

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

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The Honourable Myrna Driedger
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

Thursday, April 22, 2021

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Doyle Pivniuk): Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Introduction of bills?

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Waverley (Mr. Reyes). Can the honourable member for Waverley unmute his mic?

The honourable member for Selkirk.

Standing Committee on Justice Fifth Report

Mr. Alan Lagimodiere (Chairperson): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Justice.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Justice—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Justice presents the following as its Fifth Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on April 21, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 5)** – *The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act (Cannabis Social Responsibility Fee) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la réglementation des alcools, des jeux et du cannabis (taxe de responsabilité sociale en matière de cannabis)*
- **Bill (No. 6)** – *The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la réglementation des alcools, des jeux et du cannabis*
- **Bill (No. 60)** – *The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act (2) / Loi n° 2 modifiant la Loi sur la réglementation des alcools, des jeux et du cannabis*

- **Bill (No. 213)** – *The Reporting of Supports for Child Survivors of Sexual Assault Act (Trained Health Professionals and Evidence Collection Kits) / Loi sur la présentation de rapports concernant les mesures de soutien destinées aux enfants survivants d'agression sexuelle (professionnels de la santé formés et troussees médico-légales)*

Committee Membership

As per the Sessional Order passed by the House on October 7, 2020 and further amended on December 3, 2020, Rule 83(2) was waived for the April 21, 2021 meeting, reducing the membership to six Members (4 Government and 2 Official Opposition).

- Ms. FONTAINE
- Hon. Mr. FRIESEN
- Hon. Ms. GORDON
- Mr. ISLEIFSON
- Mr. LAGIMODIERE (Chairperson)
- Ms. LATHLIN

Your Committee elected Mr. ISLEIFSON as the Vice-Chairperson.

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record

- Hon. Mr. GERRARD

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following two presentations on Bill (No. 213) – The Reporting of Supports for Child Survivors of Sexual Assault Act (Trained Health Professionals and Evidence Collection Kits) / Loi sur la présentation de rapports concernant les mesures de soutien destinées aux enfants survivants d'agression sexuelle (professionnels de la santé formés et troussees médico-légales):

Garrison Settee, Grand Chief, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc.

Renee Kastrukoff, The Pas Family Resource Centre—Minisewin Waska

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 5)** – *The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act (Cannabis Social Responsibility Fee) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la réglementation des alcools, des jeux et du cannabis (taxe de responsabilité sociale en matière de cannabis)*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 6)** – *The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la réglementation des alcools, des jeux et du cannabis*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 60)** – *The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act (2) / Loi n° 2 modifiant la Loi sur la réglementation des alcools, des jeux et du cannabis*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 213)** – *The Reporting of Supports for Child Survivors of Sexual Assault Act (Trained Health Professionals and Evidence Collection Kits) / Loi sur la présentation de rapports concernant les mesures de soutien destinées aux enfants survivants d'agression sexuelle (professionnels de la santé formés et troussees médicolégales)*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill with the following amendment:

THAT Clause 8 of the Bill be replaced with the following:

Coming into force

8 This Act comes into force on a day to be fixed by proclamation.

Mr. Lagimodiere: I move, seconded by the member from Brandon East, that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development Ninth Report

Mr. Jon Reyes (Chairperson): I wish to present the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

Clerk: Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development presents the following as its Ninth Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on April 21, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. in Room 254 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 3)** – *The Public Service Act / Loi sur la fonction publique*
- **Bill (No. 12)** – *The Crown Land Dispositions Act (Various Acts Amended) / Loi sur les aliénations de terres domaniales (modification de diverses dispositions législatives)*

Committee Membership

As per the Sessional Order passed by the House on October 7, 2020 and further amended on December 3, 2020, Rule 83(2) was waived for the April 21, 2021 meeting, reducing the membership to six Members (4 Government and 2 Official Opposition).

- Mr. BRAR
- Hon. Mr. EICHLER
- Hon. Mr. HELWER
- Mr. LINDSEY
- Mr. MARTIN
- Mr. REYES

Your Committee elected Mr. REYES as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected Mr. MARTIN as the Vice-Chairperson.

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record

- Mr. LAMONT

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following three presentations on **Bill (No. 3)** – *The Public Service Act / Loi sur la fonction publique*:

Kevin Rebeck, Manitoba Federation of Labour
Bruce Gammon, Legal Aid Manitoba
Michelle Gawronsky, Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union

Your Committee heard the following eight presentations on **Bill (No. 12)** – *The Crown Land Dispositions Act (Various Acts Amended) / Loi sur les aliénations de terres domaniales (modification de diverses dispositions législatives)*:

Evan Balzer, Private Citizen
Ian Robson, Private Citizen
Anastasia Fyk, National Farmers Union
Bill Uruski, Private Citizen
Chief Glenn Hudson, Peguis First Nations

Tom Nevakshonoff, Private Citizen

Dean Harder, Private Citizen

Don Sullivan, Private Citizen

Written Submissions

*Your Committee received the following written submission on **Bill (No. 12)** – The Crown Land Dispositions Act (Various Acts Amended) / Loi sur les aliénations de terres domaniales (modification de diverses dispositions législatives):*

Constance Menzies, Private Citizen

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 3)** – The Public Service Act / Loi sur la fonction publique

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill with the following amendments.

THAT Clause 64(5) of the Bill be amended by striking out "not represented by a bargaining agent (as that term is defined in The Labour Relations Act) or excluded from a bargaining unit".

THAT the following be added after Clause 64(6) of the Bill:

Exception—appeal to commission

64(6.1) *Subsection (6) does not apply to a reference to the former Act or a specific provision of it in relation to an appeal that is commenced after the coming into force of this section under a collective agreement described in that subsection. For greater certainty, a provision of the collective agreement that provides for an appeal to The Civil Service Commission is of no force and effect and **The Labour Relations Act** applies instead.*

Reference to commission in collective agreement

64(6.2) *Despite subsection (6) but subject to subsection (6.1), any reference to The Civil Service Commission in a collective agreement entered into before the coming into force of this section is deemed to refer to the Public Service Commissioner appointed under subsection 26(1) of this Act.*

- **Bill (No. 12)** – The Crown Land Dispositions Act (Various Acts Amended)/Loi sur les aliénations de terres domaniales (modification de diverses dispositions législatives)

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

Mr. Reyes: Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for McPhillips (Mr. Martin), that report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now we'll go on to tabling of reports.

The honourable Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development.

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development): It's actually him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Oh, the honourable member for education—advanced education and learning and immigration.

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): I am pleased to table the Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration 2021-2022 Main Estimates Supplement.

Mr. Pedersen: I am pleased to table the Main Estimates Supplement, 2021-2022, for Manitoba Agriculture and Resource Development.

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Central Services): I am pleased to table the Estimates supplement for the Department of Central Services for the financial year 2021-22.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Minister of Conservation and Climate.

An Honourable Member: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have another.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Oh, yes, sorry. The honourable member for Central Services, on another report.

Mr. Helwer: I'm pleased to table the Estimates supplement for the Civil Service Commission for the financial year 2021-22.

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate): I am pleased to table the Estimates supplement for the Department of Conservation and Climate for financial year 2021-2022.

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Crown Services): I'm pleased to table the Estimates supplement for Department of Crown Services for fiscal year '21-22.

Hon. Ralph Eichler (Minister of Economic Development and Jobs): I'm pleased to table the Estimates supplement for the Department of Economic Development and Jobs, financial year 2021-22.

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education): I'm pleased to table the Estimates supplement for the Department of Education for the financial year 2021-22.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I'd like to table the Estimates supplement for the Department of Families for the financial year 2021.

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I'm pleased to rise today in the Assembly to table the Main Estimates 'supplement' for 2021-22.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): I'm pleased to table the Estimates supplement for the Department of Health and Seniors Care for financial year '21-22.

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations): I'm pleased to table the Estimates supplement for the Department of Indigenous and Northern Relations for the financial year 2021-22.

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure): It is my pleasure to rise today and table the Estimates supplement for the Department of Manitoba Infrastructure for the financial year 2021-2022.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now the honourable Minister for Justice.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I'm pleased to table the Main Estimates Supplement for Manitoba Justice for the fiscal year 2021-22.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Legislative and Public Affairs): I'm pleased to table the Estimates supplement for the Department of Legislative and Public Affairs for financial year 2021-2022.

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery): I'm pleased to table the Estimates supplement for the Department of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery for the financial year 2021-2022.

Hon. Derek Johnson (Minister of Municipal Relations): I'm pleased to table the Main Estimates Supplement for the Department of Municipal Relations for financial year '21-22.

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): I am pleased to table the Estimates supplement for the Department of Sport, Culture and Heritage for the financial year 2021-22.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, we have to go back to committee reports.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

(Continued)

Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development Ninth Report

(Continued)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister for Waverley on the economic development committee, if he can repeat the procedure again to—*[interjection]*—yes, to have a seconder who is online. Apparently, the person that you seconded wasn't on—sitting in his seat.

Mr. Jon Reyes (Chairperson): I wish to present the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Just move the motion.

Mr. Reyes: Okay, I got you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Fort Richmond (Mrs. Guillemard), that the report of the committee be received.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It was—the honourable member for—it was—forward by the honourable member for Waverley, seconded by the honourable member for Fort Richmond, that the committee of economic development and social development be received. *[interjection]* No, he said Fort Richmond. Is it—oh, it should be Portage la Prairie.

The honourable member for Waverley, can you repeat 'seconded' by the honourable member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart).

Mr. Reyes: I will, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for Portage la Prairie, that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, now we'll get on to ministerial statements, and the honourable member for climate and conservation. The required 90 minutes notice has been—routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26-2.

Would the honourable member–minister please proceed with the statement, the honourable member–Minister for Climate and Conservation.

Earth Day

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate): I rise today to make a statement celebrating Earth Day.

Since the first Earth Day was organized over 50 years ago, much has changed. Top of mind is climate change.

We are, of course, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, but, nonetheless, we cannot forget the importance of fighting climate change and protecting nature. This is the defining environmental challenge of our time. Earth Day is an excellent opportunity to remember what we are working towards.

With the launch of our Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan, Manitoba established a five-year carbon savings account system with a one-megaton greenhouse gas reductions goal from 2018 to 2022. We are the first jurisdiction in North America to set a five-year greenhouse gas emissions reduction goal backed by a legislative governance framework.

* (13:40)

To support this goal and provide other green economic benefits, our government has launched a number of key initiatives. In April 2020, Efficiency Manitoba was launched to improve energy efficiency in buildings. With this current program offerings and more on the way, Efficiency Manitoba's 2020-2023 plan is forecasting to achieve an annual average electricity savings of 1.51 per cent and greenhouse gases emissions reductions of 140,000 tons from this natural gas savings program.

Manitoba recently announced \$32.3 million in funding for Efficiency Manitoba's three-year efficiency plan, which has successfully leveraged an additional \$32.3 million from Canada through the Low Carbon Economy Fund.

Manitoba has taken the lead and implemented biofuel regulations that exceed federal mandates to reduce emissions from vehicles. Over the next two years, the renewable fuel content and fuel sold in Manitoba will increase from 8.5 per cent to 10 per cent for ethanol, and from 2 per cent to 5 per cent biodiesel. These new regulations will make Manitoba the province with the highest total renewable fuels requirements in the country, reducing GHG emissions by approximately 100,000 tons per year.

Manitoba launched the efficiency trucking program in 2020, providing financial incentives to heavy-duty vehicle and fleet operators to install fuel saving and aerodynamic devices on trucks and trailers. Manitoba has allocated \$5.9 million to support the Efficient Trucking Program and leverage the same amount from Canada. With \$7 million invested in the program to date, this program will contribute to 70,000 tons of emissions reductions to Manitoba's carbon savings account and save 25.9 million litres of fuel. These technologies are being installed right here in Manitoba and ensure good green jobs for Manitobans. Over the life of the equipment, over 200,000 tons of greenhouse gas emissions will be avoided.

Manitoba's \$102-million conservation and trust and the \$108-million Growing Outcomes in Watersheds trust promote the conservation of natural areas or changes to land and water management, helping to both reduce emissions and mitigate against impacts of climate change. These trust funds support wetlands and other natural areas that create, conserve or enhance natural infrastructure that increase resiliency to drought and flooding while sequestering carbon on the landscape.

Manitoba recently launched a \$1-million Green Impact Bonds, a first for our province. This innovative financial tool is being used to stimulate investment into environmental solutions to complex challenges. With this investment, Innovative NRG, a made-in-Manitoba company, will divert organic waste, such as animal byproducts and wastewater sludge through a gasification process. Over the lifetime of this initiative, approximately 230,000 tons of organic waste will be diverted, greenhouse gas emissions will be reduced by an estimated 90,000 tons and 22 full-time equivalent jobs will be created.

Last year our government launched a new Conservation and Climate Fund, providing \$600,000 to organizations undertaking local green initiative that support key priorities in our Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan. This was an increase from \$355,000 in grants hand-picked by the previous government.

In the Budget 2021, our government announced that this fiscal year we have an additional one-year increase to this fund for \$1 million total, supporting outcome-driven projects that reduce GHG emissions. Looking to a future of low carbonate energy, our government is developing the framework for a new provincial energy strategy.

Manitoba recognizes the necessity for a forward-looking energy strategy that sets out the Province's plan for a transition to a future with fewer fossil fuels and significantly lower greenhouse gas emissions. Manitoba's electricity grid is powered by over 99 per cent renewable electricity, and leveraging this important energy resource will help us as we take action on climate change. We are proud that our Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan has set forth a solid plan towards greenhouse gas emissions reductions and the protection of our land, air and water, while recognizing the importance of growing Manitoba's green economy.

I would also like to take a moment to give thanks to my incredible staff in the climate and green implementation office who have been helping me in achieving Manitoba's ambitious climate goals.

I join all Manitobans who are celebrating Earth Day today. I encourage everyone to think of how you personally can contribute with an action of your own.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Waverley (Mr. Reyes)—Wolseley, sorry. Wolseley.

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): I am so happy to rise today to wish all Manitobans a happy Earth Day.

Earth Day is an annual opportunity for us to reflect on our relationship with our environment, particularly with climate change on the rise. This year's theme is Restore Our Earth, and I have been inspired by the online three-day event hosted by EARTHDAY.ORG that is bringing together people of all ages to inspire meaningful action.

We are already seeing the impacts of climate change here in Manitoba, with larger wildfires, more erratic weather and more severe droughts. Manitoba's greenhouse gas emissions are at an all-time high and are growing quickly under the Pallister government, who refuse to take the necessary actions.

This government has a choice: either they can keep wasting time fighting with other levels of government or they can get on board with fighting climate change. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) continues to waste taxpayers' dollars on lengthy court challenges, even though similar lawsuits from other provinces were recently struck down by the Supreme Court.

And the Minister of Conservation and Climate (Mrs. Guillemard) recently announced that Manitoba's climate plan is not to reduce emissions, but

just to let them increase less than if we did nothing. This lack of urgency is embarrassing and Manitobans deserve a government that takes the climate crisis seriously.

On this side of the House we believe in fighting climate change head-on. This includes setting real targets and taking meaningful action to reduce emissions. We believe in protecting our waters and keeping Lake Winnipeg healthy through strong investment and intergovernmental co-operation. And we believe our parks should always stay public for Manitobans to enjoy.

Earth Day is fundamentally about remembering that we only have one earth. During COVID-19, many of us has discovered a new-found appreciation for our outdoor spaces, something I hope will not change post-pandemic.

A future without climate change is possible if governments rise to the challenge with ambitious targets, focused investments and meaningful action. If we take these steps now, we can preserve the beautiful province we know and love for future generations to enjoy.

Once again, I'd like to wish all Manitobans a happy Earth Day and say miigwech in appreciation of Indigenous land and water protectors and thank you to all Manitobans who work to protect our earth and heal our environment.

Thank you.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I ask for leave to speak in response to the minister's statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there leave to allow the member from St. Boniface to speak on the minister's statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Lamont: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to respond to the ministerial statement on Earth Day.

