

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

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 17, 2021

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): It is my duty to inform the House that the Speaker is unavoidably absent. Therefore, in accordance with the statutes, I would ask the Deputy Speaker to please take the Chair.

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

Please be seated. Good afternoon, everyone.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 231—The Employment Standards Code
Amendment Act
(Leave for Miscarriage or Stillbirth)**

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): I move, seconded by the honourable member for Thompson (Ms. Adams), that Bill 231, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Leave for Miscarriage or Stillbirth), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Lathlin: I am pleased to introduce Bill 231, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Leave for Miscarriage or Stillbirth).

The unexpected loss can be emotionally trying on expectant and new parents. This bill would allow parents to take up to three days of paid leave following a miscarriage or stillbirth.

Currently, Manitobans who experience a miscarriage or stillbirth have to cut into their sick leave, lose part of their paycheque or risk their jobs just to take time off to heal.

New Zealand also recently introduced three days of paid bereavement leave for grieving parents in the event of a miscarriage or stillbirth. I hope this

Assembly will follow the lead of these other jurisdictions and unanimously support this bill.

Ekosi.

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

We'll go on to committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to table The Fatality Inquiries Act, section 43(1) report of Manitoba Justice for the fiscal years 2018, 2019 and 2020.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

African Movie Festival

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise today to recognize a leader in the community of Lagimodière.

Ben Akoh has expertly connected people from both the African and non-African communities, and for the past few years he has been instrumental in organizing the annual African film festival in Manitoba. This festival, which I have personally attended since its inception, showcases local and international African films, whose stories often educate audiences about various cultures while highlighting the African diaspora around the world.

He and his team successfully raised funds for the festival, marketed it to the community at large and connected people from various professional backgrounds. Being the first of its kind in Winnipeg, Ben and his team created a project that will flourish for many years to come.

This year will mark the fourth year of the African film festival. I'm impressed with Ben's ability to continue building the momentum for the event, especially during last year, in keeping the festival on track in the middle of a pandemic.

While maintaining public health orders, Ben was able to organize the film festival by using a hybrid of virtual and in-person discussion for the panel section of the event. He was also able to ensure that in-person

guests were able to stay physically distant while enjoying the year's films. Ben and his team delivered an excellent film festival, despite the overwhelming challenges of a pandemic.

In addition to his great work, Ben uses the festival to promote up-and-coming local talent. And speaking of inspiring local talent, his daughter Veda is an up-and-coming vocalist, who has just released her single on Spotify.

Please join me in recognizing Ben Akoh for exemplifying the kind of leadership in our community.

Nanatowiho Wikamik

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): Today I want to acknowledge the Thompson Homeless Shelter for all their important work they do.

The Thompson Homeless Shelter also goes by another name, Nanatowiho Wikamik, which means place of healing. This name reflects the work that the shelter has done as their goal to improve the lives of everyone that steps through their door. Their vision is to foster a community that works together to help those in need of help themselves and for everyone to become an active member of the community of their choice.

The shelter is ran by the Canadian Mental Health Association, and they offer supports 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. These include three meals a day, as warm place to stay, a—the shelter also offers comprehensive supports and programming for the community.

They provide many services, such as mental health, education programming, traditional teachings, sharing circles, smudging, addiction supports, advocacy, employment services, nutritional programming and other life skills.

The shelter has continued to operate safely through the COVID-19 pandemic and has found ways to continue to offer services for their clients. Earlier this month, they were able to gather and provide enough food and money donations—throw in a homeless shelter COVID-safe party.

They actually surpassed their donation goal of \$250 by raising an impressive \$2,675. This money was used to purchase a three-piece entertainment unit, two bookshelves, \$600 in Walmart gift cards that were used to purchase groceries and clothing for residents, as well as enough food was donated to feed the residents for several meals. It was amazing to see our

community come together and support such a great organization.

It is clear there needs to be more work done to address homelessness and addiction crisis in our province. We have much to learn about the comprehensive services in the Thompson Homeless Shelter provides—

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

Devinder Dhir

Mr. Jon Reyes (Waverley): Mr. Deputy Speaker, today I have the great pleasure of delivering a private member's statement honouring Waverley constituent and my good friend, Mr. Devinder Dhir.

The story I'm about to tell you is another example of how our immigrant population makes Manitoba a prosperous and wonderful province to live in. It also touches on the entrepreneurial efforts that many newcomers take on as they contribute to our local community and economy.

Since he arrived in Canada from India eight years ago, Devinder has called Canada and Manitoba his home. His journey as an immigrant in our great country has been nothing but positive, with his family all becoming Canadian citizens just a few years ago.

* (13:40)

Devinder always wanted to do something for his community. With this ambition in mind, he and his family decided to open Winnipeg's second location of Manohar Vegetarian Bakery. This Punjabi bakery has several locations around Canada, specializing in unique recipes including, cakes, pastries, muffins, breads, cookies and various types of snacks.

Most importantly, the bakery addresses the rapidly growing need of vegetarian products while also accommodating diabetic individuals and those with wheat allergies. The key to the bakery's success is their fresh products being made with the best ingredients, completely egg- and trans fat-free.

Devinder's story is so remarkable because of his journey as a business owner trying to establish his bakery during this pandemic. He faced many challenges, including a delayed opening, finding a location, paying extra rent and delays relating to several other areas. Despite this, Manohar Vegetarian Bakery was able to open their doors last month, creating jobs with six staff, including some youth, and they are

ready to serve even more of the residents of south Winnipeg and contribute to the local economy.

I ask my colleagues to join me in honouring Mr. Devinder Dhir for his entrepreneurial efforts in the community and giving back to the province and country that he now calls home.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Demolition of Panet Road Housing Units

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Every Manitoban deserves a safe, affordable place to call home. This has never been truer than now. In the midst of a global pandemic, where staying home means saving lives, nobody in our province should feel unsure or unsafe about their living situation.

Yet, despite this reality, this PC government has continued headlong in their plans to sell off and privatize Manitoba Housing units across the province. Recently, families in Concordia learned how this policy would impact them as residents of Manitoba Housing's Panet Road townhouses received eviction notices telling them they needed to be out by the end of June, as their homes were being inexplicably bulldozed later this year.

