister have—can he commit to introducing an amendment? Does he have the wording so that we can debate the amendment and see that amendment and ensure that we're debating the correct bill as it may actually be passed—that the minister is planning on introducing an amendment?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): And it gives me a great pleasure to stand up and put a few words

on the record again, and I'd like to thank my opposition critic for the question.

I know that he, as well as the NDP party, as well as many other media outlets and that have received copies of the letter that I have forwarded on to the student groups that I had many excellent meetings with, and I look forward to this bill passing through second reading today, this afternoon, heading to committee. And we are entertaining various amendments onto the bill to add some clarity.

So I'd like to, again, thank the member for the question.

Mr. Moses: So the minister failed to confirm whether they'd actually be presenting an amendment for sure. They also failed to state what that amendment is to give clarity for these student groups that I've met with on several occasions and have expressed concerns with the legislation as it stands.

So I'd like to give the minister another opportunity to (a) confirm whether he will actually be introducing an amendment, and (b) clarify what specifically will it say? How will it address the concerns around student fees for student groups? Because as the bill is worded right now, it does give the minister power to affect things like student unions, health-care fees, dental fees, food banks for students. As it's written right now, that amendment is needed.

So I ask the minister to please clarify—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Mr. Ewasko: I've afforded the student groups a few meetings and I know that my predecessor, the Minister for Economic Development and Jobs, had met with them, you know, prior to Christmas, and the definition of the way that the bill is formulated right now, we assured the students and all Manitobans that it is not going to be affecting any student fees. And so we've actually submitted that in writing and then I can go on in the next question as far as a little more specifics to additional things that were—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time is up.

Mr. Moses: It's, you know, having a letter in writing is good, but it's not good enough. Amendment is what's needed to fix this bill and that's what students have asked for, and I think that's what needed—is needed to address the issues that have been raised.

You know, health-care plans are not a small thing for students. Dental plans, food banks—these are necessities for students in their life, and we should be working to help them. This minister hasn't provided any clarity, and so I'd like the specifics on what is going to be done to address the bill, when an amendment will be introduced because so far, the minister has made no commitments to do so.

Will he address how specifically he'll amend the bill to fix the issues that students have had around student fees?

Mr. Ewasko: I appreciate the question coming from the member again, and for the third time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have had meetings with the student groups. I've—we've listened, we've partnered, we've—taking action on some of their concerns in regards to the clarity of the bill.

We will be bringing forward an amendment to committee to further clarify that. I know that the member from St. Vital (Mr. Moses) has received a copy of the letter. I've signed it. It absolutely says, and I quote, I can also confirm that Bill 33, as written, excludes fees set by student—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time is up.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I understand this legislation gives the minister the option to not make student fees mandatory.

Is it this minister's plan to ultimately not have mandatory student fees?

Mr. Ewasko: I thank the member for the question. In regards to student fees, the bill, as I've mentioned on quite a few different occasions, the bill is to amend The Advanced Education Administration Act, which will enable the minister to issue guidelines concerning tuition fees and student fees charged by universities. For colleges, these fees may be set by regulations, and we are bringing forward some amendments to clarify the fact that this bill will not interfere with the union fees that are imposed by student unions or associations.

Mr. Moses: The member for Tyndall Park raises an important point about the compulsory nature of student fees, which the minister has not addressed on his third or fourth attempt to do so.

Are student fees going to be compulsory or will the minister have control of them?

We've seen in other jurisdictions, namely Ontario, similar legislation be brought in, only to be struck down by the courts.

Why is the minister bringing in a bill that is being tied up in another jurisdiction and may not even be passed when challenged in the courts today?

Mr. Ewasko: So Mr. Deputy Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member, and I cannot comprehend the bill for him. I can just explain what is in the bill.

The Ontario piece of legislation—I appreciate the fact that the NDP member is continuing to do his research, much like other NDP members with Google and non-factual information. The Ontario policy was introduced by the Ontario government in early 2019, which allowed students to opt out of previously mandatory student fees.

* (15:10)

I have put it in writing, Madam—Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have had meetings with students. I have committed that this bill will not affect student fees, not today, not—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time is up.

Ms. Lamoureux: Oh. I don't have a second question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Moses: I'd like to ask the question of the minister around tuition. This bill gives the minister direct influence and ability to change tuition for students.

Will the minister commit to not increasing tuition beyond the rate of inflation for students? And if he's not able to commit, so then can he please tell, so students know, how much their tuition will be raised?

Mr. Ewasko: And, again, Bill 33 is going to change The Advanced Education and Administration Act to provide more flexibility in the oversight of tuition and student fees set by a board. Again, once again, for the fifth, sixth or seventh time already, fees set by student unions and associations are not included in the definition of student fees, as they are approved by students in democratic process. In regards to any type of tuition increases or student fees, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this would enable the post-secondary institutions to actually come back with their suggestions to my department for some oversight.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses).

The honourable member from St. Vital, can you take your mic off mute?

Mr. Moses: I'm asking the minister about tuition fees. You know, this time I'd like to get clarity on the minister's plans and roles for student—for tuition fees. It clearly states that the minister will have authority to determine what—tuition fees and is he going to increase these beyond inflation?

If he's not willing to commit to not increasing tuition fees, then please tell us and students of Manitoba how much they can expect their tuition to be increased? We've seen tuition increases over the past few years with this government; I think students should be prepared to know what's coming next for their tuition fees.

Mr. Ewasko: We know that Manitoba's approach, through Bill 33, is going to be regulating the tuition and fees so that they will align with other western Canada jurisdictions. That's where some of the other jurisdictions have gone. Our government is listening and taking action, and student success and quality of programs are No. 1 and key.

Our government continues to work and collaborate with all Manitobans, Mr. Deputy Speaker, absolutely, including students. We are working, collaborating with students. I just wish that the member for St. Vital would stop his fear-mongering and his party's fear-mongering and trying to use students—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Mr. Moses: So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the minister's just said that he's looking at aligning tuition fees to other western Canadian regions.

And does that mean that the tuition that might be set at our universities—like University of Manitoba or Winnipeg—might be set based on what's happening at UBC or U of A or other western Canadian universities? Is that correct? So our tuition is going to be based on what happens in Alberta or in BC? Is that correct, minister?

Mr. Ewasko: So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I did want to—I will address the member's question in a few seconds. But I did want to share a little bit of a quote that he mentioned the other day in his private member's statement when he was busy gaslighting and standing, apparently, up with students. He said, his colleagues and I—so this is quotation; this is him speaking—stand

with students. We stand with groups such as the Canadian Federation of Students of Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask that the member stop standing behind students and stop using them as shields and as pawns in his political games and really stand up for students as we are. We're here collaborating, listening—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time is up.