You know, there's something known as the campsite rule. When you arrive at a campsite, you try to leave it better than you found it. It's a pretty simple idea with a lot of applications and the campsite rule could apply to everything and everyone, whether it's reconciliation, jobs, health care, education or our environment.

All Manitobans depend on natural resources and on nature. Farmers do not benefit from exhausted soil nor fishers from overfished lakes. We don't benefit from thinning forests or wildlife pushed to the brink

of extinction. We don't benefit from waste, from wasting fuel, wasting water or from wasting land.

Human activity has been affecting climate change—climate for the worse. We can and must choose to affect it for the better. When we face such threats to humanity and to our own children, we have a moral obligation to act. We've already seen decades of inaction, delays and outright obstruction from politicians who've put their own political fortunes ahead of the public good.

For Manitoba, this is an opportunity to lead, to grow and to turn Manitoba's strengths to our advantage for the benefit of every community in our province.

Unfortunately, instead, we're seeing inaction, plans to plan on climate change and the continued destruction of wilderness, rubber-stamping projects in protected areas like rivers or projects like the Vivian Sand mine, which could irreparably contaminate one of the largest aquifers in the province.

* (13:50)

Putting all the monies—our money into trust funds means that money is sitting in a bank instead of driving the change we need.

Nowhere is the denial of the future more clear than in this government's mindless repetition, strictly in the present tense, that at this particular moment, Manitoba's parks are not for sale, while we know full well that in October, the government asked for a plan to sell them off in the future. Maybe tomorrow. Maybe in June.

Fifty-one years ago, the great Walt Kelly said, we have met the enemy—we have seen the enemy, and it is us.

Without clean water, clean air, and healthy land, what do we have? We don't have another environment to live in. We need to start acting like it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Manitoba 150 Award Recipients

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate three of my constituents who were the recipients of Honour 150 presented by Canada Life as part of the Manitoba 150 celebrations.

Dr. Ernest Cholakis is the founder of Cholakis Dental Group. Over his 40-year career, Dr. Cholakis

has led the way in educating parents and children from all backgrounds about the importance of oral hygiene and healthy habits.

Dr. Cholakis is also passionate about arts and culture. Since joining the Winnipeg Art Gallery board of governors as chair, he has been a part of numerous WAG projects, including Qaumajuq, which showcases the largest collection of contemporary Inuit art in the world.

Gunvor Larsson is 97 years young and is a trail-blazer for the growth and recognition of Swedish culture in Manitoba. Since immigrating to Canada in 1958. She has taught Swedish, owned an import store and has written cookbooks featuring traditional Swedish recipes that have been sold across Canada.

Over the years, Mrs. Larsson has hosted countless *fikas*—Swedish for coffee and cake break—to welcome Swedish students and hockey players to Winnipeg. She also continues to volunteer at Folklorama 50 years after being one of its founding members.

Karyn Lazareck is a champion for youth and social, intellectual and developmental disabilities. Her leadership saw the formation of a Steering Committee for Persons with Disabilities in the Jewish Community.

Ms. Lazareck was also instrumental in establishing a life skills program called Gaining Resources Our Way, also known as GROW, which supports Manitobans with special needs.

I'd like to sincerely congratulate these three most deserving individuals who have all impacted so many lives within our community and our province.

To all Honour 150 recipients, thank you. Manitoba would not be the same if not for your tireless dedication to the people of our province.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I am proud to rise today and recognize Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata for their leadership in the community throughout this pandemic. They have a caring and compassionate team that have been working hard to support families during this difficult time.

Ma Mawi's 445 King St. location recently became a *[inaudible]* site. This site offers over 200 tests per day to people who are symptomatic and to those who need to be tested before travelling to a northern community. Ma Mawi provides wraparound services

by having staff on hand to help individuals who test positive with self-isolation plans and other supports to alleviate stress and help keep families safe.

Indigenous Manitobans are overrepresented in COVID-19 cases, as of last week making up 59 per cent of active cases in the province while only 18 per cent of the total population. Having this testing site available at a trusted community organization will help limit the spread of COVID-19 in Winnipeg's urban Indigenous community. By offering services like child care, transportation and food, Ma Mawi is making it easier for those who test positive to isolate while still supporting their families.

Ma Mawi's McGregor location has recently become a vaccination site. Executive director Diane Redsky is calling on the government to prioritize Point Douglas for vaccinations, as we've been recently hard hit by this pandemic. Ma Mawi is also advocating for entire households to be vaccinated at once, rather than only using age-based criteria. This will help protect families and limit generational transmission, and we support them in this call.

Most importantly, we all need to get vaccinated as soon as possible. I was able to get my first dose on Sunday and I encourage all Manitobans to get theirs as soon as they are eligible.

Please join me in thanking the entire team at Ma Mawi for their dedication to provide—protecting our community and keeping our families safe.

Miigwech.

Tick Season

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Vérendrye): Spring is here, but judging from the weather we experienced last week, one may question Mother Nature about that. With spring comes tick season. Earlier this month my son and I were walking in some tall grass, and we can confirm that the ticks are out there.

With ticks comes the possibility of tick-borne diseases such as anaplasmosis, babesiosis and Lyme disease. We are all aware of the serious consequences those diseases can have on humans.

In Manitoba, we have several species of ticks, but only one that is known for spreading tick-borne diseases to humans: that is the deer tick or the black-legged tick. These diseases are relatively new to Manitoba, but every year the number of cases continues to rise.

With more and more Manitobans exploring nature and Manitoba's great outdoors, it is important that Manitobans educate themselves on the different varieties of ticks in Manitoba.

In order to help identify the different varieties of ticks, Manitoba has recently joined the eTick platform. This program developed by Bishop's University and funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada will ensure Manitobans can access rapid tick identification. When you find a tick, you can submit a picture to have the tick identified by experts.

A new mobile app has been developed to facilitate and streamline the submission of tick observations. It is available for free download under the App Store, Google Play store or directly on the eTick website at www.eticck.ca/.

Manitoba is full of great outdoor adventures, and I wish everyone a safe and enjoyable tick-free season and a great outdoors.

Thank you very much. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Maurice Allard

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): These past 14 months during the pandemic, small businesses in St. Vital have gone through incredible changes in the way that they operate. I thank all the small-business owners and their employees who are facing these challenges.

The Old St. Vital BIZ provided \$675 each to their 150 member businesses, totalling \$100,000 of financial assistance through their economic recovery recognition program. Thank you to the Old St. Vital BIZ board—and supporting our local business and community during these difficult times.

I want to also take this opportunity to recognize the retirement of Maurice Allard, the executive director of the Old St. Vital BIZ. Mr. Allard says he will miss the people and the relationships he has developed over the years and that being known by name in the mayor's office wasn't a bad thing either.

A highlight for him during his time at the BIZ has been the St. Vital Watershed project. Working with actual canoes, altered and stood on end, local artist Collin Zipp replaced the branding with historical neighbourhood references to the 1820 Métis settlement and dates marking the levels of Winnipeg's great floods. Mr. Allard shared that during his time, a successful move from 604 St Mary's was made to a more modern and efficient office space.

Mr. Allard has gone above and beyond in his job description as executive director, being on call 24-7 and constantly looking for graffiti or rent signs in the area to stay on top of. He leaves the BIZ with memories of truly enjoyable times. His departing words of wisdom for the next executive director is to be willing to do anything, anytime to benefit the Old St. Vital BIZ.

Thank you, Mr. Allard, for your many years of dedicated service to improving St. Vital and the wider community. Thank you.

Prix Ronald Duhamel

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Je suis ravi de prendre la parole aujourd'hui pour rendre hommage au lauréat du Prix Ron Duhamel. Institué en mars 2005, le Prix Ronald-Duhamel vise à reconnaître un ou une employé(e), ou un groupe d'employés, œuvrant dans le secteur public ou parapublic à l'échelle fédérale, provinciale ou municipale et s'étant distingué au service de la Francophonie au Manitoba.

Remis tous les deux ans, le Prix est une initiative conjointe de la Société de la francophonie manitobaine, du gouvernement fédéral, du Secrétariat provincial aux affaires francophones et de l'Association des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba, ou AMBM.

* (14:00)

Le dernier lauréat du prix est M. Michel Loiselle, agent principal de développement économique, Diversification de l'économie de l'Ouest du Canada.

Au cours des 18 derniers mois, Michel Loiselle a mené une vaste initiative de consultation de la communauté francophone, qui a permis de mieux comprendre ses besoins et ses intérêts dans le domaine du développement économique.

Les efforts de M. Loiselle ont abouti à une variété de projets différents répondant aux besoins des communautés concernées, allant des programmes et soutiens pour les entreprises et l'employabilité à l'entrepreneuriat chez les jeunes, en passant par la promotion et l'inclusion d'artistes francophones et au sein des industries culturelles du Manitoba.

Ces contributions importantes au développement économique de la francophonie de notre province témoignent du rôle de Michel Loiselle en tant que promoteur et défenseur de la communauté francophone du Manitoba.

En tant que député de Saint-Boniface, je ne cesse d'être étonné et impressionné par le dévouement, la passion et le travail acharné de mes électeurs, ainsi que par leurs contributions extraordinaires à notre collectivité, à notre ville, à notre province, à notre pays et à la francophonie.

Félicitations et merci à M. Loiselle.

Translation

It is my pleasure to rise today to pay homage to the winner of the Ronald-Duhamel Award. Created in 2005, this award recognizes an employee or a group of employees of a governmental or quasi-governmental body at the federal, provincial or municipal level, for their distinguished service to the Francophone community in Manitoba.

This biennial Award is a joint initiative of the Société de la francophonie manitobaine, the Federal Government, the Manitoba Francophone Affairs Secretariat, and the Manitoba Association of Bilingual Municipalities (AMBM).

The most recent winner of the award is Mr. Michel Loiselle, senior business officer, Western Economic Diversification Canada.

For the past 18 months, Mr. Loiselle has led an extensive public engagement initiative with the francophone community that has resulted in a better understanding of its needs and interests in the realm of economic development.

Mr. Loiselle's efforts have culminated in a variety of different projects responding to the needs of the involved communities, ranging from programs and supports for businesses and employability, youth entrepreneurship, to the promotion and inclusion of francophone artists within Manitoba's cultural industries

These significant contributions to the economic development of our province's Francophone community are evidence of Michel Loiselle's role as a promoter and defender of Manitoba's Francophonie.

As the member for St. Boniface, I am always amazed and impressed by the dedication, passion and hard work of my constituents, as well as by their extraordinary contributions to our community, our city, our province, our country and the francophone community.

I extend my congratulations and my thanks to Mr. Loiselle.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for oral questions.

Surgery Wait Times Nurse Staffing Levels

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, happy Earth Day to all of us and to our mother, the Earth.

We know that the 1,300 nursing positions that sit vacant right now are having an impact far beyond emergency departments in Winnipeg. It's impacting the lives of 10,000 Manitobans who are waiting for surgeries as well.

Now, the wait-list has not been moving; people are continuing to live in pain, and now we know why. At the Health Sciences Centre, they are short 95 surgical nurses. That's 95 nurses less than they should have in the surgery department. It means a 19 per cent vacancy rate for surgeries at the HSC, the centre of so much health care in our province.

That's less care at the bedside and it explains why Manitobans are waiting so long.

When will the First Minister hire more nurses to make sure people get the surgeries they need?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Deputy Premier): Of course, this minister and our government has been hiring more nurses, but this is a long-standing issue.

I refer back to a newspaper article entitled, Manitoba facing nursing crunch. This was just from a few years ago, and it was Karen Sadler, president of the St. Boniface nursing union, who said, we still have huge issues in critical care and lots of spaces to fill when it comes to nurses. The then-minister, Theresa Oswald, said, we've been planning in earnest for this in years.

The bottom line is, we know it's a concern and we're trying to find an answer, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a supplementary question. *[interjection]*

Order.

Mr. Kinew: I'll table the documents for the benefit of the minister. I know the First Minister won't read them, but perhaps the member for Steinbach will.

What it shows is that the situation is getting worse by the day under this government, and it's because of

their cuts—cuts that they all stand in solidarity with at the Cabinet table, I would add.

It meant 11 per cent fewer nurses—before the pandemic—than are required to meet our basic health-care needs. So things were getting bad under the PCs at the start of the pandemic, but that 11 per cent vacancy rate has now grown to 14.7 per cent as we meet here today. Things are getting worse: fewer nurses at the bedside.

How does the Premier (Mr. Pallister) plan to address the surgery backlog without first addressing the staffing shortage?

Mr. Goertzen: Not only \$750 million more invested than the NDP ever did, but, of course, we know, as confirmed by Theresa Oswald, that the challenges with nurses started under the NDP.

And what did that result in, Mr. Deputy Speaker? It was only a few years ago that Sharon Blady then said, well, there's no magic wand on the issue of trying to get patients from ambulances into hospital, because there was an average of 78 minutes wait to get a patient from an ambulance, once they arrived at the hospital, actually into the hospital.

More than an hour sitting in an ambulance after they'd been rushed to a hospital: that's the legacy of the NDP. It's not an Etch A Sketch where you just shake it and try to get your record to disappear, Sir. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The honourable Opposition Leader, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Kinew: Well, it's much longer than a 78-minute wait to try and find a PC who will face the facts that their cuts are causing damages to our health-care system. In fact, we're still waiting for a minister who would look at the FIPPA document that proves there are now 1,300 nursing positions vacant.

And it's not just that that's such a huge number that's impacting surgeries—10,000 Manitobans on that surgery wait-list, by the way—it's not just that that's leading to hallway medicine making a comeback in Manitoba, those stories of seniors waiting five days in a hallway. The issue is that it's getting worse day by day each day that the PCs are in office.

When will they admit that their plan for health care is a failure and that they have to start hiring nurses now?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of course we are hiring nurses to try to fix their mess. Of course,

Theresa Oswald acknowledged that this started under the NDP and there was negative impacts. Ambulances had to wait outside ERs in Winnipeg for more than an hour, and patients couldn't get into the hospitals.

And then, when they got into the hospitals, not only could they not find nurses, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but what did they do? They then sent the patients home, before they were ready, in a taxicab.

Now, I know the member opposite has some experience with taxicabs, but I will say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that one of the daughters of one of the people—of the mothers who got sent home in a taxicab before they were ready said, they just shoved her in a taxicab and sent her home.

So, the ambulances waited outside the hospital. There were no nurses inside. And then, when they wanted to get rid of them, they put them in a taxicab. That's the NDP record. They can't run away from it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a different question.

Churchill River Diversion Project Duty to Consult First Nations

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Why are there fewer nurses today in Manitoba than there was when they took office?

The Premier (Mr. Pallister) has a very important decision to make, upcoming, when it comes to the Churchill River Diversion Project and the final licence. Now, despite the ongoing environmental impacts and many impacts on surrounding communities, the Premier seems to have fallen short on his duty to consult with these affected First Nations communities.

Now, we know that the O-Pipon-Na-Piwin and Tataskweyak communities are those that have been amongst the most harmed, amongst other Cree communities in the North and Anishinabe communities in the Interlake. It's time that we all work to fix the impacts of the past so that we can ensure a bright future for Manitoba Hydro.

Will the Premier work with the communities impacted by the Churchill River Diversion Project to ensure that they have a meaningful say in its operations before issuing the final licence?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate): Our government continues to work with various stakeholders, including Indigenous communities, as we look for a cleaner and greener

province in this country. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will continue to engage with our stakeholders as we look at long-term economic growth within the province, as well.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Kinew: Indigenous nations are not stakeholders, they are rights holders.

When we're talking about the O-Pipon-Na-Piwin and the Tataskweyak Cree nations, not only are we talking about communities that hold rights in the territories where Hydro is carrying out their operations, they're also communities that have been impacted by developments over the course of the history of Manitoba Hydro's operations in our great province.

Now, we know that there is an inflection point coming up in which we could address some of these wrongs. And it's coming with the Churchill River Diversion Project and the Augmented Flow Program coming up for that final licence.