Needless to say, the families impacted by this cut to Housing are anxious. One woman living with her children in a four-bedroom suite told me how she needs a larger unit to accommodate her family, but limited options means she's not sure whether she'll find something in time.

Another resident I spoke to—spoke with noted that tenants have been told to choose between one of only two rehousing options, and both are in communities far from their existing residence and to which she has zero connection to.

The PC government's plan to demolish these 16 housing units—while making no plans public to replace the units, offering few options to residents—is just not right. This represents yet another loss of affordable housing under this government's watch, to add to the staggering 1,700 units already sold, and is once again a loss of government support and services for families in northeast Winnipeg.

Clock is running out for the folks living on Panet Road. I'm calling on this minister to immediately reach out to these families and ensure they stay housed in their community in appropriate units to meet their needs. I also call on her to stop her government's policy of selling off Manitoba Housing units and to

guarantee northeast Winnipeg will not see a further loss of affordable public housing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations.

The honourable minister, if you can unmute your—it seems like you're muted. Mic—you had—move your mic to your—to speak. It's—*[interjection]*. There we go.

The Kelwood Barn

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations): With summer months fast approaching, we're hopeful that we can get out and explore many sites and scenes across our province. Rural Manitoba has so much to offer: trails to explore, local businesses to shop at, markets to visit and diners to eat at. And we are hopeful this summer will—that will be what it looks like.

I'd like to highlight a relatively new rural business in Agassiz, The Kelwood Barn. It's situated on the corner of No. 10 highway and No. 5, heading up to beautiful Riding Mountain National Park.

This business was a project that began in 2015 when the small community of Kelwood had several businesses close. Community members got together to share ideas and potential plans for a new store and fuel station. The group wanted to capitalize and expand on the traffic coming in and out of the park area.

Ending in hard work, The Barn opened its doors in 2019. It is home to The Farmer's Daughter restaurant with Connie Dafoe as cook and manager. She makes the best cinnamon buns, tried and tested.

The gas bar and The Mountain General store is managed by Kaylee Mund and Tomah Axford. The store sells essential grocery items as well as locally grown produce and products. In the summer months, the location is perfect to host the outdoor Mountain Market. Local businesses, clubs and organizations can come together to market their products, provide food and entertainment. An ice cream truck will be the new addition for this year's weekend markets.

I'd like to recognize and thank the core committee members: Bob McRae, Doug Wood and Geoff Burton for their vision and their commitment to see this project through and not give up when they were faced with challenges. Special thanks to the volunteers who contributed their time to the project and the Kelwood community for supporting and investing this business venture in rural Manitoba.

If you and your family are exploring rural Manitoba, getting active and outdoors, please enjoy the restaurants and businesses of the area that have so much to 'offsher'—offer, pardon me.

I wish The Kelwood Barn [inaudible], Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's audio and—video and audio has been disrupted a bit.

Is it will of the House to actually have everything that's printed in Hansard? Is it agreed? [Agreed]

We apologize for the technical difficulties, the honourable minister, so we'll have everything put in Hansard. Thank you.

Madam Speaker with summer months fast approaching we are all hopeful we can get out to explore many sights and scenes across our province. Rural Manitoba has so much to offer; trails to explore, local businesses to shop at, markets to visit, and diners to eat at. We are all hopeful this is what summer will look like.

I would like to highlight a relatively new rural business in Agassiz – "The Kelwood Barn"; it is situated on the corner of road #110 and highway #5 heading up to beautiful Riding Mountain National Park.

This business was a project that began in 2015 when the small community of Kelwood had several businesses close. Community members got together to share ideas and potential plans for a new store and fuel station. The group wanted to capitalize and expand on the traffic coming in and out of the park area.

After years of planning and hard work the "Barn" opened its doors in 2019. It is home to the "Farmers Daughter" restaurant with Connie Dafoe as cook and manager. She makes the best cinnamon buns. The gas bar and The Mountain General store is managed by Kalee Mund and Tomah Axford. The store sells essential grocery items as well as locally grown produce and products. In the summer months the location is perfect to host the outdoor "Mountain Market". Local businesses, clubs and organizations can come together to market their products, provide food and entertainment; an ice cream truck will be a new addition to the weekend markets.

I would like to recognize and thank the core committee members; Bob McCrae, Doug Wood, and Geoff Burton for their vision and commitment to see this project through and not give up when faced with

challenges. Special thanks to the volunteers who contributed their time to help with this project and the Kelwood community for supporting and investing in this business venture in rural Manitoba.

If you and your family are exploring rural Manitoba, getting active and outdoors please enjoy the restaurants and businesses of the area they have so much to offer.

I wish the "Kelwood Barn" stakeholders and staff all the best for their business.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

COVID-19 Infection Rate ICU Staffing Concerns

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Manitoba has the No. 1 highest rate of COVID-19 infections in North America. Now, that's very concerning. It's very damaging to people. People across Manitoba are getting sick.

Now, I'm sure that in response to this, the Premier and his staff and his Cabinet this morning were hard at work brainstorming ways to spin the numbers to try and make it look like things aren't that bad. Of course, they'd be doing that instead of actually taking measures to protect Manitobans.

Why has the Premier and the Cabinet failed to protect people in our province? [interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, I appreciate the member raising the question, because the COVID numbers that are extremely high right now are going to continue to be high if people won't follow the public health orders. The member understands the importance of all of us following those public health orders, I hope, because that is very critical.

I can also remind the member that we did take very significant action, in terms of our restrictions, much earlier than other jurisdictions, and so it is, of course, with no small amount of frustration, that we see people disobeying health orders.

We've had people, according to Dr. Atwal the other day, who are saying, yes, I went to a bonfire; I went to a sleepover. We've got a growing number of people who say, I'm not telling you what I did, which is a clear indication, when people deceive and don't

answer questions, that they may well be guilty of violating those public health orders.

So we're going to continue with enforcement. We're going to continue with these restrictions. And we're going to ask all Manitobans to do the right thing—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister:—and follow the public health orders so we can shorten the third wave here in Manitoba. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, clearly, the Premier's strategy of making up the public health orders at the Cabinet table is not serving the people of Manitoba. Hospitals and ICUs are already stretched too thin, and we know that the numbers are going to continue to rise for patients in those venues.