Mr. Moses: The minister has provided no assurances for students on tuition—his plans for tuition, if he's going to increase them—which I think is clear by his non-answer—and he has provided no assurances on how much it will increase.

Will tuitions' rates increase as high as University of BC or University of Alberta? I think these are important questions, which the minister has failed to answer during this question period.

So I'll move on to talking a little bit about how the—about the minister's overall plan for education, in terms of tuition based on courses and programs.

Will the minister be changing tuition based on certain programs, whether it's the faculty of arts or sciences or engineering?

Mr. Ewasko: I'd like to bring the member back to Bill 33 and, in fact, talk about tuition rates and that. I mean, it—for colleges and universities, we know that we've been working hard partnering with our post-secondary institutions here in the province, unlike the NDP government who failed to collaborate and work with the post-secondary sector.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I strongly believe that we have a strong post-secondary institutional educational sector here in the province. I'm going to continue working with those partners, and students, and any other stakeholder to make sure that our students have—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time is up.

Mr. Moses: If the minister would—was familiar with his own bill, he would know that I am speaking about Bill 33, wherein section 2.2(7) says that the minister, by regulation or guideline, may establish different classes of tuition fees. And I'm thinking that this different classes of tuition fees may be based on faculty or department, whether it's the arts faculty, or whether it is the department of science or engineering.

Are they all going to have different tuition based on what the minister decides? Is that how it's going to

work under this minister's plan for post-secondary institutions?

I'd like some clarification on that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Ewasko: Back to my comments in regards to the member using students as pawns, I know that I've received an email in regards to the member from St. Vital, that it states that they—the student association was contacted by the opposition, an MLA Jamie Moses—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Oh.

Mr. Ewasko: I apologize.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I just want to remind the minister to not refer to somebody as their name or, but more so to their constituency.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and sorry for the misspeak—the MLA for St. Vital, so it proves once again that he's busy trying to get in the way.

I would like to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we've received a tweet. We thank the minister for his collaboration and commitment to protect the autonomy—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time is up.

Time for question period has expired.

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The debate. Any speakers?

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): I am very excited to be discussing Bill 33 this afternoon. It's an important bill and it goes to future of our post-secondary institutions in our province. It speaks to the importance that this government has on the next generation of leaders and economic drivers in our province.

It's important to remember that if these students play a vital role in helping our economy grow, being the next generation of business starters, of workers, of young leaders and entrepreneurs, and it's important that us, as a government, believe in them, listen to them and do right by what they are telling us is important to them. And I think the minister has sadly shown during the question period and non-answers during the question period that there are many aspects of Bill 33 which he has not fully considered how it affects students in Manitoba.

At first, starting with an important aspect of tuition. Tuition is one of the most—the single most important factor which students face when it comes to challenges with attending university. The barrier of affordability for university students is large and we all know that—or we all should know, and the minister should know, that making university more accessible is key to more people being able to participate in our economy.

* (15:20)

Bill 33 gives the minister direct authority over controlling tuition and tuition fees.

Now remember, these universities and these institutions have—you know, university, for example, has a senate, which is made up of students and faculty and the administration of university. They work together, collaboratively, looking at their options and concerns and programs that they're intending, that are in the best interest of their institution and work together to create a plan to keep tuition as affordably—offer the programming that is needed for that campus community.

And having this Bill 33 would allow the minister to override decisions by, you know, an elected, you know, group, who are working in the best interests of an institution, even override the appointed members of the board that oversee institutions—members of a board that, I might add, are appointed by the same minister.

The minister could then take the opinion of those people, who are working most closely with the university or college, and say no, this is not the direction we want to go, I alone can determine what the tuition is going to be. And that is a very, very dangerous—it is very, very dangerous because it gives one person far too much power and control over such a crucial—such a crucial aspect as a tuition of students in our post-secondary institutions.

It is essential that those decisions be made by those who are in the best—in the most knowledgeable in those positions.

And I argue, and I think a lot of Manitobans would agree, that those decisions shouldn't be made at the desk of a Cabinet minister, but should be rather made in collaboration with students, faculty and administration of an organization, to all of their best interests.

Now, we know that tuition is a huge and a central part of what makes universities accessible. And when

we look at that, it's not just accessibility generally in—to attend university, but the choices of which students make, of which programs they're going to enter into is also an important factor. The cost of entering into sciences versus an arts degree versus going to business or agriculture or engineering, are all key factors in what—in the decisions that students have to make every year, every time that they're making a choice about their post-secondary education.

And it shouldn't be at the minister's desk to determine necessarily what program is more affordable for students and which one is not. And in Bill 33, it's clearly states that different classes of tuition fees can be determined by guideline or regulation by the minister, and I'm only left to think that the—this line in the bill is giving the minister direct authority and the power to control tuition, based on different—arts versus engineering versus science versus business versus agriculture, et cetera, et cetera. And how is this going to help students, who are making those very tough decisions, as to what they're going to be doing when they're at post-secondary schooling and moving forward for their careers?

Now, we've seen much to—talk related to post-secondary education, as it pertains to discussing the impacts of funding where your pay—an institution might be paid for performance of students, for example, or funding where faculties are paid different amounts of grants from the provincial government, based on what they think meets market needs in their own view.

Well, that is certainly a concern that this government is taking that lens of approach on our post-secondary institutions. It's been done in other jurisdictions with, I say, very little success and, in much—many cases, almost no success, and I think it would an error for us to go down that same path here in Manitoba, because from many perspectives, the big downside of that is it limits accessibility for students.

It makes it harder for students to attend university. It raises that bar, that challenge, that barrier for students because the tuition that has been—that would be set by the minister could hinder them, would hinder them from achieving their educational goals that they are trying to go after.

This is a such a—I think, perhaps I can use a philosophical leaning or ideology of the minister to be looking at controlling tuition to such a degree instead of leaving it up to the independence of the institutions—which still have government-appointed individuals on their board, which still have an

administration to ensure the financial stability of their institution, which still have faculty and student input to ensure that their interests and programming are being met—leaving it up to those knowledge experts to make the right decision instead of being put in the hands of a single individual in a Cabinet office.

And so I am very, very concerned about the impacts that this would have on tuition, and as a result, the impacts that it would have on the accessibility for average Manitobans to get an education. Now I'm saying this for—is people who are already looking at obtaining a university education or a college education, but Bill 33 does nothing to address the people who might have even more barriers to achieve a post-secondary education.