Now, consultation would help to address the concerns of the communities. They have a few specific asks, key among them is to have a meaningful say in the Churchill River Diversion Project.

Will the Premier (Mr. Pallister) ensure that they have that meaningful say on an ongoing basis prior to the final licence being issued?

* (14:10)

Mrs. Guillemard: I appreciate the question, and this has been an ongoing consultation process of over nine years. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will continue to consult, we will continue to listen and ultimately make what's in the best—decisions in the best interests of Manitobans, as we have done since we became government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Kinew: What is in the best interests of Manitobans is to ensure that the communities, the nations of O-Pipon-Na-Piwin, Tataskweyak and other Hydro-affected First Nations have a meaningful say in the operations of Hydro and the Churchill River Diversion.

Now, we know the impacts have been severe, impacts on culture. Unfortunately we saw cemeteries flooded in the past, huge impacts on the white fish fishery which made the communities around South Indian Lake self-sufficient since time 'immemorable'—time immemorial. There has been tremendous impacts.

What we're looking for today is a commitment to ensure that we turn a new page, that we *kwaysh-kin-na-mihk la paazh* [*turning the page*], as the Métis like to say, when we talk about turning the page. But what is required to get this started in earnest is a commitment from this government that they will ensure that those Hydro-affected communities have a meaningful say in the Churchill River Diversion before the final licence is granted.

Will the government comply?

Mrs. Guillemard: Every member who has submitted their feedback has have—had a meaningful say and contributed to this process. Manitoba has one of the most strict environmental assessment processes in the country. We will continue with our great record in holding our industries and all stakeholders accountable under that process and under the licensing agreement.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I look forward to later this year being a part of communicating even more details.

Thank you.

Manitoba's Workforce Paid Sick Leave

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): This morning, the Alberta government announced a paid, job-protected COVID-19 vaccination leave for all employees regardless of status. Paid, protected time off to get the vaccine reduces significant barriers preventing people from getting vaccinated as quickly as possible.

Despite the many calls that we've made to the Premier and his government to prioritize this, Manitoba is quickly falling behind other jurisdictions across Canada.

Will this government finally follow in the footsteps of Alberta, Saskatchewan and BC and implement a paid, protected vaccine leave for all Manitoba workers?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Our government won't have to follow the lead because we

did take the lead where our Premier from—Premier as well as an NDP premier pushed the federal government for a sick leave parameter program that's in place, that's been extended because of the extensive work that our Premier, as well as ministers—pushed both the federal Finance Minister as well as the Prime Minister to have a program in place to make sure people are supported during COVID.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The 'honorim' member for St. Johns, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Fontaine: And yet Manitoba is falling behind other jurisdictions.

Manitobans need more than just paid leave to get their shots. They need actual paid sick leave so they don't have to come to work if they're having symptoms of this illness. As the Premier's vaccine rollout continues to be pushed back and slowed down, we're in a third wave of COVID-19, coupled with new and dangerous variants, the financial impact is growing larger on many people living paycheque to paycheque. We know workplace transmission is occurring and we know that many low-income workers can't afford to take paid—time off if they get sick.

So will the Premier (Mr. Pallister) protect workers by providing permanent paid sick leave for all Manitobans?

Mr. Fielding: I can tell you that I've been in contact with numerous businesses or been contacted—with us. I can tell you that it's generally happening right now—a volunteer basis—where people are giving their employees time off.

People want to make sure that they're vaccinated. That's going to help not only their business; it's going to help the Manitoba economy reopen; that's important.

Our government has pushed the federal government for a sick leave program. We're going to continue to enhance our push to make sure there's an enhanced program. We know the longevity of the program has been extended a number of weeks because of the collective effort that our Premier, as well as the premier from BC, has taken. We're going to continue to push the federal government for enhanced programming.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a final supplementary question.

Ms. Fontaine: While the minister keeps passing the buck, we need a permanent rethink for how we deal

with illness in the workplace. COVID-19 has laid bare the disparities between working conditions for Manitobans. We need a permanent paid sick leave is—and that is very real.

Women, BIPOC Manitobans and low-wage workers are among the most impacted and are often those who do not have access to benefits that would allow them to stay home when they're sick without losing income.

The Premier has failed to protect vulnerable front-line workers with paid sick leave.

So will the Premier stand up today to protect Manitobans by announcing a comprehensive permanent paid sick leave infrastructure today for Manitobans?

Mr. Fielding: Our government has taken the lead. As mentioned, our Premier was the—one of the ones that pushed for the sick leave program at the federal level. That's really important.

Not only do we—are we talking about these things, we're actually doing these things, Mr. Speaker. We are the first province to pass legislation in terms of allowing people time off in terms of the sick leave parameters.

It's been raised before. There's been over 2,000 people that have been supported through the Workers Compensation Board. Up to 90 per cent of their incomes have been supported where people have been protected. And that's one of the first provinces—in fact, we were the first province to do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Northern Health Care Funding and Staffing

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Northern health care is in crisis. I've pleaded with multiple ministers of Health to address the serious loss of health professionals in northern Manitoba.

Yesterday's news confirms what we've been saying. Nearly one in every two nurse positions is sitting vacant in the northern region right now. That's not sustainable. It's pushing northern health care well past the breaking point.

Why has this government allowed the steady erosion of health care in northern Manitoba?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): Certainly, we are working to increase the capacity across the entire province in our health-

care system when it comes to nurses, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In fact, 20 new spaces have been created in the University College of the North's diploma in practical nursing program, which is now being offered for students in Thompson and Flin Flon. And I want to thank the minister responsible for Advanced Education for that great announcement that he made today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Lindsey: Cuts and closures are having a real impact on northern health care. Nearly one out of every two nurse positions is sitting vacant.

When health-care services are restricted, my constituents have to travel great distances, some taking flights, others 12 hours on a bus, in order to get their health needs met, and that's just plain wrong, and more so during the pandemic.

We need care closer to home that this government keeps promising but keeps failing to deliver.

Will the minister undo the damage, restore funding for northern health care today?

Mrs. Stefanson: Not only have we announced that—20 new spaces at the University College of the North's diploma in practical nursing program, but we're also working hand in hand with the Provincial Nominee Program to find individuals with professional nursing backgrounds.

We're providing assistance in navigating provincial regulatory registration processes. Thirty-seven registered nurses have recently completed the critical-care nursing orientation program, and all of them have been offered full-time permanent positions in Manitoba ICUs.

We're making progress, but we recognize there's still more work to be done.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Lindsey: I hear what the minister says about nurses being hired to fill ICUs. We have no ICUs in northern Manitoba.

You know, there's less care closer to home, less medical procedures due to underfunding, understaffing: day surgeries declined by 28 per cent from 2016 to last year; no doctor in Snow Lake; shut down Leaf Rapids Health Centre due to a nurse shortage.

Now, with COVID-19, reduced flight schedules from the North, more time has to be spent in the city; no increase in the amounts paid by northern patient transportation.

* (14:20)

Why has this government allowed the steady erosion of health care in northern Manitoba? Why do they hate northern Manitobans?

Mrs. Stefanson: Oh, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we love northern Manitobans.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Deputy—[*interjection*] I'll just sit down. [*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Minister of Health and Seniors Care.

Mrs. Stefanson: In fact, we love northern Manitoba so much that we have created those 20 new spaces at the University College of the North to train more nurses in northern Manitoba, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We won't go back to the dark days of the previous NDP government, where they shut down more than 17 hospitals in our rural and northern communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We'll continue to ensure that we provide better health care sooner, closer to home for all Manitobans, including those we love in northern Manitoba. [*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

COVID-19 Vaccine Priority Winnipeg Transit Staff

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Every single day, transit workers work in a space that's roughly a 150 square feet. And in that small space, hundreds or even thousands of people go through their vehicle on a daily basis. Transit drivers have no way to guarantee the folks who get on their buses are COVID-free, and we've seen many COVID-19 exposures listed on transit buses. Yet, those transit workers show up for work every single day to provide an essential service.

However, this government doesn't seem to think that those transit drivers should be prioritized for vaccination.

Will the minister do what's right today and include transit drivers in the vaccination priority list?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): The member opposite will know that,

of course, we take our advice from the medical leads at the Vaccine Implementation Task Force who are advancing the eligibility criteria each and every day to ensure that we protect those most vulnerable Manitobans.

So we'll continue to take the advice of the medical leads, not the members opposite.

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

Mr. Wiebe: We rely on transit workers to keep the wheels of our cities moving, everything from going to work, accessing health-care services, getting to the grocery store and everything in between. Yet, as more and more of us rely on transit, exposures are increasing, and transit workers tell us that the increase in COVID variants is a real concern.

This year alone, we've seen 70 confirmed public exposures to COVID-19 on Winnipeg buses, with 21 of them being linked to those variants of concern. And despite these increased risks, the minister continues to not prioritize those workers.

I ask again: Will the minister protect transit workers and those who ride the bus by including transit operators in the vaccine priority list?

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, the member opposite should know by now that we take our advice from the medical leads at the Vaccine Implementation Task Force.

And I just want to take this opportunity to thank them and all those who are working diligently to ensure that we can expedite the vaccines in the arms of Manitobans. We won't be satisfied until we get every eligible Manitobans vaccinated in the province of Manitoba.

But I want to thank them because they've made significant headway. In fact, even this week we've expanded the eligibility to 50 years of age or older and 30 years of age or older for First Nations. We've expanded the vaccine eligibility to include front-line police officers, firefighters and first responders. We've partnered with five urban Indigenous community organizations in Manitoba to create Indigenous—

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

The honourable member for Concordia, on a final supplemental question.

Mr. Wiebe: The minister will know that those medical leads are in fact telling her that, since the pandemic began, 15 Winnipeg Transit staff had self-

reported testing positive for the—COVID-19 to their union. And we know that the true numbers, of course, will be higher. But they continue—and so workers continue to interact every single day with hundreds and hundreds of people, and they are getting sick.

Our team raised this issue months ago and we wrote to this minister to ask to make transit workers a priority. Yet, two months later, no answer from this minister.

Will the minister change her mind, respect these workers, get them vaccinated now, yes or no?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, so much to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so little time to say it, because the medical leads of the Vaccine Implementation Task Force have been so busy, in fact, getting more Manitobans vaccinated and more Manitobans eligible for vaccination.

So I will continue, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We've worked with our Indigenous community organizations to further partner with them to get vaccines out in those communities. We've partnered with North Dakota to ensure that 4,000 essential truck drivers for the province of Manitoba are also prioritized. We've expanded the criteria for the AstraZeneca vaccine to all Manitobans over the age of 40.

I want to thank the incredible work of the Vaccine Implementation Task Force, the medical leads who make these very important and very tough decisions based on—

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

Churchill River Diversion Project Duty to Consult First Nations

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): We understand that a final licence decision for the Churchill River Diversion is imminent. The Province has an obligation to meaningfully consult with O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation and Tataskeyak Cree Nation before making this decision.

This is so important. Hydro is incredibly important to this province, but the concerns of Hydro-impacted First Nations cannot be ignored.

Will the minister ensure that communities impacted by the Churchill River Diversion Project are truly and meaningfully consulted before making a final licence decision?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Crown Services): Certainly, on this side of the House, we take a whole-

of-government approach when it comes to consultation, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's exactly what we're doing with the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations (Ms. Clarke), the Minister of Conservation and Climate (Mrs. Guillemard), and in concert with Hydro and Crown Services, we're going to make sure that consultation continues, unlike the members opposite.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. James, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Sala: We know how important Hydro projects are, but we recognize the harms that were done in the past.

The final licence process is an opportunity for a new approach. Those greatly impacted by the Churchill River Diversion and the Augmented Flow Program must be adequately consulted.

When will the minister consult with impacted First Nations to ensure a fair and equitable decision for all?

Mr. Wharton: The member brings up the past. Let's talk about the past when it comes to Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know under the NDP what happened. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wharton: The NDP tripled the debt of Manitoba Hydro.

As a matter of fact, during the Keeyask-bipole process, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they bypassed the PUB. They went all the way around the PUB.

We'll ensure that Manitoba's Crown jewel, Manitoba Hydro, owned by Manitobans, will continue to be the Crown jewel under our government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. James, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Sala: I find it embarrassing that the government cannot just simply commit to sitting down with First Nations to discuss this important issue.

The Churchill River Diversion was licensed on an interim basis, as was an Augmented Flow Program. It's had a real and lasting impact on First Nations in northern Manitoba.

A final licence decision is an opportunity to meaningfully engage with communities. We're deeply concerned that this government hasn't done that.

Will the Pallister government conduct public and transparent consultation with the impacted communities before making such a large decision, yes or no?

Mr. Wharton: Of course, our government is very proud of the reconciliation and communication and negotiations that we have with our First Nations partners, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As a matter of fact, the 17 years the NDP were in government—[*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wharton: Let's talk a little bit about Freedom Road. Mr. Deputy Speaker, under the NDP, not an inch, not a foot, not a mile was built under them.

* (14:30)

We are consulting with our First Nations. We built Freedom Road. We will continue to consult with First Nations. Unlike the NDP, we'll get it right.

Manitoba's Workforce Paid Sick Leave

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Manitoba Liberals are certainly glad the NDP have come around to our view that Manitoba needs better sick leave protections for Manitoba workers. Since six months ago, when the PCs tried to rush through completely inadequate legislation in just three and a half hours, we stood alone asking for more sick days, no sick notes and for the provincial government to actually put in some money.

Canadian courts have recognized that labour is presumed to be a provincial responsibility and that the federal government only gets involved in exceptional cases. That's why we have a provincial minimum wage, why we have provincial labour laws, why we have a provincial Workers Compensation Board.

Is this government going to honour its legal obligation with better sick leave for workers, or is the Premier (Mr. Pallister) once again going to ask everyone else to do his job and cover his bills?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Our government is very proud of the initiative that we've taken with the sick leave program. That sick leave program probably wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for our Premier, as well as the NDP Premier of BC, to push this initiative. We think these programs that are important.

We're going to continue to push the federal government to have an—not just in terms of the

duration, but in terms of the amount that people are supported from. That's something that we'll continue to push. I know I pushed it at the federal finance ministers' table—we have our weekly meetings—as well as the Premier pushes with the Prime Minister every time he gets on the phone call with the Prime Minister. [*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

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

Mr. Lamont: The government can hardly deny that labour is almost entirely a provincial responsibility because so much of their legislative agenda is dedicated to lay-offs, cuts, breaking unions and stripping people of their constitutional right to bargain for the value of their work.

In October, we were the only people standing up to say that the PCs' bill wasn't good enough, and we held it up asking for improvement for Manitoba workers. Manitoba workers need better paid sick leave, and the provincial government should be the first to provide it.

Why does this government only think labour is a provincial responsibility when they're taking rights away from workers?

Mr. Fielding: We're glad we can have consensus with the Liberal members. We want to push the federal government to have an enhanced sick leave program. We think that's extremely important, that's why we pushed—we were one of the first in the nation to push for such a program.

In fact, we pushed it so hard, Mr. Deputy Speaker—beyond words, we put it into legislation. We are the first province to have legislation that was introduced in our Legislature before any other in the whole country of Canada.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a final supplementary question.

COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Long-Haul Truck Drivers

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): It's typical that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is taking credit for vaccines being paid and administered by the American government for long-haul truck drivers driving south, yet all of our long-haul truck drivers driving east into Ontario, west into Alberta are still not eligible.

The bottom line is, Mr. Speaker, with the tens of thousands of vaccines that are available but not being administered, will the Premier show compassion and make it clear that all long-haul truck drivers will now be eligible?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Deputy Premier): Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it takes some nerve, even sitting in your home, to launch this kind of a question. The scarcity of vaccines that Canada is experiencing is a direct result of the federal Liberal government not being prepared for this pandemic when others saw that we needed these vaccines much earlier.

But we have a Premier and a government that has vision, vision to work with an NDP Premier in British Columbia to try to get supports, vision to work with the Republican governor in North Dakota to try to get vaccines for Manitobans.