Now, how are the staff going to be found to allow our ICUs to continue running, particularly when there's already 1,300 vacant nursing positions in Winnipeg alone? Doctors and nurses have sent a clear message: they're understaffed. Health-care workers have been raising this alarm for months. They've been ignored by this government.

So I'll ask the Premier plainly: Where is the Premier going to find the people—nurses, in particular—to keep ICUs running?

Mr. Pallister: Well, the member is patently false with his assertion when he ignores the health orders himself and then accuses us of not working in partnership with health officials to try to encourage people to do the opposite of what he did. He's wrong, he's wrong and he is wrong again for not apologizing for breaking the health orders. This is something that we all need to do, and that is to follow them.

* (13:50)

What's driving this extreme scenario is people's behaviour, said Dr. Atwal. It is about those interactions. It's about not adhering to the orders to their fullest degree. We introduced—*[interjection]*

The member might be interested to know we introduced our restrictions and then strengthened them twice when we were in a trough just beginning to come up. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: Other provinces waited 'til they were at a peak before they introduced their restrictions. In Ontario, they were double us in terms of their average—seven-day average case numbers before they introduced their restrictions.

So when the member says we're not working with health officials, he's wrong. *[interjection]* When the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) chirps from her seat that they should nail the person to the cross who broke the health order, she wasn't just talking about the guy at the rally at The Forks. We all know that—

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

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

Mr. Kinew: The Premier's failure during the pandemic combined with his health cuts have lead to bad outcomes for Manitobans and health-care staff who are stretched thin. Now we're currently looking at ICU numbers and hospitalizations that are going to continue to rise for weeks to come and there will be many weeks after that for those folks to continue to recover.

Now, we know that the Premier has failed when it comes to the pandemic. Now is the time to stand up and demand better. Today, we are the worst COVID hot spot in North America.

Doesn't anyone in that Cabinet think that that's a big enough deal to finally stand up and say something against this Premier on behalf of the people of Manitoba?

Mr. Pallister: Well, it's showmanship, but it doesn't have the backing of fibre.

The member broke the public health orders; he set the wrong example. The member hid his criminal record when he ran for office; didn't set the right example. The member won't confront the truth of his own record. We're confronting the truth of this situation by strengthening our health-care investments to record levels, by introducing the most significant—according to Canadian association of civil liberties, the most restrictive—strong restrictions in the country of Canada.

We have the strongest enforcement of our rules. We need people to follow those rules. We need people to get vaccinated.

And so I say thanks again to our health-care leadership for acting and for acting promptly in terms of encouraging Manitobans to get a vaccine—we will

all benefit if we all do that—and encouraging all Manitobans to do what the Opposition Leader has failed to do: to follow the public health orders. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

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

Education Modernization Act Collective Bargaining Negotiations

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I'll invite the Premier to start wearing his mask in public settings like this one.

Time is running out—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Kinew: Time is running out for teachers and school staff in River East Transcona and Louis-Riel school Divisions. Thousands of staff have been waiting for a new contract but the Premier has threatened them, trying—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —to prevent a fair deal with teachers and we know why: every time the Premier's been pushed to an independent hearing, he's lost.

Will the Premier stop interfering and ensure teachers get a fair deal?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): No one's more dedicated to having teachers and all of—public servants get a fair deal than people on this side of the House. No one.

There wasn't any bargaining going on when the NDP were in power. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: They were CUPE, they were Unifor, they were five or six main public sector unions. Those unions say it, the NDP say it, the member stands for it. He knows how he got his position, that's how he got it and that's the only way he'll keep it.

So we'll stand up for Manitobans while he stands up for public sector union bosses.

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

Mr. Kinew: You know, people are banding together, they're joining forces to fight against this Premier and his wage freeze and to fight against his Bill 64. Very

unpopular in the suburbs. Very unpopular in rural Manitoba.

Now, people are fed up with that terrible education reform and, of course, the multi-year wage freeze because they know what it's like out there in the real world. They know what students need in order to be successful. For years, though, the Premier has pushed forward an unconstitutional wage freeze and now he wants to double down with Bill 64. It's all wrong. It all needs to stop.

Will the Premier withdraw his wage freeze and allow a fair deal for teachers in Manitoba? *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: Well, my old union's called for centralized bargaining for years, and that's what they're going to get with this government, and they never got it with the NDP.

And teachers have called—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —for less administrative waste at the top of the system for years, but the NDP just gave them more. We're going to give them more money on the front line.

And so when it comes to getting better outcomes in education systems, what you need is fewer junkets by trustees like the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) and more resources to be in the hands of teachers.

So that's what we're going to do. We're going to make education work better for the people of Manitoba and for the children of Manitoba.

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

Mr. Kinew: That is simply not true. The Premier has cut education funding by 7.6 per cent in real-dollar terms since he took office.

Now, the government keeps disrespecting workers—now, most recently, by forcing through this wage freeze and doubling down with Bill 64. And now they seek to become the employer of educators across the province. It's no wonder that teachers are upset with that. It's no wonder that school staff want better.

The clock is ticking for the Premier and his Cabinet to allow a fair deal for teachers to be struck.

Will the Premier do the right thing and ensure a fair deal for these educators?

Mr. Pallister: Absolutely. Fair deal for educators is \$40 million more on the front line where they can use it to educate children, money not wasted in triple-thick administrative costs like the NDP created—the highest costs in the country, apparently, according to analysis done, from Quebec to the west coast. And the fact is the NDP is arguing for that system to continue.

And I'm not understanding why. Maybe the member would like to elaborate on why he'd like to deprive front-line teachers of more resources so they could do their job. But we don't want to do that. We're going to keep—we're going to proceed with well-intentioned and well-designed educational reforms that should have happened a long time ago.

Tenth out of 10 is not good enough for our children, and we're going to make sure that it gets a lot better than that in spite of NDP opposition to this initiative and to the other initiatives that we're bringing forward, such as reducing the education tax on property. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

Switch to Remote Learning Timing of Public Notification

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): Frustration and anger—that's what so many Manitoba families have been expressing with this government's last-minute move to remote learning. It's leaving many families in a very difficult situation.