And it's so interesting that after the year that we've had going through a pandemic—and still going through a pandemic, going through an economic downturn, seeing people struggle, and many people actually go into colleges and universities to re-educate themselves—that this is the bill the minister sees as being so important to bring forward.

And I say that because the pandemic has highlighted so many challenges, so many other challenges in our post-secondary institutions, namely that it is increasingly difficult for young people to afford going to college and university.

And so Bill 33 makes almost no attempts, and I say certainly no attempt to break down barriers for those who can't afford it, for those who are interested and able to go to post-secondary institutions but can't afford it, or struggle with child care as a barrier for obtaining post-secondary education, or struggle with housing as a barrier to obtain post-secondary education, or struggle with transportation as a barrier.

These are all real-life barriers that Bill 33 does not address, and they have become even more of a concern over the last 12 months during this pandemic. They've come even more to light.

The minister does not address them at all in this bill, which to me are huge concerns for our community. But not just for me, but these are the things that have been brought to my attention from community groups, from student groups as barriers, as issues that they're facing in their life.

The minister has talked about how he's met with student groups, and I think that's a good thing to do. I've done that as well and I'm glad that that's a part of the minister's bill, but obviously, the student groups and the faculty consultation was not done before the

drafting of Bill 33 otherwise it would have been clear that there was some language confusion with this bill that the minister has readily admitted, and that could have been addressed before the bill was actually drafted and brought into the Legislature so the minister wouldn't have to be talking about an amendment today.

Now, if that proper consultation had been done before the minister brought in this bill, it would have solved a lot of problems. There would be a lot less angst and anxiety from student groups as to what the minister really means because he hasn't—he didn't do the work before the bill was introduced to clearly 'consultate' and clarify the language that would be needed. The bill was then introduced and didn't say anything until, you know, we were able to—this was brought to the attention of many student groups and they advocated rightly on their behalf.

* (15:30)

Now, the minister clearly states that there is a miscommunication. There is some vagueness around the language in the bill.

And today, in debate—in our time to talk about Bill 33, on multiple occasions, the minister refused to clarify how he's going to amend Bill 33, the—to clarify the language. Multiple occasions he's had to clarify what amendment he's going to make to Bill 33, and he has not done so.

Now, that speaks volumes about the transparency that this minister is working with when it comes to collaborating with students. I am very concerned of what it means, and I know that many students are concerned. They're concerned with what this is going to mean for them, and they are asking this minister for clarity.

They're asking him to provide them with what it's going to mean for them. And day after day as it passes, and the minister has been aware of this issue of several days now, he has still refused—still refused—to provide the necessary clarity.

And today, when we're debating, we're spending the time to talk about Bill 33, the minister still does not have the amendments to provide for us, to provide for students across the province to ensure that their student fees will not be touched in Bill 33.

And so I'm greatly—gravely concerned that—as to—I'm questioning the minister's seriousness about making an amendment on Bill 33 because, on a day when we have plenty of time to talk about the details—

the nitty-gritty of Bill 33, the minister, again, failed to provide the amendments that would be needed to ensure student fees wouldn't be affected by this bill.

Again, just to reiterate: it was a failure to consult with students and faculty before the drafting of this bill.

Then, during the earlier times, still didn't admit that there was a problem; finally admits there's an issue with the language of Bill 33 and says he's going to make an amendment, but on the day when we have to debate Bill 33, the minister fails to make the wording of his amendment available—leaving all the students of Manitoba, all the post-secondary students of Manitoba, still wondering what Bill 33 is going to mean for them.

And given the track record of this PC government, I think they might be, sadly, wondering the worst because we've seen a track record of higher tuition over the last few years from this PC government. We've seen a track record of grants being cut from our post-secondary institutions.

We've seen a track record of bursaries and scholarships being reduced. We've seen a track record of services to our post-secondary institutions being reduced and worsened, year after year, and made worse last spring during the pandemic—as we were all worried about our own safety, we had this government approach our post-secondary institutions and ask them to make cuts up to 10, 20 and 30 per cent—10, 20 and 30 per cent.

That is crippling for institutions, for educational institutions, that are trying to help educate the next leaders on our community, the next group of people who are going to spark our economy. And this is happening during an economic downturn, where we should be investing in the next wave of economic drivers. Instead, this government chooses to ask them to make a 30 per cent cut to their operating budgets.

That is not right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is not right.

And it goes to show that this government has—seems to have—an attitude of post-secondary education—well, if you want it, you've got to pay for it yourself. Students are willing to do their hard part—do their hard work, they're willing to do their part—but they want to know that we as a community can assist them and be there with them.

And we, as a government, should be investing in their futures because the greater success that they

have, the greater success that we all have. And there's no other way around that.

Now, fortunately, there are many groups that came out and spoke against that 30 per cent drastic cut that was proposed by this government back last spring. And now, we see them at it again with Bill 33, trying to take full control over tuition, full control over student fees. And this is the same thing that we're seeing mirrored in the recently released K-to-12 review and bills—associated bills.

It's this government continually taking full control over education, full power control. They're taking it with Bill 64 and their K-to-12 review by looking at centralizing all educational power to the minister's hands. Same thing with Bill 33 today—all central power over tuition and student fees in the hands of the minister.

They are removing and taking control away and weakening other democratic institutions, removing school trustees in the K-to-12 plan, and, you know, unless the minister actually brings forward in legislation, as it stands, Bill 33 removes some of the autonomy from student unions—elected student unions, right, some clear parallels of issues that are being faced by K-to-12 students in the K-to-12 education system and in our post-secondary.

And all the while, they are doing so by weakening and lessening the voices of community groups. It's always the most marginalized people, the people who have the weakest voices, who often see the worst impacts of this government's decisions, and that is on full display in the K-to-12 review and it—and the bills, and it is in full display with this Bill 33.

But the individuals who, you know, are looking to get access and gain access to post-secondary will have a more difficult time. The people who are—say I want to work for a year, work for two years to save up to be able to go to college, they will have a more difficult time when this minister takes full control over tuitions for programs.

And it is a real shame that the minister has taken and gone down this route with this bill when there are so many other challenges that students face on a daily basis, so many other issues that the minister could have chosen to introduce for us to debate, which would actually help students, that would actually help campus life and make life easier for faculty and allow our institutions to grow and flourish. But yet, we're faced with this bill.