We will work with anybody to try to improve the lot of Manitobans during this pandemic. We'll even work with the Liberals if they would stand up and work with us and just not play partisan politics all the time, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Perimeter Highway Funding for Upgrades

Mr. Scott Johnston (Assiniboia): Earlier this week, the Minister of Infrastructure announced the construction of road-rock road—Rockall Road, I'm sorry, a \$2.5-million service road off the Perimeter Highway within the RM of Headingley.

Can this hard-working minister update the House on this exciting news and share how our government is improving safety on our Perimeter Highway?
[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure): Well, first of all, thank you very much to the member for Assiniboine for that fantastic question.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) for that great budget that he brought forward—\$1.5 billion for Infrastructure over three years. And part of that is going to go in support of our mission to update the Perimeter Highway to freeway status.

We have provided a one-time grant of up to \$2.5 million to construct Rockall Road. This will be a municipally owned service road required to facilitate the urgent closure of the direct access onto the South Perimeter Highway.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say that our government is going to ensure that we develop the Perimeter Highway in a safe and sustainable way, because safety is our government's No. 1 priority.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Targets for Manitoba

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): The Pallister government is the only provincial government without real greenhouse gas reduction targets. It's a national embarrassment.

The federal government today pledged reductions up to 45 per cent under 2005 levels by 2030. The United States pledged 50 per cent.

Manitoba's approach is tinkering around the edges while the world burns, and it's long past time for substantial action.

Will the Pallister government honour Earth Day by putting forward a real plan with real targets to reduce emissions?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate): I appreciate any questions that surround our Climate and Green Plan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, setting targets are very important, but more important are reaching those targets. And our Climate and Green Plan has set realistic targets that are achievable, attainable, and we are already getting results.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Wolseley, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Naylor: I really want to employ—implore the minister: this issue is dire. This is not a time to set the bar so low so that you can reach it. You—the minister would find co-operation from this side of the House if she took charge of this file and pursued this matter seriously, but that means real targets, a real plan and real investments.

There are no real targets. There's a plan written by a previous campaign manager and very limited investment. The Pallister government is fighting a rising carbon price in court. They're now offside with even their own federal party.

Will the minister support real targets for Manitoba in line with what Canada and the United States announced today?

Mrs. Guillemard: I find it almost laughable that the member opposite is talking about low bars. The—under the NDP government, the OAG reported that their 2008 and 2015 plan did not set realistic targets. In fact, to quote, the Province conducted no economic or scientific analyses in setting the 2008 and 2015 targets.

We will take no lessons from a tired, old, non-plan-filled NDP party.

Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Wolseley, on a final supplementary question.

Ms. Naylor: The Pallister government is offside with every province in Canada, and all this minister can do is compare this government to a government that—from—you know, she's talking about 2008. What are you even talking about? Have you noticed what's happened with the environment and climate in the last 13 years?

This government's had five years to work on this file. They have no real targets for reducing greenhouse gasses. They're in a losing legal fight arguing that they can fiddle with the timing of a carbon price. Their arguments never made sense, and less so now, now that every major party in Ottawa is proposing a rising carbon price, even federal Conservatives.

* (14:40)

The Pallister government can't stall any longer—

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

Mrs. Guillemard: Just to help the member out, the previous NDP government was in power until 2015. All of our departments have been cleaning up a mess ever since. And we are determined, and we will be reaching our emissions reductions target. It's not enough just to speak about caring about the environment, which the previous government was very good at doing. You must also act to preserve it.

The NDP have all of the right words but they have zero actions or results to back up those words. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will do better because we can do better.

Wage Freeze at MPI Appointment of Conciliator

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): Just a few weeks after this government forced MPI into costly deals with insurance brokers, they also implemented a two-

year wage freeze on MPI workers. It is clear that the average Manitoban isn't who this government is looking out for.

Will the minister stop interfering at MPI? Will he once again be appointing a conciliator?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Crown Services): Again, I've mentioned many times and—actually, I've met with the member from The Maples on a number of occasions and have the utmost respect for him. And he understands, he knows that he—we as government should not get involved in negotiations between parties, especially with our Crown corporations.

I know that he appreciates the process like we do, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's exactly what's going to continue on during the negotiations. And we're going to keep nose in, fingers out on all Crown services as we go forward.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for The Pas-Kameesak, do you have a petition?

Public Child-Care Grants

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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) When child-care centres have faced increased costs associated with the 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 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.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this petition has been signed by many, many fine Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In accordance with rule 133-6, when petitions are read they must be deemed to be received by the House.

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, and residents now have to travel to different locations to get their testing done, even for a simple blood test or urine sample.

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

(5) COVID-19 emergency rules have resulted in long outdoor lineups, putting vulnerable residents at

further risk in extreme weather, 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 Dynacare maintain all of 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 Manitobans.

Dauphin Correctional Centre

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government plans to close the Dauphin Correctional Centre, DCC, in May 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 the DCC and proceed with the previous plan to build a new correctional and healing centre with an expanded courthouse in Dauphin.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

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

The background to 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 the 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.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there any further petitions? Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Mr. Deputy Speaker, could you please call for second reading, Bill 71, The Education Property Tax Reduction Act, property tax and insulation assistance act and income tax amended—act amended and, following that, Bill 40, The Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation Amendment and Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been 'mannounced' by the honourable Government House Leader that—to bring Bill 71 on debate for—Bill 71, The Education Property Tax Reduction Act, the property tax insulation assistance act the and income tax amended, and then also requested to have Bill 40, and No. 40—Bill 40. Is it the pleasure of the House to bring these bills forward? *[interjection]* Pardon me.

* (14:50)

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 71—The Education Property Tax Reduction Act (Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act and Income Tax Act Amended)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We'll go into debate on Bill 71 for the—the honourable member for Point Douglas has 14 minutes remaining.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Well, let me be clear. Bill 71 attacks Manitoba's most vulnerable, those most in need, while shoring up the bank accounts of the richest people in this province.

Today, Manitoba renters get a \$700 tax credit—not anymore if Bill 71 receives royal assent. Deputy Speaker, this bill reduces the \$700 tax credit Manitoba renters get by 25 per cent every year until it's ultimately phased out completely. These renters rely on this extra money when they're figuring out their finances when tax time comes.

Now, Deputy Speaker, this government knows what its doing. As I've already said, if they wanted to help out low-income Manitobans they can easily do it in a lot of ways. That said, if you had to pick one avenue to take in helping low-income Manitobans, rent is a good way to go. Any regular Manitoban who doesn't live in a mansion can tell you renters need help the most.

Rent is skyrocketing in our province under this—under the watch of this Pallister government. Renters are the people who have been hit the hardest in this pandemic. People who rent rather than own their homes are more likely to be seniors, racialized people, women, LGBTTTQ2S, young Manitobans, students and people with disabilities. These are the people who need economic support from this government the most, not those who own homes—two, three, four homes that are going to get multiple rebates from this government that don't really need this extra support, especially during a pandemic.

This pandemic has not affected everyone equally. If somebody was financially stable enough to own their own home and have some savings to fall back on after getting laid off, things weren't as bad as they could have been. They could simply stay inside, order food to their home and spend time with their family. That expense—or that experience of basic safety and well-being through a pandemic is something that not every Manitoban has been able to experience.

Instead, the unemployment rate for young people has increased dramatically. Homelessness and poverty have been on the rise in this province under this Pallister government's watch. Racialized and newcomer Manitoban [*inaudible*] working precarious jobs and they have been hit hard, Deputy Speaker.

What this government offered to these people, what have they offered? Not a whole lot, when they should have been supporting Manitobans financially. And what better services? They were doing the exact opposite. They are proposing tax breaks for the rich while Manitobans are still in the dark ages when it comes to mental health funding.

The most liberal estimates would still put the funding rates for mental health in this province at a percentage of the total health-care budget below 6 per cent. Deputy Speaker, you won't find an expert anywhere who can tell you that number should be below 9 per cent, and that's the bare minimum.

And what does Bill 71 do for them? Absolutely nothing. This government axed the funding for the Seneca Warm Line, a non-profit mental health support. That was a program that the numbers show with more than twice—that was more than twice effective and exponentially cheaper than the government's big business sweetheart deal with Morneau and Shepell.

And does Bill 71 do anything for this mental health support? Absolutely nothing.

Not to mention the fact that the Seneca Warm Line provided employment to Manitobans, not people from out of province, Deputy Speaker, Manitobans—Manitobans who care about their neighbours, want to help them and know the province will do well enough to do—and know the province well enough to do that better—and know the province better than anybody else from out of province possibly could.

And yet, Deputy Speaker, what did this Premier (Mr. Pallister) decide, that offsetting the wealth tax for rich landlords instead of giving Seneca Warm Line 113,000 that helped over 12,000 Manitobans—12,000 Manitobans with mental health issues while this pandemic is going on. And this, you know, Premier, decides to help wealthy landlords and big real estate companies, and he felt that that was something more important than helping Manitobans with their mental health issues.

The Premier is so cheap when it comes to things that actually matter to Manitobans, so cheap that he decided to make—decided that it makes sense, in a deadly pandemic, to only vaccinate Manitobans six

days a week. Deputy Speaker, Manitobans care about getting vaccinated. Manitobans care about their loved ones getting vaccinated. And here you have a Premier who can't even vaccinate people seven days a week.

Meanwhile, we've heard from concerned family members of patients at Selkirk Mental Health that they're only getting brief 10-minute breaks from the building every day. Why are these patients, who are living in a high-density health facility, not getting vaccinated? Why are they making them wait and allowing their mental health to suffer?

And this Premier brings forward Bill 71? These are what families care about. They want to ensure that mental—the mental health of Manitobans is at the forefront, that resources are being put towards helping people during this pandemic, that people are getting vaccinated in timely—a timely manner, that there's enough nurses in this province to make sure that every patient is getting care at the bed that they should get.

Deputy Speaker, we heard about a 93-year-old. This bill does nothing to help that 93-year-old get out of the hallway of Grace Hospital. Instead, this Premier thinks that giving, you know, wealthy Manitobans tax breaks is the way to go. There's so many ways that this government and the Premier could help Manitobans, yet still the Premier sits in the House, you know, pushing a bill that would take money off of the kitchen table of renters—that's even if they have a kitchen table left, Deputy Speaker. And yet, they have the audacity to say the opposite, that they're putting money on kitchen tables.

Well, they're not putting money on kitchen tables where it matters the most, and that's those that are struggling, those that have lost their jobs, those that are, you know, struggling to keep the house that they're living in, struggling to pay their rent every month, to keep their lights on, to put food on the table, to keep their kids in daycare. And this government, you know, brings forward a bill that does not help them.

Mr. Dennis Smook, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

The reality, Deputy Speaker, is much different. It's clear who this bill is meant to help. The Premier got more in common with landlords than they have in common with renters. That may be why they've engineered this bill to give wealthy Manitobans who own multiple properties an enormous break. I'm talking about tax breaks for those who need them the least, while those who need them the most are being left out in the cold with this—with Bill 71.

This bill gives handouts to the rich by repealing—repeating the same 25 per cent rebate for their second property and third property and fourth property. You know, there's no limits, Deputy Speaker. If someone owns an apartment block, you know, what is their rebate going to be? Astronomical, versus someone who is going to be getting less—25 per cent less come income tax that banks on that money, you know, to help maybe pay—to buy that kitchen table.

I know when I was growing up that, you know, income tax was huge for our family because we knew we were getting some extra funds, and those funds were used to, you know, buy us new beds or put some new clothes on our backs, and I know Manitobans struggle with that even today. And this is this government's priority, to give wealthy Manitobans a tax break instead of helping those that actually need it? You know, I say to this government that they need to go back and actually start listening to Manitobans.

Based on the government's own reporting numbers on this bill—and I want to be—and I want this to be very clear: according to the government's own numbers, the average homeowner in this province gets \$385. What the government didn't include is that most of that money is going to be eaten up by the Premier's increase to hydro rates.

* (15:00)

Well, we know that just before Christmas, in December, that this government raised hydro rates by 2.9 per cent—2.9 per cent during a pandemic, during a time when Manitobans were struggling, when Manitobans were losing their jobs, when Manitobans were losing their houses, their suites, you know, when they were getting kicked out of—because they couldn't pay rent. And this is this government's priority?

Why not start helping the average Manitoban that actually needs the support, that doesn't own property in this province, instead of taking money off of their kitchen tables?

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's also worth considering how much Manitobans are losing out to this government's cuts. It's harder to put a dollar value on that per person, but I think if you ask the average Manitoban if they'd rather have three more emergency rooms and more nurses during this pandemic or a glorified campaign leaflet with a few dollars taped to it, they'd probably pick the former. And like I said, Manitobans want their services and this government has continued to erode them.

As we've heard, there was 3,000 less nurses. The Premier bragged about hiring back 1,700 of those nurses. Well, if you do the math, Deputy Speaker, that's still 1,300 less nurses at the bedside helping Manitobans. And this government wants to boast about 1,300 less nurses at the bedside helping Manitobans? Shame.

The Premier earned a lot of money as a businessman. Apparently, that makes him better than the average Manitoban, because we know that this Premier is getting a \$7,000 cheque right from the people of Manitoba, with his own signature on it.

Bill 71 makes no sense to me. Why would an average Manitoban who has been laid off from work and, you know, off and on for months because of this government's mismanagement of the pandemic, not deserve that same \$7,000? Why? Why would the average Manitoban who's been offered precarious little or precious little by this government and, in some cases, have not had or have even had benefits clawed back, not need \$7,000, Deputy Speaker?

And I think about all the Manitobans, you know, from Bill 71, that aren't going to be benefiting; they aren't going to be getting any rebates, people that are on EIA that have been cut off. You know, there's so many Manitobans that are struggling, and Bill 71 does nothing to help them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$7,000, you know, to the Premier (Mr. Pallister) that—that that could go to Manitobans in need. And to put this all into perspective, the government could have sent a cheque to students—students who have seen their tuition under this government continue to skyrocket.

It's put education out of the reach of students in the province and I think of, you know, First Nations students who used to have access to bursaries in this province and will now, under this government, don't have access to any bursaries or have access to very limited amount of money, in terms of going to school. And if we want to talk about equality and levelling the playing field here, Deputy Speaker, where's their rebate? How is Bill 71 helping them?

This government just continues to, you know, help the wealthy and leave those that are struggling left behind. So if this government wants support for Bill 71, they need to ensure fair taxation and quit leaving out the most vulnerable Manitobans, like our small businesses, our small businesses who rent their space. They're not going to be getting a rebate cheque because they don't own the space that they rent.

How is that helping them, many who have had to close their doors under this government? And this government boasts about having the most generous, you know, plan to help Manitobans.

Well, I can tell you, the Manitobans that we're speaking to, that are reaching out to us, and there is a lot of them, do not support what this government's plan has been.

Miigwech.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Bill 71 will reduce education property tax for homeowners and for those who own commercial property, or perhaps, more accurately, will give rebates to such property owners, which, in the case of residential homeowners, are 25 per cent of their property tax.

In order to do this, the government is borrowing about \$250 million to give property owners a tax break. While it's always nice for people to get a tax break, there are a number of important questions we need to ask. First, we need to ask: Is it smart to reduce taxes in this way at a time when the government has a large deficit and a large debt?

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) says that this year the government will run a deficit of more than \$2 billion. We have to take the minister at his word, because he provided a list of the expected government expenses but failed to provide a list of the expected government revenue.

We also know from the Minister of Finance that it's expected that Bill 71 will cost the government \$248 million. However, this is not the total cost because this number doesn't include some of the costs involved; for example, the more than \$1 million that it will take to deliver personal letters from the Premier with the rebate cheques.

We also know that the Minister of Finance expects to take eight years to balance the budget. We have not been provided any estimate of the extra interest costs that need to be included during this period as costs for borrowing this money, which is to provide rebates to property owners.

The government can only start paying the money borrowed back, which would cover the cost of this tax reduction, when it has balanced the budget, because until that time, it will be going further into debt. Thus, the total cost of the tax reduction is likely to be many additional millions of dollars.