As the minister and I discussed in Estimates, COVID-19 case information is provided to him earlier in the week. Yet, again, the announced move to remove learning for Garden Valley and Red River school districts came over the weekend, with just one school day to move 27 schools to remote learning. It's left families scrambling.

Why is this government only reacting to this wave at the last minute?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education): First of all, I do want to acknowledge teachers and all staff and educators that are doing their best to keep students in their classrooms. Clearly, that's what we want from the outset. I know the educators want to keep them in the classroom as well.

Even though we do have about 375 in remote learning, we still have approximately 450 schools

active under the COVID normal, as it were. So our goal is to keep students in school where possible.

Obviously, situations are developing. They're developing quite quickly, and we're working very closely with our public health officials who make recommendations in terms of going to remote.

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

Mr. Altomare: Our province now has the highest COVID-19 case counts in all of Canada and the United States. The Pallister government should have seen this coming. The response, again and again, is last minute, late, scrambled.

Yet, more division closures over the weekend, with 27 schools closed in Garden Valley and Red River Valley, informed by case counts that the minister had for days.

Why has this government left everything until the very last minute, leaving families yet again in a difficult situation?

* (14:00)

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I appreciate the member's opinion. And, quite frankly, that's what it is, is an opinion.

We listen to the experts in the field, our public health officials. We're working closely with our public school officials as well. We've had discussions in terms of these—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cullen: —two particular school divisions for a number of days. Clearly, a decision had to be made at some point in time. A decision was made over the weekend to change these two school divisions to remote learning.

We seek advice from our public health officials. We listen to that advice, and we take actions based on that advice. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Transcona, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Altomare: Two weekends in a row, the Pallister government has moved divisions to online learning with very little notice. It's the most shambolic move in all of Canada.

Even Ontario gave families a week to prepare. Alberta gave at least a few school days. Yet here, with

the modelling at hand, the Pallister government waits until the very last moment. Manitoba now has the highest COVID-19 case counts in all of Canada, the United States, and we've been heading this way for weeks.

Why has the minister and this government left everything yet again to the very last moment?

Mr. Cullen: Well, again, I appreciate the member's opinion. We're taking advice from our public health officials.

Clearly, these situations are evolving quite quickly in terms of case counts. Again, the goal here is to keep as many students in classrooms as possible. We do take that advice. We take it very seriously. We do not make these decisions lightly. We're trying to be very proactive in these cases to make sure that student safety and teacher safety, in fact, public safety, is paramount. And those are the advice that we're getting from public health officials, and we respond to the advice we get from public health officials.

Churchill River Diversion Project First Nations Consultation

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Despite concerns and objections from impacted Indigenous communities, this government went ahead and granted a final licence for the Churchill River Diversion Project. This is—heartbreaking decision for these communities—or, these communities that continue to suffer the harms, and it's counter to reconciliation in this province.

Will the minister meet with the impacted communities immediately and ensure that they have ongoing meaningful discussions around these projects?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate): I appreciate the question from the member opposite whose government had prolonged the consultation period and not fulfilled their duty to complete this process.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am happy to continue the dialogue and the communication with all impacted communities and have indicated so to each of the communities. And I do look forward to working alongside them and ensuring that we will continue to closely monitor and hold Manitoba Hydro accountable for fulfilling the new conditions that we have placed on this licence.

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

Mr. Lindsey: Indigenous nations are rightsholders and deserve to have a meaningful say in decisions impacting their lives and livelihoods.

When Indigenous communities and leadership are telling you that they don't believe they've been consulted properly, you don't get the right to tell them they're wrong.

Will this minister commit to new consultation process, one developed with Indigenous communities to ensure that they have meaningful say?

Mrs. Guillemard: Our government has committed to doing proper consultations with communities impacted in all of our decisions, and we have made great strides to improve those communications, where in—previous governments, of which the member belonged, did not adhere to those consultation requirements.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we'll take no lessons from the member opposite and his party.

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

Mr. Lindsey: The Augmented Flow Program has been especially harmful to Indigenous communities. The fishing industry has suffered because of it. Since the implementation of the Augmented Flow Program, whitefish harvest decreased by 90 per cent, sturgeon population almost extinct.

This minister has failed to ensure Indigenous communities have a meaningful say before she granted the final licence.

Will the minister agree to giving impacted communities a meaningful say in the operation of all of these structures that may impact them going forward?

Mrs. Guillemard: I would invite the member to actually read the conditions that are placed on the final licences and he will note there that the conditions do reflect the concerns raised by many impacted Indigenous communities, which his—the previous NDP government did not place these conditions on the interim licences or any of the AFP.

So, again, I will take no lessons from the NDP or any of the party members on how to properly consult.

Thank you.

North End Sewage Treatment Plant Public-Private Partnership

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): The City of Winnipeg has already done a review and concluded that private operation of the North End water treatment plant is

not a feasible solution for Winnipeg. In a report to Executive Policy Committee, Moira Greer explains this type of P3 would essentially be privatization of the entire sewage-treatment system in the city of Winnipeg.

Despite this, the Pallister government is now withholding funding and approvals for the project, demanding that a private market sounding be taken for private and long-term operation of the North End treatment plant.

Why is the minister withholding approvals and again delaying this project?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I believe it's the honourable Minister of Central Services.

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Central Services): Again, we're—seems to be some misleading of the House here. We're not withholding dollars. We're not withholding funding.

We've been working with the City of Winnipeg and the federal government to advance the North End water pollution control centre to the ISIC and make sure that it is all documented and that it will be ready to move ahead when it's time for it to be all approved.

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

Ms. Naylor: Mr. Deputy Speaker, let's be clear. The Pallister government is pushing for the privatization of Winnipeg's entire sewage-treatment system, after the City of Winnipeg has concluded it's not feasible. In fact, the City's already gone to tender on the headworks.

The government's actions here are going to mean actions to address the—this environmental concern are once again pushed down the road. This government's delays to date have already driven up costs. These new demands are unreasonable and will unnecessarily delay this project up to another two years.

Will the minister withdraw their demand and allow this project to proceed?