Now, I didn't mention earlier the consultation, and the consultation about this bill, whether this was something that the minister consulted with student groups before it was drafted. And it's clear that it wasn't consulted with students, otherwise the language issue would have been addressed and clarified beforehand.

But the bigger issue here is, is this a bill that student groups or faculty or institutions have even asked as something that would be helpful to them in their lives? There are many things that institutions would want to see from this government. There are many things that faculty would want to see from this government, that support staff would want to see from this government, that students would want to see from this government to make their lives, as part of a post-secondary institution, easier.

But none of them are addressed in Bill 33. And why is that? Is it because the minister, you know, chose to talk and work with students but actually not introduce something that would make sense and actually help to make their lives easier? Or is it because this minister hasn't met with these individuals and listened to their largest concerns and tried to address them in a meaningful, constructive, real way? Or is it, perhaps, that this minister is being led by a Premier (Mr. Pallister) who has an ideological bent on education generally and is taking, I think, very clear, obvious steps to—

* (15:40)

Audio system failure

Madam Speaker in the Chair

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Can you hear me?

An Honourable Member: Yes. I can hear you.

Madam Speaker: Okay. It sounds like our sound system is back on. We had a technical issue. Our sound system here is very sophisticated, so this is—these kinds of things make us nervous when this happens.

But we will now revert back to debate, and the honourable member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses) has the floor. And I understand that he lost about a minute in—when he was cut off, so I would ask the table to add that minute back to the clock.

The honourable member for St. Vital, to continue in debate.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Moses: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you for all those in the Chamber for that wonderful support. I also appreciate the clerks being able to provide me some of my last comments as to where I left off.

Alas, for the sake of time, I won't be able to repeat all of them. I will just summarize by saying that everyone would have loved them and I'm sure both sides of the House would have been standing with applause, but, alas, we don't have a time machine, so I cannot go back to repeat those comments. I will simply press on and move forward.

I will conclude my remarks, though, Madam Speaker, by saying that Bill 33 is a direct assault and confront–conflict with our post-secondary institutions, students and faculty in Manitoba. Tuition is the largest aspect that can students—where students have concerns. Bill 33 puts tuition in the hands of the minister, and, given this government's track record, we know that tuition is going to rise for students.

Bill 33 changes the way student fees would operate, and we know some of the terrific and helpful programs that student groups put on with those student fees. And if those programs are challenged or threatened, it goes to the accessibility of our post-secondary institutions.

We know that when the minister has power over controlling which departments and programs have higher tuition or lower tuition, that also changes and challenges the status quo and the autonomy of our institutions, faculty and our students.

*(16:10)

These—all these things together hurt and harm our post-secondary institutions, puts us, as a province, a step behind in tackling the challenges of the future. And so we will not be supporting Bill 33. We urge the minister to take a step back, withdraw Bill 33, go back and consult, do the proper consultation that was not done, as evidenced by the fact that there is incomplete and unclear language in Bill 33, which the minister has admitted himself. Go back, do the work in consultation and come back and bring forward a new bill which would actually help students on their concerns, help faculty with their concerns, because none of that is addressed in Bill 33.

For those reasons, Madam Speaker, I'll conclude and again say that we will not be supporting Bill 33. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The next speaker I have on my list is the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew), but is there another NDP speaker?

I understand, then, that the member for Tyndall Park might want to speak.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Yes, Madam Speaker, I would like to speak to Bill 33.

We're not going to be supporting Bill 33 because we don't actually believe that this government is keeping students at the forefront of these decisions, and it's incredibly upsetting, and we've heard from many students on this. And so I just want to take a little bit of time and explain what it is exactly we're hearing and how it is we are understanding this bill.

And just to give an idea and sort of set the stage of the pattern that this government has created is—we think back and over the last few years, starting with tuition rebates. This government took away tuition rebates for post-secondary students here in Manitoba. And a lot of students actually relied upon these tuition rebates. These tuition rebates often served as down payments on houses, paying off debts, and it was—it served as an incentive to study here in Manitoba, and this government took it away.

In addition to this, they started to charge international students more fees for health care. This is an abuse of power, in my opinion. We want to be encouraging international students to come to Manitoba. It's why we have such a rigorous post-secondary education placement in the first place, and by adding these extra barriers for international students, who already have to pay almost five times more than students here in Canada, it just seems heartless, frankly.

And lastly, just not too long ago, just prior to the pandemic, Madam Speaker, we heard about post-secondary institutions being forced to make cuts, and this kind of came out of nowhere. The government just said, okay, you've got to find departments in your post-secondary institute and up to 30 per cent, be able to cut it out, and sorry—not sorry—make it work.

So now, with Bill 33, students not being consulted or even at all mentioned as stakeholders, Madam Speaker—we spoke with students, you know, the Liberal caucus, and we know that the NDP spoke with students, as well.

And I've really been appreciating what the member from St. Vital has had to say, and a lot of this is sort of doubling down on that. And we spoke with

students and they shared with us that none of them were consulted, and when they requested a meeting with the minister, they got the meeting, which is good—we'll give the government points on that part. Students were able to meet with the minister responsible, but the minister refused to put anything in writing, which is very worrisome and completely understandable why students would be worried.

Government is overreaching their power, and it doesn't make sense why the minister would be the most appropriate person to be determining what is to be determined through this bill, and what that is, the fear around tuition fees and student fees, because in other jurisdictions, this bill has used to defund student groups

And to talk about these student fees a little bit, if they are raised or even if they're made not compulsory, either direction they go in, there's a huge fee—huge fear that, if fees are not paid, organizations, resources, even student unions won't be able to function properly; they might even be cut out completely.

And we know that student fees cover so much. We can talk about health plans, and both physical and mental; it goes into our dental work, it goes into physio, it goes into therapy and therapeutic services, Madam Speaker. And a lot of people who go into post-secondary education have recently left their parental health plans and so they are needing health plans and student fees attribute to this.

We can also talk about daycares on campus, student groups on campus, community groups, gym passes, parking; there are endless things that student fees contribute to.

So there is a huge fear that if this government, if this minister, in particular, has all the power to determine how these fees are decided, where these fees go, instead of the students who actually pay into the fees, who experience what the fees are going towards, it just doesn't make sense. And it can even potentially affect marginalized students further than they are already affected.

And, Madam Speaker, the big fear is the minister would have control over the student fees.

And, you know, when I asked a question about this during the question portion of this bill, the minister kept coming back and saying, wait for the amendment. Well, Madam Speaker, share the amendment. Share it with us. Or do the right thing and fix this piece of legislation, take it back. It's currently

being introduced. It's only in second reading. We have not passed it. Take the legislation back and scrap it or fix it. If you're already creating an amendment and we haven't even passed the legislation yet, it feels rushed.