For example, if the interest rate paid were 2 per cent, the cumulative cost of this year's initiative alone would be close to \$300 million in eight years. If the interest paid was 5 per cent, then the cumulative cost of this year's initiative would be close to \$400 million after eight years.

These costs do not include the cost of the planned reduction next year by an additional 25 per cent, which would add significantly more dollars and more cost in terms of interest payments. Thus, the cost of the interest on this borrowed money is likely between \$50 million and \$150 million, depending on the interest rate to be paid. We need to assess bill 72 in terms of the total cost to Manitobans, not just the immediate cost.

Second, we must ask: Is this a wise use of public money to give property owners a cheque using borrowed money at this time? When a government borrows money, it should be used either to address a crisis, as we are doing in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, or it should be used to put in place lasting infrastructure capital expenditures. Or it should be used in programs which will provide a substantial return on investment for the government and for the people of Manitoba. Thus, borrowing items—money to spend on items which will provide a large and long-term return on investment—can be justified.

To this point, as to what the return on investment for the Province and the government will be from this government's expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars, the government has provided no analysis whatsoever. We would have expected any responsible government which plans to use borrowed money for an effort like this to have provided a substantive analysis on the return on investment. It is very disappointing that the government has not done so.

If, for example, a person who gets a property tax break—for example, the Premier (Mr. Pallister)—uses the money to spend a lot of time in Costa Rica, for example, the money spent by the government will have little benefit to the people of Manitoba, as the money saved will be spent in Costa Rica and benefit people and employment and government revenues in Costa Rica.

I'm not going to argue that the Premier shouldn't help the people of Costa Rica. They are no doubt deserving of his help, but these expenditures are clearly not a benefit to employment and to people in Manitoba.

Similarly, providing property tax reductions for people who live outside of Manitoba but own property in Manitoba will likely not have a significant return on investment to Manitoba, as the money will likely be spent elsewhere.

* (15:10)

Now, the government has provided no analysis whatsoever as to whether individuals who are wealthy are likely to spend their money in ways that will benefit people in employment in Manitoba. So we don't know the answer to whether this is good use of borrowed money by the government. They have apparently done no surveys, no research as to how people who are well off will spend their money if they're given extra money.

It is to be hoped that the government will provide this analysis before the bill comes to a vote, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is very important information, which should be available before MLAs have to vote on this bill.

Third, we need to ask: Is this expenditure of hundreds of millions of borrowed dollars by the government fair to all Manitobans? From the government's analysis, fewer than half of Manitobans are property owners who will see a direct benefit from the property tax.

The government says about 650,000 property owners will be better off. This means, with our 2021 population estimated at 1.3 million, that 700,000 Manitobans will not benefit in any way. It is reasonable to ask whether it is fair to borrow hundreds of millions of dollars to spend for the benefit of less than half of all Manitobans.

The government has argued that renters may have some benefit from a rent freeze for two years. However, this is debatable, and there are other concerns with the way the government has analyzed this and made this assessment.

There are many ways property owners have found to get around rent freezes. This claim may turn out to be false for many who are renters. This is a major concern for all sorts of reasons, including the fact that many renters are less well off, many renters are on fixed income. And so this could be very detrimental and be very harmful for many renters.

The money, of course, saved by landlords may go to their pockets rather than benefiting their renters. Only time will tell. But the government of—should have provided a much better analysis of this and done

much better in the way of helping those who are renters, as well as those who are property owners.

In this 'context', it's important to ask what will be the secondary impacts of the property tax reduction downstream. Now, one impact of a property tax reduction is likely to be an increase in the price of property. I'm told that this has been very well established by economists.

Thus, we can likely expect property prices to rise following the reduction in property tax. This will have all sorts of implications and may have some detrimental implications in terms of property tax that some people on low income may have to pay. I will take you through this in a moment.

We need to ask, as part of this process, whether the bill we are considering to reduce property taxes is a good way to reduce poverty in our province. Property owners, with some limited exceptions, are individuals who are sufficiently wealthy to own property. This will not have a direct effect to alleviate poverty, because very few of the 650,000 property owners are poor.

There could potentially be spinoffs. Those who benefit from this bill might decide to donate more to charitable organizations to address poverty. But the government has provided no evidence whatsoever that this will occur or is even likely, and nor have they even suggested that they will check whether the government-borrowed money provided to property owners leads to an increase in charitable donations to help those in poverty. For the 'moment,' we can assume that at the extent that this might occur, it's probably going to be marginal and not have much of an effect on those in poverty.

It is of interest that individuals who own a home and who have a low income may receive no benefit from the Pallister property tax reductions or may surprisingly even have to pay more in property tax.

Let me take you through a potential example. Let us take the example of Joe Doe [*phonetic*] and calculate the property tax he will pay now and after the Pallister-style education tax reduction. In 2020, Joe Doe [*phonetic*], on his house had an education property tax bill of \$700. Because he received the resident \$700 homeowner Education Property Tax Credit, he paid no education property tax in 2020.

In 2021, as a result of the cut in education property tax, or what is, as I've said, really an education tax rebate, property values are going to rise. As a result of this rise in property values in 2021, his bill for his

education property tax is now \$750 instead of \$700. This year, 2021, his Education Property Tax Credit is reduced to \$525. Because he will get a rebate of \$175 and a cheque from the Premier (Mr. Pallister), he will have a total of \$700 in benefits.

But this year, he will now have to pay \$50 in education property tax. In other words, his property tax has gone up instead of down as a result of this bill.

All the indications are that this is a bad bill for lots of people. And while it may benefit those who are well to do, it will have, from what we can see at this point, an adverse impact on many, many people in Manitoba.

The resulting situation where an individual like Joe Doe [*phonetic*] can be paying more property tax after the tax reduction than before is the result of the mish mash of changes in the Pallister-style education tax reduction.

While tax experts will no doubt make more analyses, what is clear is that those property owners who have a low income will receive much less in benefit than those who have large incomes. The tax is anything but progressive. It is very—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): I'd like to remind the member, when referring to members in the speech he should be referring to them by their title or their constituency.

Thank you.

Mr. Gerrard: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, I had meant to say the Pallister government-style education tax reduction.

The tax is anything but progressive. It is thus very likely to increase inequalities and increase the relative extent of poverty in our province.

Is this property tax cut the best way to generate economic activity in Manitoba? We have no analysis from the government to suggest this.

Is this property tax the best way to help children who are struggling at school? Again, the government has provided no analysis of the impact of the cut on children's learning.

Are there alternative ways the borrowed money could be spent to help people in poverty and to get a very substantial short- and long-term return on investment? There are quite a number of ways in which the government could spend, which would provide very substantial returns on investment and where using borrowed money might be justifiable

based on these major returns on the investment being made.

Outside the Legislature, on a number of days, including yesterday, was a group of individuals, primarily with type 1 diabetes, who were arguing and making the case for the government funding of continuous glucose monitors for people of all ages.

The government has increased the availability or the public funding of such monitors up to the age of 25. This may help, from what we can gather, about 50 people. But what really needs to be done is to cover all ages.

Now, many people in front of the Legislature have come and they have done their homework and they have given evidence, including sources, on which they show that there would be a large return on the investment of supporting all those who have type 1 diabetes to get continuous glucose monitors and insulin pumps. Here's an example of an investment that could be quite reasonably made to save money.

* (15:20)

Preventing diabetes is another option, particularly for type 2 diabetes, where we know that there are major potential for reducing and preventing type 2 diabetes. Indeed, 20 years ago, in talking with a physician who is an expert in this area, he pointed out that if the government wanted to have a sustainable health-care system, one of the things that was needed was to act to prevent diabetes instead of primarily acting to provide more and more dialysis to treat it, because it wasn't being prevented.

Now, there was very little NDP action on this, and there's been no PC action on this. And such action could be saving hundreds of millions of dollars. It's another example where there could be significant savings from an investment. But in the case of this bill, you know, borrowing money to give people a rebate on their property tax, there's no evidence that it will provide that sort of return on investment.

We know that in child care and early childhood education there's many studies which show that the return on investment can be sevenfold. For each dollar invested, there can be a return of \$7.

Here's another example where expenditure could be quite reasonable using borrowed money because of the major and substantial return on investment, 'preparing'—preparing for and preventing crises. We need to ask, you know, did the government actively prepare for the COVID-19 pandemic?

In all the planning around the government's changes, starting in 2016, I don't remember anywhere where the government planned to have the surge capacity needed for the COVID pandemic. The result has been major shortage of health-care workers, compared to what has been needed.

And today, as we all know, we have a severe shortage of nurses and other health-care workers, because of the lack of adequate foresight and planning by the government for the surge, which we have seen in the need for health care during the COVID-19 pandemic. To add to this, the government failed to ensure in the years 2006 to 2019 that the funding for public health was robust enough to have adequate preparation for this pandemic.

Another area where expenditures might be justifiable using borrowed money and might have major returns on investment would be in preventing and mitigating climate change. We have a global crisis looming, resulting from the increase in global temperatures, and yet this government has brought in a budget with a lot of infrastructure spending, that very little of which will make any significant impact to reduce climate change.

Basic research—basic scientific research can have very large returns on investment. Take an example, the research of Dr. Kati Kariko. This research on mRNA laid the groundwork for the mRNA vaccines, which has been so important for the development of vaccines against the corona virus, SARS-CoV-2, which has increased and caused the COVID-19 pandemic. It's to be mentioned that the funding that she received she struggled for on many, many occasions. And, certainly, it's an example of where government support can make an early difference by supporting scientific research.

Another example would be helping individuals with disabilities. We all know that invention of the telephone resulted from a person, Alexander Graham Bell, trying to help an individual with a hearing difficulty.

There are countless other examples, of major examples, resulting from work to help those with a disabilities. Individuals with learning disabilities are an example. Our education system should be able to learn better to help those with learning disabilities. And this could make a big difference. And in learning, we can have a better education system instead of what the government is trying to do which is to change the overview, get rid of school boards, make them scapegoats and get rid of some of the attention which has

been so valuable from school boards to help individuals who are struggling.

I have brought up recently the potential for benefits from investing to eliminate lead water pipes and reduce the lead exposure of children. President Biden wisely recently announced a major investment in infrastructure which will replace all the lead water pipes in the United States and reduce lead exposure and lead poisoning of children.

Newark, New Jersey, is an example of a city that's acted. It is now almost replaced its thousands of lead water pipes. Regina in Saskatchewan has announced that its goal is to replace all lead water pipes by 2025. But Manitoba is missing in action.

So there are many ways—and I will mention a couple of others. Investment and major issues related to addiction and mental health if properly done would have a major beneficial income—impact. One could even look at minimum basic income, because money given to provide a minimum basic income will likely all be spent in Manitoba, will help the Manitoba economy instead of being spent in Costa Rica.

And providing that minimum basic income will help some, as has been shown in Dauphin, get better education, it will 'selp' others so that they have less mental 'stretch' that are more healthy. So it could be an example of a very beneficial financial investment that would give a substantial return on investment.

Before I wind up, I want to make a brief comment on the fact that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) and other members of his government say they haven't raised taxes. But, of course, we have a bill before the Legislature at the moment, Bill 5, which puts a new tax on the sale of cannabis. The government has called it a social responsibility fee but has given not any evidence that it will do the studies needed to provide the knowledge and basis for understanding the net harm and the net benefits from cannabis, and it's unsure that the money raised will actually address this—issues arising for cannabis use.

This so-called responsibility fee is a tax, and the government shouldn't try and cover this up. The government needs to be forthright with people in Manitoba instead of using words to try to cover up what they're really doing.

So the honest assessment of this tax reduction—property tax reduction is that there's no evidence that this is a wise use of borrowed money. There's no evidence that this will address poverty or help any of the social issues that we have in Manitoba. There's no

evidence at this juncture that it will provide economic benefit to all Manitobans and increase economic growth, or that it will benefit climate change.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the bottom line is that, you know, the government should have done more homework on this, they should have provided much better analysis of what's going to happen with this rebate. But so far as we can see at the moment and so far as we can judge right now, this doesn't appear to be a very good decision by this government. It appears to be more moded by—motivated by trying to win votes rather than do things which are sensible and benefit Manitobans.

So with this comments I await the presentations at the committee, and we will see what happens with the next steps, whether the government will decide to make some major revisions or whether they want to continue to pursue an avenue which doesn't appear to be optimal for Manitoba.

Thank you.

* (15:30)

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I just ran in from doing media on Bill 71, so I'm trying to get all my notes here and prepare to rivet the House. I'm sure that everybody's going to be listening and just with so much engagement to my presentation.

Before I begin on Bill 71, I do just want to take a quick moment—and I know that everybody in the House feels the same, but I don't think we've done it this week. I just want to acknowledge our clerks and everybody that is working behind the scenes for, you know, all of the, you know, online virtual stuff that's going on.

For Manitobans that may or may not be aware, we've spent the last two weeks—two and a half weeks, doing standing committee meetings that start typically from 6 p.m. and can go anywhere until—I think this last week or this week it was, like, midnight, 12:45, something like that. And so there's a lot of infrastructure; there's a lot of people that allows that work to go on, and allows MLAs to come into the committee room and everything is done and all the infrastructure is in place.

And so I just want to just take a moment to say miigwech for all of that hard work. You know, that's time away from families and from walking our dogs and whatever we need to do. So I just want to say miigwech to everybody that allows us to be the best

that we can be in this Chamber and serve the constituents that elected us. So thank you for that.

You know, Bill 71: I know that our members have put a lot of words on the record in respect to Bill 71. And as most people know, I—typically, I'll post my videos. I post my videos because, obviously, Deputy Speaker, not everybody watches the livestreaming of what occurs in this building, in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly.

Often, you know, it's kind of like a bubble in here, you know, what—you know, things that are going on in here. We know what's going on; we get riled up about what's going on; we're concerned about what's going on. But often, you know, these things, you know, the public don't necessarily know what's going on.

And to be fair, you know, I was—as most people know, I was hired by the Indigenous committee—Indigenous issues committee of Cabinet, back in November of 2010 as the special advisor on Indigenous women's issues. So I've actually been physically in the building since 2010. And to be fair, I wasn't entirely sure what went on in this Chamber either. I mean, typically, I would suggest that you find out what goes on in this Chamber once you're actually in this Chamber. And so, you know, folks know that I post my videos and I post them to be able to share with the public what's going on in this Chamber, what's going on in respect of what the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and every single one of his PC caucus are allowing to go through in respect of legislation.

And so for the purposes of that, it's—you know, we operate on a calendar here in the Legislative Assembly, which means that, let's say the government bills that they—the legislative agenda that they want to see receive royal assent, they have to introduce those bills within a particular time frame in order for those bills to be guaranteed passage, in order for those bills to receive royal assent and so that they become law.

Bill 71 was not introduced within that deadline, so Bill 71 is a bill that is not guaranteed passage, and is only guaranteed passage if the government decides that they want to be flexible, if they want to work with opposition in letting Bill 71 go to second reading and receive royal assent.

And so I think there's a couple of things that are really important to put on the record here: (1) The timing of Bill 71 is super suspect. If you—if—for those folks that are political junkies and pay attention to the media and pay attention to what our Premier is doing

this week or since he got elected, everybody should know, and ought to know, that our Premier, the member for Fort Whyte, has consistently been—particularly through this pandemic—the least liked Premier in all of Canada, across all provinces and territories, across all our jurisdictions; this current Premier, the Premier of Manitoba, is the least liked consistently.

An Honourable Member: What's the topic here?

Ms. Fontaine: Well, why is that important? That's important—because I hear some of the members asking what's the topic here. If they would pay attention, they would know that Bill 71 was introduced—it was haphazardly put together and introduced at the exact same time when yet another poll came out and showed that, not only does everybody not like the Premier—which, again, is consistent across the board, across Canada—but the poll shows that it is pretty consistent that Manitobans in general don't like anybody on that side of the House and don't appreciate what anybody on that side of the House has done to impact on the lives of Manitobans—and mind-blown during a global pandemic.