Mr. Helwer: Well, the member proves that her question is incorrect. If the first one has gone to tender, obviously it's not privatization. There was no P3 involved in that tender.

We're constantly 'discussioning' with the City of Winnipeg what the best approach is to be for this situation, and there have been many, many successful P3 projects in the city of Winnipeg and across the province.

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

Ms. Naylor: In their first year in office, the Pallister government repealed The Public-Private Partnerships Transparency and Accountability Act. That legislation ensured a proper apples-to-apples comparison and full cost-counting for the use of P3s.

As we have seen in other jurisdictions, the full cost of P3s are often hidden. What looks like favourable terms up front masks long-term costs and lower service standards down the road, and a responsible government would be very careful in their application.

Instead, the Pallister government ripped up the legislation that requires accountability and they're now imposing private options after a project has gone to tender, ensuring yet more delays.

Why is the minister pushing P3s at this late date?

* (14:10)

Mr. Helwer: Again, the member misleads the House.

That particular piece of legislation gave the provincial government the last say in all agreements of this nature. And that's not incumbent upon a government that seeks to form partnerships, as we have with the City of Winnipeg.

I'm sure she's well aware of the Chief Peguis chair-trail or the rapid transit facility that's in action in Winnipeg here. Those were all P3s and very, very successful.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I just want to remind the members here in the Chamber, it's very hard to listen to anybody that's actually talking on virtual, and it's—the respect that you should be giving to your colleagues is important.

So let's actually be quieter when it comes to virtual answers and questions, please.

Manitoba Bridge Grant Program Availability to New Applicants

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): The pandemic has been difficult for small businesses. However, the Manitoba Bridge Grant program is not accepting new applicants.

Many businesses operated through the pandemic without government support.

Will the minister reopen the Manitoba Bridge Grant program to new applicants and provide support to the businesses who need it today?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Our government has been second to none to other governments, in terms of supports for business, including the Bridge Grant program, the gap program—all total: over \$671 million of support to small businesses.

We want to make sure businesses are supported during the pandemic. And that's exactly what this government has done.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Many businesses bought buildings and inventory, but they aren't eligible for the Bridge Grant program. This needs to change. Businesses that have operated through the pandemic need relief. They shouldn't have to go through the arbitrary appeal process.

Will the minister reopen the Manitoba Bridge Grant program for new applicants, yes or no?

Mr. Fielding: Our programs—business-support programs—have been easy to access. They've been accessible, they've been getting—giving money into peoples' hands quickly and very flexible.

All total, the Bridge Grant program has supported close to 15—count it, 15,000 businesses, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over 50,000 individual payments to businesses; 125,000 businesses in Manitoba have gotten support from this government.

We're going to continue to do programs like that to make sure businesses get to the other side of COVID-19.

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

Mr. Sandhu: For the minister, I think—I don't know if he knows or not, but the businesses who bought businesses after March 31st or who were operating after March 31st, they do not have an application process, so small businesses need relief.

The eligibility for a Bridge Grant program is too restrictive. The program is not accepting any further applications. Any appeal process is wasting time for business owners who need support now.

Will the minister reopen the Manitoba Bridge Grant program to the applicants?

Mr. Fielding: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our Bridge Grant program has been very flexible. Along the way, we made changes to the Bridge Grant program. We've included home-based businesses, which we think are

important. All totalled, close to \$671 million of support.

Even since the budget alone, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've added over \$71 million to the Bridge Grant program, \$3.5 million or \$3.6 million to the top-up for restaurants—we know they've been 'hurt' and—when they had to close—as well as over \$60 million to support sick leave programs for businesses as well as individuals.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's one of the most generous programs to support local businesses in the country.

COVID-19 Deaths in PCHs Request for Independent Review

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): The Premier's been saying Manitoba has fewer cases of COVID than Saskatchewan, but Manitoba has twice—twice—the death rate, despite having similar numbers of cases, and when you look at long-term-care homes, the situation is even worse.

I table statistics from the national 'institudios'—Institute on Aging that show that Manitoba had four times as many COVID cases in long-term care compared to Saskatchewan and four times as many deaths. The tragedy at Maples represents a fraction of all those who died.

Will this government immediately convene a review by independent researchers to examine all care-home deaths so we can learn from our mistakes to ensure nothing like this ever happens again, and possibly even inform our third-wave response?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): There was an interesting interview with an epidemiologist from the University of Saskatchewan on CPAC on Saturday night, I believe, talking about the fundamental differences between Saskatchewan's and Manitoba's environment, talking about the concentration of population that exists within Winnipeg and how that is higher than any other province, in terms of that concentrated population, and talking about the honest aspects of what has led to many of the challenges of COVID that are different in Manitoba than they are in Saskatchewan.

We both face these challenges, and all provinces are not the same. And the reality, of course, is in Saskatchewan they have a different dynamic, in many respects, with a number of mid-size communities spread around the province. We don't have that here so much. So I think that's been a major factor that

epidemiologists have pointed to in terms of the causative relationship between COVID and the pandemic's effects on seniors homes in the city of Winnipeg, in particular.

So I'm open to the ideas the member has raised, but I tell him that that data is readily available and numerous studies, I'm sure, will ensue and are already under way.

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

Mr. Lamont: A year ago this week, Ontario released its report into the tragedy in their care homes in the first wave. In response, Manitoba Liberals asked this government to set up rapid response teams for the second wave to cover code-COVID outbreaks in three-up to three care homes at once, but our suggestion was dismissed until November.

Canada had the worst death toll in long-term care of any country in the OECD. And in the second wave, Manitoba's numbers are the worst of the worst. Today, Manitoba's third wave means we have the highest case count in North America.

For the sake of responsibility, accountability and learning from a tragedy so we don't repeat it, will this government ensure a full, independent review of why so many Manitobans died of COVID in long-term care?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I can only say to the member that, of course, being in the middle of the third wave is bad news, and he might want to also consider that we have taken proactive action and we continue to and that we're all on this team together.

He might also give credit where credit's due to our vax team for moving vaccines out, for working co-operatively with First Nations communities and making sure that we also got vaccines—double vaccines into the bulk of our seniors—over 90 per cent of our seniors in care homes—and our front-line workers.