And, Madam Speaker, we know that the government is rushing this legislation. And we know this because if they were to take it back right now and do the right thing and adjust the legislation, they wouldn't be able to pass it by June. So, instead, they are pushing this legislation through. They're hopeful to bring forward an amendment in the hopes of getting it passed before the—getting it passed and having royal assent by June.

So this legislation also takes out the provision that ensures we would have the lowest tuition fees in western Canada. And there's only really one way to read this, Madam Speaker. If you're going to take something out of the legislation, it indicates that this government is no longer planning to have the lowest tuition fees here in Manitoba. There's really no other way to interpret this.

So what are the plans then? Why are they taking this out? Of course, it's causing conversations. Of course, it is causing some fear. Students don't know what they're going to be paying in years to come, and it's hard to plan around that, Madam Speaker.

And the original act did not apply to Université de Saint-Boniface and the University College of the North for the college-level instructor—instructions they provide. However, this legislation—they are no longer exempt? It does apply? It's unclear, Madam Speaker, and there's no explanation behind it.

So, over the last couple of months, I've had the opportunity to talk with some students, including—and this list is quite extensive, I've prepared it—members of the post-secondary education community, some provincial government members, 'mem-L-As,' some student unions, faculty associations, student groups, student services, student networks and associated organizations, labour unions and other partners of the student movement here in Manitoba and even across Canada.

And some students actually shared a back-grounder with me, Canadian Federation of Students in particular, and they've given me permission to share some of this with the House. So I'm going to share their key issues.

Key issues, Bill 33 would allow the minister responsible for post-secondary education to determine whether or not democratically established student fees

are compulsory or not. Student union fees and levies are democratically established by referendum through elected student governing bodies and should not be determined by the minister.

* (16:20)

These fees include, but are not limited to, student services, health plans, daycare, student unions and student service organizations. Student fees, plus levy groups, are established over decades of advocacy and service development and should not be rolled back.

This bill resembles the Student Choice Initiative and policy put forward by the Ford PC government of Ontario in 2019, which was deemed unlawful by the courts in Ontario this past year—Madam Speaker, just side note, but that should be telling enough.

But to continue on with the key points, the minister responsible for PSE would be able to determine if a student fee is compulsory or not, but the language about how a student fee is defined is vague and threatens our democratically established student organizations.

The Canadian Federation of Students, Manitoba is concerned with the intentions behind Bill 33, as there has been no student consultation on the bill. And if Bill 33 passes, the minister can issue a directive that mandatory student fees cannot exceed a certain amount, reducing budgeting and funding for student-funded organizations, decide which part of student fees are mandatory or implement volunteer-voluntary unionism, whereby students would either opt in or out of their student fees, toying with the financial stability of democratically established fee structures due to a sustained lack of consultation and communication with students on any matters relating to this Bill 33.

We are worried—these are the students, Madam Speaker—about the impacts that this legislation will have on the student population in Manitoba and the 45,000 members of the CFSMB.

I specifically heard from a student at U of M that this bill puts UMSU at risk, and we all know UMSU. This bill puts UMSU at risk because of the UMSU act, explaining how the board of governors must approve student union fees as part of the process of remitting them so university administrations collect and remit student fees on behalf of the unions.

It's like a loophole, Madam Speaker. And students are concerned with being considered as pawns, and extremely and understandably upset that this minister is accusing students of spreading misinformation.

Who would know the information better—we're talking about student fees—the minister, new to his role, or students, who have been and who are currently paying these fees? How is the minister going to address this? Like, I think that an apology to these students would actually be valid.

Past experience is this government is following a pattern of hurting our education system, and I'm not confident that the minister should be in charge of how this money is distributed. We will not be supporting this legislation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): I move, seconded by the member for Wolseley (Ms. Naylor), that the bill—the debate now be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 37—The Planning Amendment and City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: I will now move to calling second reading of Bill 37, The Planning Amendment and City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment Act.

Hon. Derek Johnson (Minister of Municipal Relations): I move, seconded by the Minister of Crown Services (Mr. Wharton), that Bill 37, The Planning Amendment and City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment 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 the message.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Municipal Relations, seconded by the honourable Minister of Crown Services, that Bill 37, The Planning Amendment and City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment 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 the bill, and the message was tabled.

Mr. Johnson: Madam Speaker, Bill 37 reintroduces amendments to The Planning Act and The City of Winnipeg Charter that were previously introduced in the last session, with some amendments in response to feedback from stakeholders.

Over the past eight months, department officials, the previous minister of MR and myself have had the opportunity to meet with municipal and industry

stakeholders to explain the purpose of the legislation and to receive input. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the numerous stakeholders and Manitobans who participated in consultations, information sessions and webinars on these proposed changes.

This bill will ensure municipal governments make timely and transparent decisions on the private sector capital investment opportunities in their communities.

Bill 37 will improve and modernize processes in Manitoba by establishing a co-ordinated approach to planning in the capital region. It will accelerate the pace at which the Winnipeg metropolitan region, comprised of 18 municipalities, including the City of Winnipeg, work together to grow sustainability.

There is tremendous economic benefit to be gained from regional approach to land use and infrastructure planning, governance, shared servicing and economic development.

In a recent report, *For the Benefit of All: regional competitiveness and collaboration in the Winnipeg metropolitan region*, by Dr. Bobby [phonetic] Murray, provided five reasons why regional approaches are necessary.

(1) firstly, individual municipalities are troubled to confront and address challenges posed by increasingly complex policy, regulatory environment and economic environment. Madam Speaker, regional approaches have proven to be more successful.

Second, the need to participate in the global economy. Regions offer stronger value proposition to investors, assuming conditions for investment and measures of competitiveness are met.

Thirdly, collaboration and co-ordination of planning and development help to drive innovation, capacity building, efficiencies and allow for the leveraging of resources and economies of scale.

Fourth, regions offer a much more diverse pallet to host businesses and industries through varying site conditions and proximity to regional land, economic assets and natural resources.

And, finally, regional services delivery can be consistent, reliable, cost-effective and transparent.

So now, more than ever, it is critical to support response and recovery efforts from the challenges created by this pandemic. Manitoba needs to catch up to other Canadian jurisdictions that have mechanisms in place such as mandated timelines for planning

decisions, and independent appeal systems to help reduce delays to development. That is why Bill 37 introduces timelines for the planning processes in the city of Winnipeg and all other municipalities and planning districts.