And so what do we have? Well, well, well. We have Bill 71 in which the Premier is saying that he wants to give every Manitoban—but not fairly—but every Manitoban, he wants to give them a cheque, like he did with the seniors cheque that he gave out a couple of—I guess last year or—yes, I guess about a year ago. And he signed his name on this cheque and this cheque went out to all seniors—clearly a ploy to get seniors to like him again. Because even seniors, even PC seniors, don't like the Premier. And so, you know, he is using the powers within his authority as the Premier to just dole out money, to give out cheques to those people that he thinks are going to vote him in.

And so Bill 71 comes at the exact same time that that latest poll came that indicated so many members opposite are going to lose the next election. And they are hoping that Bill 71, that all of a sudden the 'electoric' are going to forget what he did throughout this whole pandemic. Which, in a nutshell, in a couple of words, is basically nothing. He's done nothing during this pandemic to help protect Manitobans.

And so they're hoping that their going to try and save the member for Kildonan-River East (Mrs. Cox), who we know is going to be gone, we know that. They're hoping that they're going to save—with Bill 71, they're hoping that they're going to save the election of the member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Fielding), which we know is going to be gone, which really is

jeopardizing his leadership goals and dreams of becoming the next leader of the PC caucus once the Premier leaves.

Because here—I'm going to get into, again, all of the other members who are going to be gone from this Chamber, but I also do want to point out that the Premier's in a little bit of a rock and a hard place because everybody and their dog knew, or knows, that the Premier is just waiting to get to Costa Rica. His bags are packed. He keeps making sure that the jet—the private jet is ready and, you know, fully gassed up and ready to take him to Costa Rica.

The problem is that he's thinking about his legacy, and his legacy since he got elected in 2016 was to balance the budget. And, unfortunately, we ended up in a global pandemic. And he did, again, the pandemic on the cheap. But even doing the pandemic on the cheap contributed to a little bit of deficit. And so now he's thinking, oh, no, what's my legacy going to be? How am I going to get to Costa Rica? Because if it wasn't for this, you know, pandemic, I probably would have been gone last year.

But no premier—no premier—should, and certainly, no premier ought not leave a province to which he is responsible and has enormous roles and responsibilities, none of them should leave in the midst of a pandemic.

* (15:40)

And so, you know, be—rest assured, for those Manitobans that are watching, this is nothing more—Bill 71 is nothing more than ensuring that he, once he gives those cheques out, he can say, hey, look at what I did, and I'm out. Peace out. I'm 'peaceing' out of here and I'm on my way to Costa Rica.

And so, he did it because of the poll; he did it because he's trying to get to Costa Rica as fast as he can; and he—and, I mean, I don't know how much he actually cares about any of the members in his caucus—I would venture and I would submit probably not very much—but he is trying to, you know, put forward Bill 71 to save the member for Southdale (Ms. Gordon), who we know will be gone in the next election as well.

We certainly know that the member for Fort Richmond (Mrs. Guillemard) will be gone in the next election as well, too. We know for sure that Brandon West and Brandon East and Assiniboia and Selkirk and best of all, the member for McPhillips (Mr. Martin), we know is out of there as well.

We know that the member for Dauphin (Mr. Michaleski), who said nothing, who did nothing, who was like a—we didn't even know where he was when the Dauphin jail was closed down, disappeared—

An Honourable Member: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): On a point of order?

Point of Order

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The member from Rossmere, on a point of order.

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to hope that I can follow a train of thought, but my mind has not been able to keep up with the member's very, very meandering line of reason here.

I do believe we're discussing Bill 71, and it seems to me that relevance has been abandoned for rants, raves and who knows what else.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, could you call the member to relevance if you agree that that member has wandered?

Thank you.

Ms. Fontaine: On the same point of order.

First off, let me just put on the record that the member for Rossmere just utilized incredibly sexist language to describe what I'm doing in the House here. And so, I would disabuse him of anything that he just attempted to put on the record.

It is very important, Deputy Speaker, to put on the record everything that I'm putting—that I'm relaying to the House today in respect of Bill 71. It's all connected, and I suspect that the Deputy Speaker knows that as well.

But I do take exception to the language and the discourse that the member for Rossmere just used in describing me doing my job in this House, particularly as a woman.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): I will consult with the Clerk on this matter.

I would encourage the member to bring the comments on Bill 71. The member has been doing that and

we ask her to continue to do that, but I would, you know—to bring it back more to Bill 71.

Thank you.

* * *

Ms. Fontaine: And so, as I was saying in respect of Bill 71, the timing is incredibly suspect for the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) all of a sudden desire to, you know, get The Education Property Tax Reduction Act for Manitobans.

It is suspect. And I think that most Manitobans see that and understand that the Premier is attempting to utilize the power and the privilege that he has in order to save whatever legacy he thinks he might have and certainly, I suppose we could suggest, that he's trying to save some of the members that I listed.

There were more members that I could have listed, Deputy Speaker, but I will move on in respect of some of the education property tax.

So, we know that Bill 71 came out at the exact same timing as the last poll that showed that this side of the House will become government—to which we are ready, willing and able and very excited to do.

And so, we know that Bill 71 did not get introduced within the deadline. And so, I think it's important to be very clear in this House that the bill is not guaranteed passage; it's only guaranteed passage if we agree to it.

And, I think, you know, as all of my colleagues have put on the record previous, there are serious concerns with Bill 71, that does a lot. It's a big bill; it has substantial, long-lasting changes to Manitobans, and we have not been afforded enough time to review the bill, to go over the bill, to debate the bill, to fully understand and comprehend the bill. I think that the government would have done well had they introduced this within the time frame, but they did not.

And so, for those folks that are curious about Bill 71, again, we know that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is intending to, you know, put the rebate into a political ploy to save his government.

What we do see in Bill 71 is that, across the board, Manitobans will see a reduction in the Education Property Tax Credit from \$700 to \$525. We see that across the board. And what that means, though, is that it is disadvantaging renters because we know that renters will not be entitled to a rebate cheque. They will actually see less dollars on their income tax when they get their income tax back because you can only

get the rebate if you own—if you own property, if you own the property that you live in.

That's not fair, Deputy Speaker, and I know that the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) very eloquently brought up the concerns about the disparities in this bill and that this bill actually centres and privileges those that have the most privilege already in Manitoba.

And so we would like to see—you know, as a starting point, we would like to see that the government, that the Premier consider amending Bill 71 to reinstate the property education—Education Property Tax Credit to renters, and so—so that renters aren't penalized for something that they had nothing to do with.

And so I think that that's a starting point of flexibility on our side, Deputy Speaker, and certainly I would hope on the side of the government. You know, as I just shared in the media scrum that I did, we're willing to be flexible. We're willing to work with members opposite, with the government, to look at how we can strengthen Bill 71 and make it more fair—ultimately make Bill 71 more fair for all Manitobans.

And so I hope that members opposite are listening, other than just chatting, and listening about reinstating the Education Property Tax Credit for renters. I think that would go a long way at moving this bill forward.

I do have other notes here that I'm trying to find here, but I don't know where it is. So, Deputy Speaker, that's certainly one of our first asks at moving this board—bill forward.

I think that the other piece that would be really important to consider for the government to consider is income testing. So, income testing for Manitobans and setting the criteria at whatever you would want to set it at so that we would see those that have the most, those that own property in the millions, are not necessarily getting more than they should be getting and—while, at the same time, you know, punishing renters. And I think that those are two amendments that we could see in the House and we could see—negotiate with the Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen), with the government, with the Premier, and we can move forward the bill.

So those are two amendments that we certainly would like to see and certainly will be bringing forward.

So, I—you know, we're not saying that we're not willing to not look at this bill at all. We're asking the government to make sure that the bill is fair for everyone. I know that all of my colleagues have spoken about—and members opposite should know how much Manitobans are struggling.

And, you know, despite all of the, you know, the stuff that members opposite, you know, try to put on the official record, you know, Manitobans don't believe what they're saying because they know that the things that they've put into place. And I'll give just one example—and I know the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) brings this up quite often because it is quite offensive and quite egregious—is that in the midst of a pandemic—a global pandemic—in December, we know that the PC government, the PC caucus, every single one of them, raised the hydro rates for Manitobans.

* (15:50)

And so, while, you know, the Premier and his, you know, Cabinet keep getting up here and saying that, you know, they're making life more affordable for Manitobans, that's simply not true. It's simply not true. And one example is Manitoba Hydro. And so, in that context, they're making things not affordable for Manitobans, including sell bills and all kinds of things.

And—but they're going to—in Bill 71, they're going to benefit even more so those that have more wealth. And anybody that's paid attention throughout this whole pandemic, and there's been lots of research and lots of articles talking about how, you know, some of the richest in the world have become even exponentially more rich during the pandemic, during this global crisis.

And instead of this government taking an opportunity—and all of this is laid bare; all of this is laid bare when we look at the statistics. We can look at the statistics in respect of women and how women have been disadvantaged at incredible levels from COVID-19. And so, all of it is laid bare.

And so, instead of the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and the caucus sitting down and saying, you know what? How are we going to make—how are we going to use this pandemic to ensure that once we come out of this pandemic—and we will, we will come out of this pandemic—once we come out of this pandemic, how will we ensure that Manitobans are not worse off than before the pandemic? How will we ensure that the rich aren't getting richer and the poor are getting poorer?

Instead of having that conversation, the Premier and his Cabinet have done the exact opposite. They've sat at the Cabinet table and they said, you know what? I don't really like that. Let's figure out how we're going to actually, you know, make those Manitobans who are most economically marginalized and most economically at risk—how are we going to make it so they'll actually potentially never get out of the economic mess that the COVID-19 is doing?

And we saw—I think it was just, like, two weeks ago—the Premier brought out a kitchen table, a prop—a prop—when they have done so much damage in the lives of Manitobans, not only financially or mentally certainly, but actually, like, the ultimate damage by letting folks die under their watch.

And so, in the context of all of that, here we have Bill 71 that they quickly just drummed up because they found out that they were going to lose the next election. And he's trying to find a way out of it. He—the Premier is legislating, ensuring that renters will be worse off than they were before the pandemic. And we've already seen—I know that our members of our caucus have brought this time and time again—that the Premier has put in place a framework that allows a 30 per cent rent increase, which gets approved 100 per cent of the time.

So, while at the same time Bill 71 takes away the Education Property Tax Credit from renters, at the same time that you're taking those dollars away, you're actually raising rents by 30 per cent. So you've got those two things. But you also have, since 2016, the slow but sure selling off of social housing units. And so what the Premier and every single one of his PC caucus are doing is creating a crisis in Manitoba for Manitobans. And they simply don't care, Deputy Speaker.

And I think that that's tragic. And that is why all of the members that I briefly spoke about are going to lose their seats in the next election. Because the governments that have done well in the pandemic, the governments that have taken care of their citizens, as they should—like, none of us brought on COVID-19 to ourselves, I mean, although we could have that debate, but none of that brought—it's not like Manitobans brought it on ourselves. Governments have a responsibility to take care of its citizens. And those governments that did well, that understood that basic principle—to take care of your citizens—have gone on to win majority elections.

And, Deputy Speaker, then the opposite can be—could—certainly could be suggested that those governments that were not there to take care of their citizens, that actually made life much harder, as does Bill 71 for renters—Bill 71 makes life much harder for renters—all of those that show just a disdain or 'discare' for taking care of Manitobans do not fare well. And that's what the polls are telling us here in Manitoba.

And so, I hope that members opposite are listening. I suggest that they probably are not listening to the debate. Certainly, I know the minister—or the member for Rossmere (Mr. Micklefield) probably wasn't listening to what I would say—what I was saying, because if he had been listening instead of wanting to get up here and use sexist language to describe the way that I'm doing my job, he would go back to his boss and to his colleagues and say, you know what, the member for St. Johns has proposed some reasonable amendments to Bill 71 that will strengthen Bill 71. I think that we should listen to what the NDP caucus are putting out there as a measure of good—a good gesture—that we can work together on Bill 71.

But I don't think that they're listening. And so, in that respect, then—because I know—I hear the members, you know, doing what they do, usually, when our members are up speaking about a particular bill. So, to that end, I would like to propose a reasoned amendment.

So I move, seconded by the member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare),

THAT the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "THAT" and substituting the following:

this House declines to give second reading to Bill 71, The Education Property Tax Reduction Act (Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act and Income Tax Act Amended), because this bill fails to ensure an equitable distribution across income groups and makes life less affordable for renters in Manitoba.

Motion presented.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): Regarding this reasoned amendment, according to the third session of the House of Commons Procedure and Practice, on pages 753 through 755, it is permissible to move reasoned amendments to the second readings of bills. And the wording of this amendment complies with the requirements set out in Bosc and Gagnon. Accordingly, the amendment is in order.

I want to remind all honourable members wishing to speak that we are now speaking to the reasoned amendment of the second reading of Bill 71, not the second reading motion for the bill.

The floor is now open for debate.

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you hear me? Is it coming through?

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): Yes, we can hear you.

Mr. Moses: Thank you.

* (16:00)

Well, it's my pleasure to be speaking on not just Bill 71 now, but the reasoned amendment that was brought forward by the member from St. Johns. And I thank her for bringing forward this amendment, because it's important that we, as a collective group of legislators, act in the best interests of all Manitobans.

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

I do feel strongly that this amendment would be in the best interests of Manitobans because, as been well-described by many of the—many of my colleagues and MLAs, it's clear that Bill 71, as it's—currently written, has many, many issues, including the issues around increasing inequality, making life less affordable for many Manitobans who need it, making it more challenging for renters and, despite the best communication efforts of the government, would actually make many people's lives more challenging when it comes to finances and tax relief.

Let me describe some of the issues that we see, which is why, I think—one of the issues that I see with Bill 71, which is why it's so important for us to support these amendments that was proposed by our member from St. Johns.

Now, first of all, when you look at an equitable tax landscape in our province, we should be looking at what is the most fair way that we can actually, you know, have a taxation system in our province, by allowing those people to contribute to the—to all the services that we have in our province, but, at the same time, ensuring that it is done in such a way that is fair and equitable. Meaning that those who have higher income and higher wealth have—are able to pay more into our tax system—taxation system, and those people who are of lower income and lower means are responsible for paying less.

And that is completely fair. Those are principles that, I think, are shared in a way of taxation systems

that we're seeing right across from municipal—municipalities, provincial governments, federal governments. And this principle of having more income and paying more taxes is a good thing because it allows those people who need more assistance and need more financial help to get ahead and to know that the government is working in their best interests to help them get a little bit of a leg up in our economy.

But this, Bill 71, is a regression, is a strong regression in the way we choose to tax people in our province. By giving people a flat across-the-board, homeowners' 25 per cent relief, it takes no consideration of being income tested and no consideration of how much money or how much ability they have to pay, and that has—is a significant consequences on the lives of low-income individuals. When you compare the taxes rebate that a wealthy million-dollar home own individual might have and their ability to pay, that might dwarf the ability of a low-income individual or individual who is renting or an individual is on income supports.

And there's a stark difference between their income levels and there should be a stark difference in what our province is requiring for them to tax. And in Bill 71, there should be a stark difference in what the—this government is looking for in terms of giving a property tax rebate and sending out a property tax cheque.

And if they're serious about doing this the right way, then I think we'd better pay very close attention to this amendment because this amendment does signal the need to bring forward legislation that is truly equitable for all individuals.

Now, I can look no further than in my neighbourhood in St. Vital, which has people who are very high income and, you know, multi-million-dollar homes in—along the river—the riverbanks of said Red River, people who live in very, you know, probably in the mid mean of property values in Winnipeg, where are working-class homes, post-World War II homes, and also we have people who are, you know, just starting out, just rented an apartment or got a very small, modest place, and are just trying to find their way with maybe holding down one minimum-wage or two minimum-wage jobs just to make it, just to survive. And that's right here in one constituency. And it's like that across our whole city, across our whole province with that diversity of income levels.

And it's—we need to recognize that some individuals who can afford to pay more, that they should have—they should be—it should be set up in our tax

system for those people to do their part in paying their taxes. And the Bill 71 takes no consideration of those facts. No consideration of those facts. And that's disappointing.