He might also want to give credit to our public health advisers for doing the considerable work they have done to help keep the third wave delayed here for actually more than two months versus as—other jurisdictions. And I think that that is an important thing, to give credit where credit's due, not just to try to seize the moment of the day.

We have bent the COVID curve together as Manitobans. Now we have the opportunity to adhere to the health orders, to get vaccinated and to shorten the third wave, and that is what we need to do now.

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

Persons With Disabilities COVID-19 Triage Protocols

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): While Saskatchewan early on prioritized individuals with disabilities to get a vaccine to protect them against COVID, Manitoba delayed and delayed.

Now, when hospitalizations and IC use for COVID patients have almost doubled in the last four weeks, people with disabilities want assurance that they will not be triaged to their disadvantage if resources are limited.

Why is the Premier not being open and honest with Manitobans by providing his triage protocol, as Quebec has done? Will he assure individuals with disabilities that they will not be discriminated against and provide his triage protocol today?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Quite the opposite from the member's assertion, we have placed incredible emphasis on protecting those who are living with a disability in our province.

We've introduced support programs like no other province, I am told, with direct financial aid going to those individuals. We've taken extreme measures to make sure that vaccine availability is enhanced for all those who have a mobility challenge. We've set up rapid access clinics. We've set up fast-moving groups of vaccinators to go out to the various areas around the province and have reached out to those who are dealing with mobility challenges to make sure they have access, not exclusively in seniors homes either, but in other venues as well.

And so what the member raises is an issue that we take very seriously and have been working on very effectively throughout this pandemic.

* (14:20)

Internet Services in Rural-Remote Manitoba Xplornet Partnership Announcement

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): The COVID-19 pandemic has showed us the importance of broadband connectivity and having access to critical and timely information and services no matter where Manitobans reside.

Can the Minister of Central Services please update the House on a new partnership with Xplornet to improve connectivity to hundreds of rural, remote and Indigenous communities throughout Manitoba.

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Central Services): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to my colleague, the MLA for Dauphin, for that great question.

Last week, I was pleased to announce our government's partnership with Xplornet Communications.

This partnership will provide more than 125,000 unserved and underserved Manitobans with reliable high-speed Internet services. That includes more than 30 First Nations and 270 rural and northern communities.

With this agreement, the government will make some of our unused dark fibre available to Xplornet. This will expand broadband and cellphone service as early as this fall to some Manitobans.

Our government is fulfilling our commitment to develop a provincial broadband strategy alongside Xplornet to build a much more connected—

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

Manitoba Infrastructure Department Request to Fill Position Vacancies

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Deputy Speaker, employees at Manitoba Infrastructure and the Vehicle and Equipment Management Agency work to keep our public infrastructure strong, safe and secure. Yet MI has reported 636 fewer employees than they had when this government first came to power.

Meanwhile, VEMA reported 82 vacancies for full-time staff positions that continue to go unfilled. That's over 700 vital, good-paying jobs that this minister has either cut or left in limbo.

Instead of working to fill these positions and ensure that Manitoba has a strong economic recovery, this minister instead has focused on cuts, contracting out and privatization.

Will the minister explain why he refuses to support good jobs in Manitoba by keeping these positions unfilled? *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure): I'd like to point out to the Manitoba Legislature that our government this year is going to spend \$630 million on our highways, a historic amount of money that has never been spent before in the history of this province. I would point out that 20 years ago, in twenty–2001–2002, the NDP spent \$93 million. Even adjusted for

inflation, that's not even one sixth of what we're going to be spending this year.

Our government is building Manitoba where the NDP mothballed Manitoba. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

The honourable member for Concordia, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Wiebe: And it falls to the workers, who are being asked to do more with less, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The minister and this government intend to drive our public services into the ground, and this is an example of that. In fact, thanks to this government's agenda of cuts and privatization, MGEU has been forced to file a grievance against this government due to their deliberate decision to starve MI and VEMA of the resources that they need.

This minister's refusal to fill these positions and instead privatize their department is in direct violation of these workers' rights in their collective agreement.

Why won't the minister respect these workers by making sure they have the tools and the team that they need to get the job done?

Mr. Schuler: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do respect all workers and all Manitobans. In fact, in the last two elections ago, we promised that we would reduce the PST, and we did that. The money that was taken by the NDP off of kitchen tables across the province, we put back. In fact, last week, we announced another commitment that we are living up to, and that is putting another \$15 million back on the tables of Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP went into Manitoba's kitchens and took 15 million tables—\$15 million off the tables of Manitobans. We are putting that money back. That's what we do as a government and as a department; we respect people, and we're putting the money back on their tables.

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

Mr. Wiebe: I notice the minister isn't contesting the numbers: 636 fewer employees, 82 vacancies in VEMA. These actions are straight out of this government's privatization playbook: carve up and restructure our essential public services, then starve them of the resources—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: —that they need.

We're in the middle of a pandemic, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Manitobans need good jobs and strong public services now more than ever. Instead of working with those public employees to ensure infrastructure stays strong and safe, this government is forcing them to file grievances and to worry what cuts will come next.

Will the minister commit to supporting Manitoba Infrastructure and VEMA by filling the vacancies, supporting good jobs and keeping our infrastructure public?

Mr. Schuler: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite talked about investing in the province of Manitoba. Our government is going to invest \$630 million into the highways and the infrastructure of this province.

I would suggest to the members opposite that they move their Lexuses aside, they move their birdbaths aside. We are building more bridges and constructing more roads and repairing more highways that were left derelict under the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, we have \$630 million. Never before have we ever spent that kind of money in the province of Manitoba. This is a government of hope. We understand there is a day after tomorrow when COVID will leave us and we will be rebuilding and building a province that's strong and ready to embrace tomorrow.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Menstrual Product Availability

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

This petition is signed by Elizabeth Connelly, Megan Catlin, Dawson Doucet and many more Manitobans.

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

Epilepsy Treatment

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

(1) One in 10 Manitobans will have a seizure in their lifetime, and the incidence of epilepsy in the Indigenous populations is double the national average. Epilepsy occurs just as often as breast and lung cancer world-wide.