Another important feature of Bill 37 is it provides opportunity for planning-related appeals where they cannot be resolved through other processes, and having them adjudicated by independent appointed professionals.

Applications will now be able to appeal council decisions on second—applicants will now be able to appeal council decisions on secondary plans, zoning, subdivisions, development agreements as well as missed timelines, to the Municipal Board.

The bill also clarifies that the Municipal Board can assign costs incurred by the board on all appeals as well as assign costs against councils where there have been unreasonable delays in dealing with planning applications.

As I mentioned earlier, a number of information sessions have been held with municipal and industry stakeholders over the last several months. I am pleased to highlight some key changes that have been made to the bill, Bill 37, relative to the previously introduced bill from the last session, to address these stakeholder concerns.

First, the powers of a planning region have been limited to those that are required to implement the regional plan.

Second, financial contributions by regional member municipalities will now require agreement on the amount or the proportion of the funding that each member municipality will contribute to meet the expense of the planning region. In the event that no agreement—that there is no agreement, the minister may prescribe the amount member municipalities must provide to the region.

* (16:30)

A third change: the minister will be required to consult on the council—with the council of each municipality proposed to be included in the planning region before establishing future planning regions.

Fourth, residents in the city of Winnipeg will now have the same authority as residents outside of Winnipeg to appeal a zoning bylaw decision.

Fifth change: the commencement period for appeals is reduced to 30 days from 60 or 90 to ensure

a consistent and timely decision-making process across Manitoba.

And six, Madam Speaker, within three years after coming into force, the minister must undertake a comprehensive review of the amendments in the act. That includes public representation.

Madam Speaker, two additional changes have been made to ensure that the planning process is efficient and timely.

First, the Capital Region planning bylaw will take effect immediately upon adoption. This means that the proposed amendments to local planning, development plans, secondary plans, zoning bylaws and subdivisions must be consistent with regional planning bylaws or they cannot be approved.

Secondly, Madam Speaker, also, decisions on planning applications cannot be delayed on the basis that the preparation or amendment to a secondary plan is pending.

The Province of Manitoba is taking responsibility to ensure that the regulatory process in our province operates in an efficient, transparent and consistent manner to achieve the desired outcomes.

The private sector plays an enormous role in creating jobs, building communities and places to work for our residents of Manitoba. The private sector contributes to our overall economy and economic prosperity as well as—it creates a robust and stable tax base. This all enables governments to deliver important front-line services to Manitobans.

These changes to The Planning Act and the City of Winnipeg Charter deliver on our government's commitment to modernize and streamline the planning process. I am confident that Bill 37 will enhance economic growth to ensure Manitoba remains competitive and attracts business and job growth.

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.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Well, we know that there are several significant concerns by municipalities within the Capital Region and throughout the province, really, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Specifically with regards to the Metro Region, the city of Winnipeg, we know, has the vast majority of the population for that Capital Region.

How will that be accurately represented in the Capital Region planning body?

Hon. Derek Johnson (Minister of Municipal Relations): I'm excited to bring this new legislation forward. It creates a regional planning authority in the Winnipeg Metropolitan Region. It's got a regional focus on planning and breaking down the silos. This improves efficiency and transparency and not to mention accountability.

I think all Manitobans can get behind this bill, including members opposite, and I'll look forward to the next question.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I just want to ask the minister—you know, we don't have a ton of time on this; I know he's new to the portfolio. I'd ask just that he focus in and answer—at least give an attempted answer to the questions, because I think these are concerns that municipalities across the province are asking.

So, again, the city of Winnipeg has the majority of the population. How will decisions by the planning region be made? For instance, what is the threshold of support in moving ahead on a development that involves expropriation?

Mr. Johnson: The Winnipeg Metropolitan Region has been working on this for years, Madam Speaker. They actually started in 1999 but haven't gotten anywhere and, coincidentally, in 1999, my daughter was born. Today is her 22nd birthday, so we're hoping that—you know, if this government across the aisle was still in power, it might be another 22 years before anything is moved forward to better Manitobans.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): This is a bill that was originally introduced last March but there was supposed to be a—there was a committee, a council sort of put together of experts.

Where is the report that they were supposed to deliver and how many days did they even meet for?

Mr. Johnson: I'm pleased to highlight the key changes that have been made to Bill 37 relative to the previously introduced bill from the last session that

the member mentions. And it's—some of these changes are entered to address the stakeholders' concerns.

So, (1) the power of the planning region has been limited to those that are required to implement the regional plan.

And secondly, the financial contributions by the regional members and the municipalities will now require agreement from the amount or proportion of funding that each member and municipality will contribute to meet the expenses of the planning region. In the event that no agreement—the minister may prescribe the amount the member—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Wiebe: So, there's various appointments and procedures that, as this bill says, the planning board must create in bylaws to address, but there's no mention of any bylaws which need to be created for—regarding the appointment of an auditor.

Can the minister elaborate on what the process for appointing that auditor would be? This is section 10.16(2).

Does the minister foresee any issues with creating this under the section—creating the opportunity for an independent auditor to be created by the Municipal Board?

Mr. Johnson: And the gist of this bill is to improve and modernize. This bill will create a timely and transparent process for both people within the new regions and also for independent people that are looking to better their area by making investments.

Mr. Lamont: Now the minister referenced a report. Why was this particular individual chosen? Because when you look at his CV, he has apparently no planning experience whatsoever. His expertise is in international relations.

So exactly why would the government pick somebody who's an expert in international relations, who's worked at Macdonald-Laurier Institute, to write a document about planning in Manitoba?

Mr. Johnson: Madam Speaker, there's an interesting book out there and it's called 13 Ways to Kill Your Community, and it's written by Doug Griffiths, and part of the—there's numerous chapters that the members opposite can check off for what they've done to kill the community of Manitoba, and one is don't attract business.

And the previous government has done nothing but increase taxes and red tape throughout the years

and drive businesses away. This is important that businesses can come to Manitoba and have a process that is fair, efficient and accountable.

Mr. Wiebe: As the minister mentioned, there is a significant amount of downloading of responsibility to the Municipal Board, and one of the concerns that we've heard again throughout the province is the ability of the Municipal Board to be able to handle that kind of increased workload.

What kind of funding is coming along with this bill in order to ensure that the Municipal Board would be able to meet that kind of demand?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, I'm glad the member brought up the Municipal Board. When we took government, appeals were behind eight years, Madam Speaker—eight years. There was a total of 1,790 outstanding appeals from the previous government when we took office.