You know, I know that there's many, you know, very bright and intelligent people who work behind the scenes to craft legislation and to advise government on how legislation should be written and the impacts that it'll have on people. The impacts it'll have on average Manitobans' lives. And so it's, you know, I think with full knowledge that this government must be aware of the impacts that it has.

And to say to a multi-million-dollar-home owner that they might get a tax rebate of \$4,000; a small average Manitoban Winnipegger might get a tax rebate of \$400. How is that fair? No, honestly? You know, I hope the members who are listening to this today can honestly think to themselves, how is that fair? How can you be crafting a legislation knowing that people who already have so much, who have already found financial success in their lives, who are already in that category of haves versus have-nots, and have the ability to pay?

You're choosing to give them the largest benefit of this proposed Bill 71. And at the same time, you are choosing in this bill to—the people who have, you know, modest property levels and a smaller ability to pay, you're giving them less benefit. And at the same time on top of that, you're ignoring all the people who aren't property owners, who don't rent—who don't own but maybe rent, who would rent an apartment or rent a place to live in our province. You're ignoring them completely and not giving them the benefit of this tax rebate.

Now, you may claim, oh, you know, we're going to freeze rent for a couple of years to maybe give them some partial benefit. But that's a short-term gain, that's a very, very short-term gain when it comes to this long-lasting benefit of decreasing of property taxes. Now, that's a very, very dangerous thing and a regressive way—a very regressive way for the government to be looking at choosing to create our taxation system.

And it's disappointing because—it is disappointing because I know that there are very smart people in our government who would have worked to craft this type of legislation, would have worked to advise the minister and the Cabinet and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) about the impacts that this would have. And they would have been full aware of the impacts, but the disappointing part is that they chose to go ahead with something like that.

And so I'm very happy that the member from St. Johns brought forward the amendment which would really go to highlighting the need for a progressive taxation system by including the thought processes around equitable levels of income and supporting groups, such as renters.

Now, we all want life in Manitoba to be more affordable and it's a very important thing for us to consider. You know, affordability is something that I heard at the doorstep during the campaign from so many Manitobans and so many people in St. Vital. When this government looks at affordability and they choose to go ahead and act on a bill like 71, but at the same time raise Hydro rates by 3 per cent right before Christmas? How on earth does this government look at itself in the mirror?

* (16:10)

Honestly, this is the exact opposite of what a government should be looking at doing during the pandemic. To raise Hydro rates unilaterally on Manitobans in winter in the dead of night while, at the same time, trying to claim that they're doing things from an affordability lens? That is not true. That is, quite frankly, shameful from this government, to take that action on Hydro, and doing so in such a way that skips over the PUB, skips over the checks and balances that are supposed to be in place and comes directly from the Cabinet table and out of the pockets of Manitobans.

I do want to also highlight that, over the course of my time as an MLA, I've had the pleasure of speaking with many, many small businesses. Many of whom are either in my neighbourhood, in St. Vital and in that area, but many that are right across our province.

These businesses are very—have, you know, very passionate business owners. Love what they do, the work that they're providing for our community. And yes, many of them have struggled over the last several months with the economic downturn. And yes, some of them, you know, have looked to the government for 'sumports' that I think have been lacking.

But, one thing that I've heard from these businesses is the issue about rent and the issue that rent plays in their bottom line, and that how, you know, they have to pay for their staff, they have to pay for the incoming—their costs of goods—and they have to pay for the rent are some of their core, bottom-line costs that they 'acquire' every month.

And even if they change their structure of their business and adjust their staffing levels or the things

that they have to—their input costs for their business, rent is a fixed cost that they have to face each and every month in order for their business to not just survive but thrive.

And when this government chooses in Bill 71 to ignore the fact that these businesses are paying substantial amounts of rent and giving little or no benefit to these people and, as described by some previous speakers to original Bill 71, in some cases may actually be paying more.

It's disheartening to see, because we know that so many small businesses are the lifeblood of our economic activity in our communities. I know for myself, you know, my constituency office is located in a strip mall full of small businesses. You know, we have a small convenience store called A-Eleven. You know, we're right beside a local quality pizza shop. Also in the strip mall is a cellphone repair place and a barbershop.

These small businesses rely on their government for a fair system, a fair taxation system. And being left out when the government is choosing to enact a bill that will take money out of the treasury and give it to the wealthiest Manitobans? The wealthiest Manitobans—how does that look for if you're a small-business owner and you've—struggling. You've spent the last 15 months struggling every two weeks to pay your employees; every month to pay your rent.

You've been struggling to find your footing through this new economic landscape, and you've made it to this point, and you look at Broadway; you look at your Legislature; you see what your Premier (Mr. Pallister) is talking about and you see that your Premier is giving himself a \$4,000 tax break; that he's giving the rest of the million-dollar homeowners thousands of dollars back in taxes because he thinks that's the best thing to do? Well, what about all these small-business owners who pay rent? Where do they get their break?

Well, these people have been completely left out of the dust by this Premier. Not part of their conversation; not the people that they're working for. And it's so disappointing to see that everyday Manitobans are the ones who are suffering because of this government's policies and specifically Bill 71.

And that's why, in this amendment, we're happy that the member from St. Johns brings forward the issues that are left out in this bill, like equitable income. Equitable income should be one of the main considerations when you're talking about any changes

to taxes. And again, this government has chosen to ignore those issues.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'll like to talk about the fact that in this bill—in this Bill 71, not only does it ignore the fact that, you know, tax changes or benefits should be done at an equitable lens, it also ignores the fact that the wealthier Manitobans might not just benefit from this once, they might not benefit from this twice or three times or four times, they'll benefit from this program, from this proposed bill, for every single property that they own. Every single property that they own, they'll get this benefit.

So if you're a multi-millionaire and you own, maybe a home here, maybe you've brought another property somewhere else, perhaps you own a cottage or two in the province, you might be collecting from this benefit two, three, four, five times. Who knows?

And so you say to a multi-millionaire, multi-property owner, that they should get multiple thousand dollars of benefit—could be upwards into the tens of thousands of dollars if—depending on the number of properties you have, whereas a single-property owner just gets a couple hundred bucks. A single-property owner who, you know, is making just above minimum wage, trying to make their way and support enough for their family, just gets a couple hundred bucks, when you could be talking upwards of tens of thousand dollars for a wealthy individual in Manitoba.

Forget the fact that—comparing multi-property owners to people who don't own any property at all. You're talking about giving zero dollars to a person working minimum wage and tens of thousands of dollars to a wealthy Manitoban. This is literally how Bill 71 works. And for this government to say that they're—they stand by this and that they're proud of this is completely unconscionable. Right?

Like, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to share a story that, you know, I coached basketball for a number of years, and I quite enjoyed it. It was a very fun experience and I hope to have an opportunity at some point in my life to do it again. Time right now, in this role as an MLA, is kind of hard to come by and balance coaching, so I'm not able to do it right now.

But one thing I always taught the students that I coached was that there are essentially two things you get out of playing when you're playing a game. You play and you win or you play and you have a learning experience. You don't really lose. You play and you win or you play and you have a learning experience. That's what—and, you know, consider it a failure or

what you might consider a loss. That's really what it is: it's a learning experience. And so you have to ask yourself after that, you know, loss, what you learned out of it, what you can take away, what you can do to become better next time you play, what things we should practise on in the next couple of practices.

I make this analogy because this is a little bit like what we've been going through as a province over the last 14 or 15 months. You know, we've had a rough time. The COVID-19 virus hasn't eluded—we haven't eluded it. It's been right here and it's affected thousands and thousands of Manitobans. And at the same time, we've experience the same economic downturn as everyone else. Businesses closed, people lost their jobs or lost income, and it's been a struggle.

But should we consider that just a simple failure and move on? We should, as I taught my basketball students, we should look at this as a learning experience. And what have we learned over the last 14 or 15 months?

Well, we ought to have learned about supporting our health-care system and supporting the needs for nurses and doctors and ensuring that there is adequate space and adequate funding to ensure people have proper health care.

* (16:20)

We ought to have learned about the importance of funding our education system, as I think many students and parents learned over the last few months, about, you know, whether it was online schooling or when classrooms were closed and the students were learning at home or whether it was cramped and crowded classroom spaces that, you know, I think our health officials would have wished were much larger and many fewer children per class with smaller classroom sizes.

You know, I think we ought to have learned the—necessary for us to ensure our economy works for everyone. Because the pandemic taught us that the job losses aren't equal; that people who work in precarious work environments suffered worse over the last year; that people who worked in minimum wage roles suffered worse over the past year; that people who worked often in shift work or in marginalized groups suffered worse during this pandemic.

And that lesson appears—those lessons appear to have been completely lost on this government. They seem to have simply forgot the issues that were raised not even a year ago; seem to have ignored the fact that

there is huge public outcry for these major issues and—that I think have been needed.

And this is a prime example—this bill, Bill 71, is a prime example of how the government has completely not learned its lessons during the past year that were so plain and obvious for anyone to see that I can't imagine this government didn't see them; I can only believe this government is choosing to ignore them. They're choosing to ignore that there is a—huge income inequality in our communities; that people in our communities are hurting and are looking for this government to provide some services and give them that hand up that they're looking for.

But, when this government chooses to, you know, cut programs like adult learning; make it more challenging and more expensive for young people to go to colleges and universities; when we see cuts to health care and vacant nursing positions—1,300 vacant nursing positions—we know this government has learned nothing, that they continue to be playing the game without understanding what it's about—that it's about helping the people who need it most.

And so, I'm very upset—you know, I'm actually very glad that this is my opportunity to speak, that I did have an opportunity to speak toward this amendment. Because, you know, quite frankly, you know, I think the member from St. Johns might have beat me to it—I would have been eager, and I think all of the members who have spoke here on our side were eager to bring forward amendments to this bill because, quite frankly, it's unbelievable that it would pass through not only the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) desk but the Cabinet desk—but the entire caucus on the other side. And all of them signed off on this type of bill that would bring such inequality to their communities—such inequality to all their communities.

And so, you know, we're very happy about that, and—about this amendment, and I think that it's—that, you know, we're happy to support the member for—from St. Johns who's brought this forward.

And I just want to share one other quick example of this: the fact that the government is going into debt—the same year the government is going into debt, it's choosing to give the wealthiest Manitobans a large tax break.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've got two little kids. You know, they're pretty young. And, you know, one of the things that happens in our house is we brush our kids' teeth—you know, my son, he's three, my daughter is five, and my five-year-old, she doesn't

need a stool—a little chair—in her bathroom to brush her teeth; she can do it. She's tall enough.

But my son, who's three, he needs a chair, you know? So we have one chair in our bathroom for our kids. And my son uses it. You know, my daughter who's older, who doesn't need it, perhaps she would like a chair—just—she doesn't need it, but I'm sure she would like one. My son, he does need it in order to brush his teeth, to reach up to the sink.

What this government has chosen to do is to not only provide that chair for everyone with this tax break—who owns their home—but they've done it—they've gone into debt to do it.

Now, in my scenario, can you imagine me going into debt just to afford another stool for my daughter who doesn't need it? That would be irresponsible. That would be completely irresponsible. And that is the exact same thing this government is doing by going into debt just to give tax breaks to the wealthiest Manitobans. It's completely irresponsible.

And the end result of this is that we're going to have a further divide in terms of the richest Manitobans and the poorest Manitobans, that the money that the richest Manitobans get out of this tax break is often not going to be cycled back into our economy to create more jobs or more further economic benefit for our communities. In many cases, it's going to leave our province and go to other—and, you know, fund a vacation or another trip that a wealthy Manitoban might be able to afford. And all these things compound the issues with Bill 71.

Not only is it inequitable, but it's bad fiscal and financial policy. This is literally taking money out of our province and sending it to other places, sending it to vacation resorts that wealthy Manitobans might go and visit, you know. And this is the type of policy that, on so many levels, hits the wrong notes.

So I, again, I'm very, very happy to be supporting this amendment on Bill 71, because the amendment that was brought forward at least considers that we all don't have the same level playing field right now, that we are all at different stages, that we all need different supports from our government.

And when blanket taxation changes like this come across, it is simply just making that playing field worse and tilting the scales again in favour of the wealthiest Manitobans. They'll be fine. I think the wealthiest Manitobans in our province will be fine. You know, they can do without a \$4,000 cheque this year. The wealthiest Manitobans will be okay.

I'm worried about them poorest Manitobans, the Manitobans who are paying for their mortgage week by week, Manitobans who are paying for their rent just by a couple of bucks, couple of hundred dollars, maybe, at the end of the month. Those are the ones that we need to be defining policy for. And I know in every community, not just in St. Vital, but in every community across our city and across our province, in the cities and in the rural regions, are experiencing the same thing.

And so every member should be very concerned with this type of bill. Even if you're not able to say it in front of the caucus, you know in your heart of hearts that this type of bill isn't that fair. And so when you do have the opportunity, to all the members on the other side of the House, I do you hope you have a little bit of courage to actually, you know, say—whether, even if it's in a quiet voice, that's okay, it's a start. Say it in a quiet voice that we can do a little bit better with this type of legislation.

Maybe suggest a little bit of a change the next time you're in a caucus meeting to bring forward a little bit of a bill that's going to be more beneficial to Manitobans. Start in a quiet voice, then you can say it a little bit louder, because we know that Manitobans are asking for better. We know that Manitobans deserve better. They're calling for it. I think that's why we're seeing the polling results that we have been recently, because they're calling for a better government in Manitoba. And we know that it's not happening right now with this current government. And I think that's why they're so eager for change.

So, thank you so very much for this time to speak, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Thank you.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I'd like to also thank my colleague from St. Vital for imploring our friends across the way here to consider speaking up against Bill 71, even if it is in a quiet voice, as he suggested, just to demonstrate a little bit of courage and speak out.

* (16:30)

And so, I am happy to have an opportunity to speak a bit about Bill 71 and to put some words on the record about why the amendment that we've brought forward is so important to, at least, making this bill slightly more equitable.

And ensuring that if this bill is to pass, that it doesn't become just simply a giveaway to the

wealthiest Manitobans, but that we at least do our best here to protect renters and low-income Manitobans who are set to lose out as a result of some of the contents of this bill.

The property education tax reduction act—Bill 71—that's been put forward is—pretty devious piece of legislation, which, I'll give these guys credit, is pretty on-brand for them.

And of course, this bill was recently concocted. We know that while this government had every opportunity to bring this type of bill forward before the deadline, they failed to do that. And I'll get a chance to speak a bit about my theory as to why they've brought this bill forward so suddenly, out of the blue, recently.

But this bill is quite a complicated scheme. It's quite a complicated scheme that, ultimately, without the amendment that we're bringing forward, will do a lot to hurt regular Manitobans.

So that's why we brought forward this amendment, to improve this bill; to make sure that we're cognizant to those who stand to be hurt by the legislation that this government's—been brought forward here today. And we can do that by ensuring that we reinstate the Education Property Tax Credit, and that will at least help to minimize the degree to which this bill takes money off the kitchen table for regular Manitobans.

We know that, as it stands, this bill—71—is a bill that works in service of Bill 64, which is a bill that—Manitobans are learning—is about defunding our education system here in Manitoba. It's about removing local voices; removing the ability of people in our communities to have some ability to impact local decision-making around their kids' education.

And we know that Bill 64 will do absolutely nothing to improve student outcomes. And we know that, because that bill doesn't actually reference—or in any way centre—kids at all, and instead completely ignores the needs of those students who are in need of extra supports in order to improve their performance. There's nothing at all about kids in that bill.

And so 71 works in service of that bill. And it is, of course, as I've already mentioned, a hugely concerning bill that will only exaggerate existing inequalities in this province.

Manitobans are worried about Bill 64. We're seeing that. Just take a peek at how many people have

lined up to speak to committee about the bill; I think hundreds of people, at this point.

We're seeing—I know teachers are lining up in opposition to that bill. I hear it all the time in my community from not only teachers, but also people working in schools, about their concern about what this government is ultimately planning on doing to our education system in this province—which is ultimately to decimate it as we know it and to completely rip apart the structures that have served us well for such a long period of time.