(2) COVID-19 has cancelled epilepsy surgeries booked for Manitoba patients elsewhere in Canada because they cannot receive this standardly routine surgery in the province.

(3) Manitoba is the only province which has an inappropriate hospital environment to perform most epilepsy surgeries because it conducts epilepsy monitoring on an orthopedics ward with orthopedic staff, instead of an epilepsy ward with trained epilepsy staff.

(4) Patients in Manitoba have to wait three or more years for epilepsy surgery, which has resulted in them having to continue to suffer uncontrolled seizures, struggle with mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, headaches, general poor health and even death, in some cases

* (14:30)

(5) Since an epilepsy neurologist resigned in 2012, more neurologists have resigned due to dealing with old and failing equipment, which has resulted in sending patients out of province, costing the provincial government millions of dollars.

(6) Epilepsy surgery is extremely effective, resulting in patients requiring less medication, sometimes becoming seizure-free, enabling them to return to work, drive and live fulfilling lives.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to open a genuine, four-bed epilepsy unit, similar to the one recently opened in Saskatchewan, at the Health Sciences Centre, with modern equipment and adequate epilepsy neurosurgeons, neurologists, nurses, clerks and technicians.

(2) To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to formally establish an epilepsy program to ensure that all epilepsy staff can deliver care to patients in a co-ordinated fashion.

This has been signed by P. Dianne Smith, Gord Smith, Shane St. Pierre, Kelly Kaufman, Marena Weir [*phonetic*] and many Manitobans.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) One in 10 Manitobans will have a seizure in their lifetime, and the incidence of epilepsy in the Indigenous populations is double the national average. Epilepsy occurs just as often as breast and lung cancer world-wide.

(2) COVID-19 has cancelled epilepsy surgeries booked for Manitoba patients elsewhere in Canada because they cannot receive this standardly routine surgery in the province.

(3) Manitoba is the only province which has an inappropriate hospital environment to perform most epilepsy surgeries because it conducts epilepsy monitoring on an orthopedics ward with orthopedic staff, instead of an epilepsy ward with trained epilepsy staff.

(4) Patients in Manitoba have to wait three or more years for epilepsy surgery, which has resulted in them having to continue to suffer uncontrolled seizures, struggle with mental health issues, including

depression, anxiety, headaches, general poor health and even death, in some cases.

(5) Since an epilepsy neurologist resigned in 2012, more neurologists have resigned due to dealing with old and failing equipment, which has resulted in sending patients out of province, costing the provincial government millions of dollars.

(6) Epilepsy surgery is extremely effective, resulting in patients requiring less medication, sometimes becoming seizure-free, enabling them to return to work, drive and live fulfilling lives.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to open a genuine, four-bed epilepsy unit, similar to the one recently opened in Saskatchewan, at the Health Sciences Centre, with modern equipment and adequate epilepsy neurosurgeons, neurologists, nurses, clerks and technicians.

(2) To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to formally establish an epilepsy program to ensure that all epilepsy staff can deliver care to patients in a co-ordinated fashion.

This has been signed by Yvonne Berthelette, Barb Fox, Amanda Downing [*phonetic*] and many other Manitobans.

Cochlear Implant Program

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Signed by Denise Davis, Dennis Davis, Christine Davis and many, many other Manitobans.

Diagnostic Testing Accessibility

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

The background of 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 are able to give their samples at the time of the doctor visit.

We petition the legislative 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.

* (14:40)

This petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Any further petitions?

Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Could you please call for this afternoon report stage on Bill 71.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been announced by the honourable Government House Leader that we're going to be on report stage amendments for Bill 71, The Education Property Tax Reduction Act.

REPORT STAGE AMENDMENTS

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The first stage amendment is the honourable member for Fort Garry.

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): I move, seconded the the honourable member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare),

THAT Bill 71 be amended in Clause 2 by adding the following after the proposed subsection 12.2(2): It says,

Restriction on paying rebates

12.2(3) For the 2022-2023 fiscal year of the government and for each fiscal year after that, a school tax rebate under this Part may be paid

(a) only after the government has tabled in the Assembly a budget and supporting estimates for expenditure for the government reporting entity for the fiscal year; and

(b) only if the estimates of the expenditure show, on a per student basis, the amount to be voted for operating support for Manitoba's K-12 education system exceeds the amount that was voted for the purpose in the preceding fiscal year by at least the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index for Manitoba (All-items) for that year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. I just wanted to—okay. It's been moved by the honourable member for Fort Garry, seconded by the honourable member for Transcona,

THAT Bill 71 be amended in Clause 2 by adding—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Dispense? Dispense.

Is it the will of the House to actually have the report stage amendment be written based—in Hansard based on what was read—what was written in—as printed? *[Agreed]*

THAT Bill 71 be amended in Clause 2 by adding the following after the proposed subsection 12.2(2):

Restriction on paying rebates

12.2(3) For the 2022-2023 fiscal year of the government and for each fiscal year after that, a school tax rebate under this Part may be paid

(a) only after the government has tabled in the Assembly a budget and supporting estimates of expenditure for the government reporting entity for the fiscal year; and

(b) only if the estimates of expenditure show that, on a per student basis, the amount to be voted for operating support for Manitoba's K-12 education system exceeds the amount that was voted for that purpose in the preceding fiscal year by at least the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index for Manitoba (All-items) for that year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry—oh, just one second here. The report stage amendment is in order.

Mr. Wasyliv: So this first amendment this afternoon basically would put some safeguards in place under Bill 71. Basically, in order for the government to, you know, issue these rebates, they would be required to meet several preconditions first.

The first precondition is that a budget and supported Estimates of expenditure for the government reporting entity in the fiscal year has actually been tabled. And (2) that it's absolutely clear from the Estimates that on a per student basis that the operating budget for Manitoba's K-to-12 education system exceeds the amount granted for the preceding fiscal year by at least the percentage increase in the consumer price index for Manitoba from that year.

And why this amendment is so important is that these safeguards would be in place in order to protect the public in several ways. To begin with, governments need to be transparent and accountable, and we have seen with this government that they haven't always been so, and they certainly haven't been committed to transparency and accountability.