I want to be very clear that our government and our departments have been working hard. From May 28th—May 2018 to December 2020 we closed 73 per cent of these outstanding appeals.

I just want to say, great job to the Municipal Board and the department.

* (16:40)

Mr. Lamont: This is just a question about accountability. It seems to me that one of the key aspects of accountability in a government is democracy and the ability to elect people and to not elect people.

So who exactly is the head of this new planning region accountable to? Are they accountable to the minister? Are they accountable to the municipalities? If there's a problem, who chooses whether this person gets removed or not?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, well, I think we're all accountable to Manitoba and our taxpayers, Madam Speaker, and none of us would be here without our constituents' support and we bring their voices forward in this building, and that's who we're accountable to, Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further questions?

Debate

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

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): On that auspicious note, I do think that this really keys in on, I think, the

theme of this session and the theme of this government; and that is a complete lack of accountability, a complete disregard for democracy, for the norms and the procedures in this province. This government has continued to break those things down. And in this case, is completely ignoring the local representation of municipal leaders throughout our province.

This government—this minister says he is accountable, and at the same time, he wants to set up a quasi-judicial body that has the final say in all development here in Manitoba that is outside of the reach of the democratically elected governments that are set up throughout this province. It puts it squarely in the hands of a bureaucrat, with no additional funding, with no additional ability to handle the increased workload, and allows the minister only, and—at the Cabinet table, to be able to make the decisions that will guide our province and our development here in the the city of Winnipeg and beyond.

This is, as I said, a theme that this government continues to adhere to, whether it's the secret bills, not releasing the bills; whether it's trying to censure members of the opposition from doing their jobs, speaking truth to power, and speaking about the abuses that this government has brought forward; or whether it's bills like this, which I will remind members of the House would have been rammed through in the middle of a pandemic by the former minister of Municipal Relations.

The member for Riel (Ms. Squires) was willing to push this through with no consultation, with no information being given to municipal governments, with the AMM just sort of shrugging their shoulders, going, we don't what this is all about. No information at all, and this government was willing to ram it it though during a pandemic.

What did we do as the official opposition? We stood in our place. We stood against this government. And we stood up for the people of Manitoba and the democratically elected representatives across this province.

Where did this bill come from, Madam Speaker? Well, the minister, as I said—the member for Riel, the minister at the time—didn't go out and talk to municipalities, didn't say how can we work with you, how can we develop a piece of legislation that's responsive, that allows for development, that allows to—to work with others to actually build a zone and a region that can be developed. They didn't do that. They didn't go out and do that. They, in fact, brought

this forward under the cover of darkness and tried to move it through.

We stood up. And, you know, it's just—it's interesting, because when you look back and you look at the members opposite and how they reacted—well, I'm just going to read a quote into the record here and we'll just have to guess who this one is from. It says: Fact is, that when we're sitting on Broadway we don't know everything that's happening in every part of the province. Sometimes, as politicians, we like to think we do, but we don't. And the best decisions are made at the local level, generally, because you know what's happening specifically in your area.

Well, who said that, Madam Speaker? That was the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) who said that, and he said that when he was in opposition. And I guess a lot changes—

An Honourable Member: Is that why he refused to bring Bill 64 forward?

Mr. Wiebe: I think it is. A lot changes when he is in government.

We know that elected representatives in the Capital Region are concerned that they won't have a proper voice on behalf of their constituents. This bill allows for the provincial government, through the Municipal Board, to overrule local decision-making. They will have the final say on key land use planning processes such as zoning, zoning amendments, secondary plans, secondary plan amendments, conditional approvals, subdivisions and development agreements.

This bill will mean that local municipalities will have a harder time protecting things like historical areas, fragile ecosystems or any other kind of development that doesn't fit with their plan that their constituents are telling them.

These changes will mean local voices won't matter ultimately, Madam Speaker, and that local decision makers can't decide what to do with their own land. Accountability will be lost through the democratic process.

And where do citizens go? Where can they go in this case? Well, they can go, then, to the Municipal Board.

We know that the Municipal Board, however, Madam Speaker, is already overworked, is already—there are significant delays at the Municipal Board, and this will further highlight those issues.

If they're expecting municipalities to surrender their planning autonomy to a board, then it is improper for the minister to be able to appoint the chair of that board, which will further complicated the process.

Also of concern, Madam Speaker, is the power given to the minister to essentially coerce the board to, quote, adopt or amend its regional planning by-law.

Bill 37 also gives the planning region unfettered power to develop and expropriate. This begs the question, where do—cities and municipalities will begin to lose the appropriate decision-making authority over their growth and development.

Affected municipalities say that this bill leaves too much to regulation, making it harder for them to plan accordingly, and the AMM has commented, saying, quote, government officials have repeatedly stated that Bill 37 was meant to bring us into line with other provinces. If so, it must be noted that in other provinces the scope of appeals and mechanisms to mitigate frivolous appeals are all specified in provincial planning laws rather than dealt with by regulation, as they are doing here, Mr.—Madam Deputy—Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, my time is very short. I wish we had more time to talk about this because we're hearing from municipal leaders who are telling us how concerned they are with the additional red tape that is being layered on top of the decision-making that they already do within their own—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: —municipalities. This is more tape; it's more bureaucracy. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: And then the bill, on top of that, sets unrealistic timelines for the approval and planning processes. Of course, the timelines are only imposed on municipalities. There's no mention of timelines that are imposed on the planning board. So the planning board has carte blanche.

We know that in places like Ontario, where they went ahead with this type of change, the backlog increased to 1,000 cases in Ontario recently, with appellants waiting months or even years just to get a hearing. And then, you know, the premier there, Doug Ford, stepped in, hired more adjudicators, which added more bureaucracy, more red tape, not less.

And, of course, this minister is doing all of this without any additional funding, without any additional supports to municipalities. All of this is being downloaded onto the municipalities for them to figure out, and it's not—there's no additional money that's being given to them or for the Municipal Board.

The red tape, we've been told by municipalities, will be crushing, in many cases. There'll be so much red tape and so much bureaucracy that they need to wade through in order to get anything done, and they simply want to be accountable to their constituents. They want to be responsive to their constituents. Their constituents will have less power, while developers will continue to have the upper hand at every single step of the way.

The timelines have been shortened, which further makes it more difficult for citizens to get organized and step up and fight these changes.

Madam Speaker, there is just so much more that I could say about this, about the uncertainty, about the work that is being left either in the hands of the minister to determine by regulation or being downloaded onto municipalities, who will be forced to create bylaws to keep up.