And people, of course, are seeing the impact that that bill, and, ultimately, Bill 71 are going to have in our local communities in terms of risking—or putting at risk—local programs—important local programs—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

I just want to remind the member for St. James—if he can bring it back to relevance and talk about the amendment of the—Bill 71.

Mr. Sala: If I might, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe that what I'm spelling out here is important, because it pertains directly to the question about Bill 71, its impacts on Manitobans. And Bill 71 works in service of Bill 64, so I will work my way back, but I'd appreciate a little patience in getting there.

So, there is a worry about—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I want to also remind the member for St. James—also reflecting on the Chair so would—a reminder that we're not talking directly on Bill 71. We're actually talking on the amendment that because this bill fails to ensure the equality—equitable distribution across income groups and it makes life less affordable for renters in Manitoba. That was what the motion was put forward of the amendment. So if the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) can stay in the parallels of that amendment.

Mr. Sala: Okay, thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You know, Manitobans want a government that is focused on the basic needs of families in this province and, you know, that puts forward bills that respond to those basic needs of families. And it's clear that both Bill 71 and Bill 64 really fail to do that.

They fail to, in any way, help to improve public education in this province, or at least the government has failed to create to any clarity on why those bills actually do anything to improve public education in Manitoba.

So there's a real deficit here in what we've seen in this bill that's been brought forward by this government, Bill 71, which we're seeking to respond to, to some degree, with our amendment.

And, you know, ultimately, this bill is like so many of the other bills that this government has brought forward which, ultimately, just do not in any way reflect the needs of everyday, regular Manitobans who, as my colleague from St. Vital earlier pointed out, many of whom are struggling to get by. They're living cheque to cheque. They're worried ultimately about being able to ensure that they can pay their bills and take care of their families.

This bill doesn't help to achieve that. And, again, this is why this amendment we've brought forward is so important.

The Bill 71 is, as I've already said, working in service of that Bill 64 and the story that the government is telling about Bill 71 is that they're planning on reducing school taxes all of a sudden by 25 per cent over the next two years. And their plan is to do that by sending rebate cheques on the education portion of our property taxes, which means instead of just getting a 25 per cent reduction in the total cost of your—the education portion of your property taxes, should reduce our overall bill as a family, the government is, instead, with 71, putting forward a scheme here that's ultimately about taking Manitobans' money that belongs to them, then sending it to them in the form of a cheque.

And also because they've included language in this bill which will allow them to include information from the minister, it's clear that when they do receive that cheque, that it's probably going to have the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) face on it or at least his signature.

So, we're going to get these rebate cheques that ultimately aren't necessary. So, they're going to be sending us our own money with the PC government's stamp on the front of it. So it's pretty transparent what's going on here. I don't think it's hard for anyone to see, except maybe for this government to recognize what's going on here and why this is such a transparent scheme.

You can't make this stuff up, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They're literally taking our money, putting it in a cheque, spending \$1.3 million to send that money to us and they're going to put their name on the bottom of it, as though that's some huge act of generosity. It's really—it's impressive. I have to give you guys credit

for that. It is impressive work. To the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding), I have to say it was—it's a great scheme you've cooked up.

Now, of course, you know, why are they doing this? I think this is really important to talk about. Why has this government all of a sudden decided that they want to send Manitobans' money back to Manitobans? What's the reason behind that? What's possibly motivating that?

And I think this is important because we're asking a question here today and we're bringing an amendment forward to improve Bill 71, but if we're doing that, we should be talking about whether or not Bill 71 is needed and where it's coming from.

And we can see pretty clearly where it's coming from. Desperate times mean desperate measures. And it's pretty glaringly obvious that this bill is an example of how desperate this government is to try to buy votes of Manitobans who right now have a lot of reason to feel frustrated, angry and ultimately disenchanted with the performance of this government.

* (16:40)

So that's clearly why this government mysteriously produced this bill, Bill 71, out of thin air after the deadline for submitting bills and why they're trying to ram this through right now. And I look forward to talking a bit more about why, I'm guessing, they've done that.

So one of the, I think, clear reasons why is because we can see that this bill, ultimately, is responding to the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) dismal performance—really dismal performance. The member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) earlier referenced that—believe—the Premier's performance is the worst in the entire nation. That is an impressive feat to accomplish.

I think we should take a second here to just acknowledge that. That is a first place that, really, nobody wants to achieve, but that's impressive. And it's especially impressive to accomplish that in the middle of a pandemic when you are given basically a free pass to lead and to just do the bare minimum to show your population, the citizens you serve, that you care about them. That's all that needs to be done.

But, somehow, in this freebie situation, even though before the pandemic he was still wildly unliked throughout the province and everywhere—and I would extend that dislike to the entire government—he managed to make it even worse in a situation that,

frankly, most premiers in this country seem to have done quite a bit better of a job stepping up to.

So, you know, it's not only the Premier that's in trouble and it's not only his performance that's likely driving this bill, but it's also the whole—his whole Cabinet, especially Ron, the whole party, and—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I just want to remind members to—when they're speaking, address members of the Legislature as either their constituency names or their titles.

Mr. Sala: I apologize, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was having a little bit of fun there.

You know, so we do—we see the party is tanking. They're tanking in Winnipeg. This is why—obviously why 71 has come forward, why they're trying to make a giveaway to the wealthiest Manitobans. You know, look at the last polls we saw. We're ahead by 16 points. We just continue to mount in the polls. It's probably scaring the Premier. It's threatening his legacy. He does not like what's happening. This is not the way he wants to go out. His party is tanking.

So he got the worst approval rate in the country for a premier, which is, again, an incredible accomplishment, something that is impressive by any measure. The party is tanking in the polls, and, you know, a number of these members, as many of my colleagues have already pointed out, just simply won't be here when we get past the next election. I hope they've got their bankers' boxes already ready to go—pack their offices.

And I think that's concerning. And so we can see, you know, the reason why—that 71 would be a bill that they would want to bring forward now, why that's something they considered. And, you know, what they produce out of that, a bill that—glaring—is a—just an absolute handout to the wealthiest Manitobans. And, frankly, it's also a handout to a number of people who don't even—property owners, large property management companies that don't even operate in this province that are getting an amazing windfall out of this, really amazing.

So, you know, why are Manitobans frustrated with this government? Why would the government want to bring forward this bill right now? It's probably because they recognize that Manitobans are hugely dissatisfied, as we've seen in the Premier's approval ratings, as we've seen in the polls. And why is that? Why are we seeing that? Well, I think the No. 1 reason, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is because this province and the people of this province have seen that this

government, this Premier, these Cabinet ministers, this whole caucus, cannot be trusted to lead. They cannot be trusted to lead this province.

And we've seen that over and over and over again over the last year and beyond. And I'm going to maybe spell out a couple of the reasons why Manitobans feel that they can't be trusted, which, again, speaks directly to why Bill 71 was brought forward, as a giveaway, and why we need to have this amendment.

You know, we could start by talking about the very basic thing that I think is on most Manitobans' minds, which is their failure to perform throughout the pandemic—the waving of the victory flag and the creation of banners and headlines, you know, huge signs celebrating our victory. When the rest of the world saw a second wave coming from miles away, this Premier and this government were busy bragging about their performance.

Meanwhile, we were completely lacking in preparations that would've brought us to a place that would've saved more lives, that would've helped small businesses to stay open, that would've ensured that Manitobans were safer. But instead, they chose to celebrate a victory. People remember that. Manitobans remember that. So I'd say this is a base layer upon which a number of other failures have been built. That wasn't a good place to start. That might be a real good foundation for where that last-place rating came from.

You know, over the pandemic, they also completely failed to do anything to secure or protect our seniors. The one thing that I think we saw around the world, that we had mountains of data on, huge amounts of evidence, was the amount—the risk of mortality to seniors throughout the world. But the risks of mortality that seniors in Manitoba were going to face, did we take any special measures to make sure that our seniors in our long-term-care facilities, our personal-care homes, were protected? No, Mr. Deputy Speaker, no, we did not.

We know that we had employees in those environments moving facility to facility, moving around, potentially spreading COVID building to building. And where did that end up taking us? We know where that ended up taking us. It took us to unimaginable tragedy at the Maples Personal Care Home and it took us to unimaginable tragedy at other personal-care homes in this city and in the province. And Manitobans remember that. That's going to be in our DNA.

We're going to remember that this PC government put us at risk. And we're going to remember that even though we had miles of leeway or a runway that was miles long, knowing that was coming, we didn't lock down those environments. We didn't do what we needed to do to keep those people safe. We had huge staffing shortages that weren't dealt with.

Thinking about not just in our personal-care homes but why 71 was brought forward, why they're trying to, you know, again, trying to buy Manitobans off to help them forget about some of their failures. Let's look back again, thinking about seniors. The failure to properly staff long-term-care facilities—or, sorry, home care.

We had a huge number of home care vacancies: 15 per cent home-care vacancies in Winnipeg, 27 per cent in the southern region. We know that the impacts of that were that the number of seniors living in assisted-living facilities or other facilities where they needed that hand, that little bit of help, went sometimes for weeks without a shower, went sometimes for weeks wearing the same clothing that they were—because they hadn't been able to wash the rest of their clothes because they weren't getting the help they needed, because the government didn't want to invest properly in getting those home-care vacancies filled. Manitobans won't forget that.

You know, even small businesses, I think, in this province—one of the things that really became clear over this pandemic was who's actually on the side—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I just want to remind the member for St. James, again, if he can bring back the—remind him of the—to draw back to the remarks back to the motion when we're debating.

Mr. Sala: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I would argue again that, you know, we're talking about—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, you're challenging the Speaker. If—again, if we can go back to—and I'll read this again: Because of the bills fails to ensure the 'equalable disputation' across income groups and make the life less affordable for renters in Manitoba.

Point of Order

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Concordia, on a point of order.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): On a point or order, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your attempt to make sure that we're all doing our best as legislators to represent the views of our constituents and to do our best in

debate to represent their views when it comes to the amendment that we're talking about with regards to Bill 71. This is an important issue to our constituents.

And because Bill 71 really changes the way that the Province brings in revenue or, in this case, gives it back to residents, I think it's very clear that this is a budget issue, it's a budgetary measure.

* (16:50)

And while we want to make sure our comments are very clear, that they are about Bill 71, obviously, the impact that the measures that the Province is contemplating here, will have an impact on so many different areas within the government's ability to spend their budget.

So, I'm simply asking, on a point of order, that, you know—and I will agree with you that I think the member needs to make sure his comments are very clear about Bill 71—but that you understand that our members and certainly any members that would like to get up—because it sounds like some have a lot to say on the other side of the House—get up and talk about how these—this particular amendment impacts Bill 71.

Which, again, is a budgetary issue which impacts so many elements of government that there should be some ability for us to talk about how the impact that Bill 71 will have, again, as it relates through our amendment on the ability of the government to fulfill its mandate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The—on the same point of order, the honourable member for Rossmere.

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, for any member having been chastened by you to return to the matter at hand, to stand and say, yes, but actually, no, is to reflect on the Speaker. That is a breach of the rules and completely out of order for this House.

If we can't listen to you, Mr. Speaker, where's the authority in this room? I believe the member's out of order and I believe the point of order brought forward by the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) cited no rule, no breach. But there is something to talk about here this afternoon regarding the behaviour of the members opposite.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I want to thank all the members who've—who spoke on the point of order. It is not a point of order. What we're trying to do here is we were speaking on the—we're not supposed to be speaking on the bill—Bill 71 now; it's—we're speaking on the amendment.

So, we just want to have relevance back to the—why the amendment was brought forward by the honourable member for St. James—for St. Johns and if the member from St. James could get back to the relevance of what the amendment was and speak about why the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) has put this amendment forward.

* * *

Mr. Sala: And I just want to make clear I wasn't intentionally trying to overly challenge you there; just some of this can be chalked up to my lack of understanding the rules. I'll get there in time, so.

So, we'll focus more on the amendment, although I'll do my level best here to maybe focus more on that. I know it wasn't probably fun for members opposite to hear about their failures there, so I'm sure they're eager for me to move on as well, and I'm happy to do that to, you know, ensure I abide by your request there.

This bill, Bill 71, is fundamentally about this PC government looking to line the pockets of wealthier Manitobans. And anytime there's a PC tax or a money-related measure, we have to watch very closely. We have to watch very closely because this government cannot help themselves; it's in their DNA, when there's an opportunity to pass more money over to wealthier Manitobans, that they will take it.

And that speaks to the importance of the amendment that we brought forward here today in balancing out that orientation of this government and this Cabinet and this entire caucus—which is, any time that a tax measure is looked at, we always have to be very cautious about what it is they're doing, what they're seeking to achieve with that.

And this bill, Bill 71, is no exception, which is again why this amendment is so critical to at least doing—making some effort at balancing out the lack of progressiveness that this bill bring forward in terms of changing the way that this tax operates.

The bill is fundamentally about moving away from a progressive approach to taxation where wealthier people pay according to their means and where people who are of lower income pay less, and it's about ensuring that, ultimately, lower-income Manitobans pay a bigger share of the bill for public education in this province. That is hugely problematic, especially when we're thinking about the context that we operate in, where so many Manitobans are struggling with affordability challenges.

But again, this is about regressive approaches to taxation. This is about taking money from lower-income Manitobans and using it to fund a \$7,000 tax break for the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his family and—that he, you know, because he owns multiple properties—and others who stand to benefit so significantly from this.

So, ultimately, this is about ensuring that lower-income people pay more. This is a fact. This is what this bill will achieve. There's no arguing that. There's no—you know, we can, quote, unquote, debate it in this space, but that is what Bill 71 achieves. It is about taking money from lower income people and using it to fund tax breaks for wealthier Manitobans. That is a fact. That's a real shameful thing to have to acknowledge.

And I would imagine that sometimes at night, when our members opposite go to sleep, that they think about that. They think, what am I doing in this role as a legislator? Why did I get into this function? What did I choose this life for? Maybe what we're doing isn't right here. Maybe we're actually doing bad or we're doing wrong by the people in my community who need more support. I think—I'd like to think some of them, maybe the minister responsible for Agriculture feels that way when he goes to sleep at night. I don't know.

But I have some, you know, confidence that they do have a conscience and they recognize that this is a big giveaway to wealthy Manitobans and it's taking money off the kitchen tables, off of lower-income Manitobans.

So, what does this tax change mean for the rest of us, in the absence of the amendment we're bringing forward? What does it mean? Well, we know that education costs a lot of money to deliver. In fact, we know that education costs approximately \$800 million a year to deliver.

And we know that the PCs are talking about, you know, over the next couple years, all of a sudden again slicing out 25 per cent of our education-related property taxes, and over the long-haul, eliminating it altogether off of our property tax bill.

What does that mean? Well, we still need to educate our kids. Last time I checked, those costs aren't going away.

And so, we know that here, with this new proposal, the difference being that it's going to be lower-income Manitobans who are going to be paying a bigger share of that \$800 million. That's fact. And

ultimately, this is going to have the impact of helping to make wealthier Manitobans much wealthier. But it won't just make them a little bit wealthier.

Let's start talking about how wealthy this will help to make certain Manitobans. This will create a windfall for people who own multiple properties, because you get that 25 per cent reduction on your education property taxes not just on your first property, but you get it on your second property, you get it on your third property, fourth property, fifth property. It goes on and on and on.

It's an incredible, incredible offer for those Manitobans who are fortunate enough to be major property owners in this province.

And you know, a good example—a great example—of somebody who stands to benefit in this province is

the Premier (Mr. Pallister) of this province. The Premier of this province, with this Bill 71—which is a big giveaway to wealthy Manitobans—is writing himself a \$7,000 cheque at the expense of the rest of us. He's literally going to sign his own cheque and send it to himself and guess what? And then we get to pay the postage fees. It's incredible.

And I think—yes. That \$7,000 is probably enough to fly the whole family to Costa Rica, I think. Maybe even a return flight.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. When this matter is before the House, the honourable member for St. James (Mr. Sala) will have four minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

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