And, at the same time, the mayor of Winnipeg, the mayor of Selkirk, others, are saying, where is the plan? Where is the Metro Region plan? They haven't seen Plan 2050. They haven't seen this, so they can't even go ahead and say this is something that they support.

No one is asking for this, Madam Speaker, and yet this government is pushing forward.

* (16:50)

So, you know, Madam Speaker, I, as I said, I could go on and on. What I will say is that I do welcome this bill going to committee at some point, because I know for a fact that this government is going to get an earful. They're going to get an earful from us, we try to do that every single day, but when the public is allowed to come in and actually speak to the members opposite, I hope that they are listening at that time.

Those municipal leaders know that we are listening. We continue to meet with them across this province, throughout the Capital Region and beyond, but I hope that the government decides to listen. Those municipal leaders know who is on their side. They know who is standing up for rural Manitoba, who is standing up for municipalities across the province,

and they know who is standing down. I welcome the chance to have that conversation at committee.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I do think that I want to pick up on several important points that my colleague from Concordia made in his remarks.

This bill that the PCs have brought before the House, it really is keeping with a lot of undemocratic practices that the government has been developing, and it really does seem to be part of an escalating attack on democracy, if you will.

Now, of course, we had them break their 2016 election promise to respect the fixed election date laws, but we were happy to contest an election and we're very happy to be the only party who actually improved our seat count in that recent election.

But, I think what's been very concerning this week and over the past few weeks, is that we have seen the government intentionally withhold the text of a number of bills—19 bills to be specific. And this does not serve democracy in any way.

And I think it's actually very damning that a government would be embarrassed to share the content of their legislation. Certainly, you're not proud of a bill if you're not willing to share it with the people of Manitoba. Certainly, it doesn't give anyone confidence that you believe the decisions that you make are going to be in the best interests of Manitobans if you can't actually share the text with those Manitobans.

And when it comes to the overall governance of the government's approach to the House, it seems as though it's less about democracy and more about just begrudgingly coming in here each and every day and putting in the time until they can implement their plan of cuts.

Now this week, of course, we've seen Bill 64, which completely removes schools divisions from the province here in Manitoba. And so, again, these issues are very relevant to the bill at hand because they represent a concomitant—I will encourage the members opposite to look the word up—a 'concomin'—a complex and increasingly complicated picture when it comes to the attack on democracy, as nefarious as it is, implemented by the members opposite.

And so, again, it is quite infuriating, it's quite preposterous, and it's by no means escaping anyone's

notice that many of the members opposite got their start as municipal politicians and as school trustees.

Of course, that marks a key difference between them and us, Madam Speaker. On the opposite side of the House, they believe in pulling the ladder up behind them once they get to their target. They believe in closing the door behind them once they get to their destination. Whereas, again, on this side of the House, we're all about making the path easier for the next people to come up behind us.

And so when it comes to Bill 64 or Bill 37, it represents the same exact thing. School trustees were a great thing in the eyes of the PCs like our colleague from St. James—or formally of St. James. He's now the member for Assiniboia (Mr. Johnston) because he refused to leave his name on the ballot in St. James, knowing that he would be steamrolled by the current member for St. James (Mr. Sala). Sorry, I just wanted to correct the record there.

And I realize my colleague, the minister for Hydro—Crowns, I should say, is choosing to quarrel with some of my description there, but I just want to make sure that the House knows that I was using steamroll in the most parliamentary of fashions, indicating that the member for Assiniboia would not have had a chance at the ballot box against the current member for St. James.

But back to the lecture at hand. Again, the PCs seem to think that school divisions are important when they're a launching pad for their own political careers, but now that they've been elected to this Chamber, they think it's appropriate to dissolve that level of democracy in Manitoba. Similarly, many of them got their start at the municipal level as councillors—with many, many bad ideas, I would add—but then, now that they're elected to this place, they want to go back and diminish the level of democratic involvement for local municipal officials across Manitoba.

And so it's quite fitting with the PC approach that they want to implement this bill that will allow unelected, unaccountable folks to make important decisions about the communities in which we live—communities like Winnipeg, like Selkirk, communities right across the province. And this is what upsets so very many Manitobans.

Manitobans, you know, participate in our democracy with the expectation that the people that they mark a ballot for are going to have the ability to make these important decisions: decisions today, tomorrow, but decisions also for decades into the future. And so

not only is this bill undermining the democratic participation of the average Manitoban out there, but it fully removes from view that decision-making process.

And, again, where is the accountability? Well, right now, you may not agree with a development decision in the community that you live in here, you may agree with it, but you will have a very clear ability to hold those decision-makers accountable: the ballot box. You have that level of accountability right now, and right now, whether you agree with elected officials in your community or not, they are accountable to you as the people of Manitoba.

However, once this bill passes, those decision-makers—the people actually making the planning decisions—won't be accountable to you, the people of Manitoba. They will be accountable to the party in charge of the provincial government at the moment, which is the PCs.

And so we have seen that, you know, in the past when the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) was at the civic level, for example, there were many, many questionable decisions being made at the time—very many questionable decisions which, in some cases, they're still being investigated at this time.

And so it really does beg the question, who stands to gain if democracy is undermined, and who stands to gain if, all of a sudden, planning decisions are no longer accountable to the people of Manitoba but are simply accountable to this Cabinet? And so these are the very important concerns that we're bringing forward here today.

And I think the best course of action, realistically, would be for the government to withdraw this bill, because it doesn't seem to really benefit the average person out there. Of course, it benefits the PC, you know, inner circle, if you will, but the average person doesn't have access to that PC inner circle.

The average person out there wouldn't even know where to get started, wouldn't know, you know, the levels of the platinum club or the silver club or whatever the PC donor club is called this week that they would have to contribute to in order to have input on this sort of decision-making process.

So we have a much different—it's a much more common sense approach, I would say, which is simply let the average person out there have their input into the decisions that affect their communities and let that remain at the ballot box.

So with those few comments on the record, I'm happy to allow many other great members to have an opportunity to speak to this terrible bill.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I will pick this up later.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Boniface, on debate?

Mr. Lamont: Yes, I mean, this is an—clearly, an incredibly objectionable bill. It seeks to strip away democracy, as well as access to the courts, by handing off decisions to bodies that—to which there are no appeals.

It's extremely concerning, in part because we live in a city where there have been very serious allegations about developers which have never been investigated despite the recommendations of the RCMP. So the idea that the biggest problem facing Manitoba—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter's again before the House, the honourable member will have 29 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 16, 2021

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are also available on the Internet at the following address:

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