We have seen over the past few years that they have broken with convention after convention of long-standing best practices in this building by providing less and less financial information to the Legislature. It's been the subject of numerous points of privilege.

And this is a basic expectation of democratic governance that all Manitobans would expect as a minimum, that a government would properly file a budget with supported Estimates of expenditure. And it's very telling about where we've gone as a province that that no longer is the expectation of this government. And they're really swimming upstream when it comes to the political culture in Manitoba and they don't feel that they're governed by that.

And the purpose of having them release these numbers is the bottom line here. We can then see, as a province, how much the government plans to spend on education, and we would be able to see whether, in fact, they are decreasing their spending from the previous year. And we know, given this track record of this government over the past five years, since this government took office in 2016, that the education system has been cut in real dollars—7 per cent reduction in funding.

We have education inflation that amounts to about 3 per cent a year, and not only has this government never ever come anywhere close to reaching that, they haven't even met the consumer price index increase for inflation, which is about half that number. And this amendment would at least provide that minimal safeguard. It wouldn't even cover everything that the education system needs per year but at least would staunch the bleeding and at least provide some measure of security for the system.

Because at the end of the day, the plan from this government is to reduce by \$500 million, through the education property tax, over two years, money that was going to be used for education. And that's fine. It's certainly ideological that they want to do that. But what parents are asking us, and reasonably so, is where is that money going to come from? Is it going to be replaced? And there seems to be no plan in place to replace that money, which is deeply concerning to parents and teachers alike.

So, you know, if your goal is to give tax breaks to wealthy landowners, what does that mean for children's school? We just have to look to Alberta and Calgary, and are we going to have a Calgary-style education system in Manitoba? If you walk into a Calgary high school, they cram 47 students in a classroom.

Nobody in their right mind would think that that's quality public education, and we certainly don't do that in Manitoba. But if you cut \$500 million out of the education system, we're going to start.

And we saw this year, with further cuts to the education system that the current government is doing, that in the Pembina Trails School Division, that—one of my school divisions in my riding—they were talking and have increased class sizes in high schools. They're not at 47 students yet, but I believe they're over 40, and I stand to be corrected. And again, I think most parents would say that's too much.

We can look at Fort McMurray a few years ago to see what's coming for Manitoba. They had a budget shortfall of about \$1 million, and, of course, the government—the Conservative government of the day had taken their power away to tax and, you know, had been underfunding the education system, as Conservatives do. It's not something they value.

And so this \$1 million that they—they couldn't raise taxes and the government wouldn't give them. So their solution was they announced that they were going to cancel schools for Friday. So children in Fort McMurray were going to school Monday to Thursday and they weren't going to school on Fridays. And the reason why is that they didn't want their bus system to run on Fridays, and if they cancelled Friday schools, they didn't have to pay for buses, and that saved \$1 million. That's what a chronically underfunded school system looks like.

So, you know, in Manitoba, we have more students, we have more needs and we have less funding. We know that child poverty is back on the rise in Manitoba, and this is the No. 1 reason that holds students back from achievement.

We all know this—it's a cliché in education—but it takes resources to bring down those barriers to education. And if this government doesn't value student success, if they don't value the eradication of poverty—in fact, the opposite's true. This is a government that is elitist and believes in throwing up barriers to education—post-secondary, be it public school—because, you know, as long as their wealthy financial donors are taken care of, that seems to be the extent of their concern.

* (14:50)

So where is this money going to come from? This government has never said. Our hapless Finance Minister says, well, through growth.

Well, if you cut jobs the way that you do, you're going to tank the economy the way that you have and it's going to be harder to actually grow our way out of this when you impose austerity solutions. Austerity does the absolute opposite to growing an economy. It shrinks an economy, and there will be less money for education.

So the solution here is found in this amendment. This is going to provide parents and teachers with certainty. There would be no further cuts to taxes for the wealthiest Manitobans and largest corporate land owners without first ensuring that there's stable and sustainable funding in the education system.

So there's that trade-off that we're going to have tax fairness and we're going to have a functional education system, and if the government doesn't want a fair tax system, they won't be able to impose it on Manitobans.

So if the Province is unable or unwilling to fund education system properly, then they would not be able to reward their campaign donors with more tax giveaways. And so if they want to reward their campaign donors, then they have to reward Manitobans by having proper, sustainable funding for a public education system.

So this is a way that Manitobans will be protected by this government or from this government, and that their children can go to a proper functioning school where they're not crammed in with 46 other students or that, you know, they're forced to only go to school four days a week.

And I'm really hoping that—I think this is a very moderate amendment that we're putting forward here, and I'm really hoping that the PCs actually show that they support public education and that they're prepared to protect the system and that they're not all about just rewarding their rich campaign donors and those of the four-home and six-car-garage set.

Because I think if they vote against this, we're going to see what they truly value, and it certainly won't be Manitoba's children or the public education system.

So, thanks again, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I would like to thank my colleague, the MLA from Fort Garry, for bringing forth this important amendment. And the reason, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this is a very important amendment is because we know, coming

out of the pandemic, that there is going to be a crushing call for services for kids.

I will tell you, where we're going to finally reach the ability to have full-time students back into the classroom, the system demand for services will be immense. And I'll tell you specifically where these services will be needed.

The first and foremost will be for clinical services. We know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that clinical services right now are not being accessed to the same level that they've been accessed during a regular school year. We know that typically, students and families that require clinical services have had a number of challenges with the pandemic and how it's impacted their child's learning while they've been at school.

This amendment will also ensure that a proper plan for coming out of the pandemic for schools is enacted and is put in place. One that will require a tremendous amount of not only human resources for also financial resources from the provincial government.

This will be seen not only as a clear signal to the people of Manitoba that this government cares about its kids and cares about its families, but it will also be seen as, you know, to them taking seriously the need to ensure that services are available in a consistent, predictable manner.

What this does, this amendment, is ensures that there is funding and accountable funding. I will tell you, looking through the most recent Estimates books that have been provided to this House by this government, we will find and you will find, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a paucity of information—information that isn't available that we can't track to ensure that when a government budgets a certain amount of dollars spent for education, that we can track it and actually see that it has been spent, as opposed to being underspent.

And we know that public education as—is seen not only as a public good but as one of the top two things that a provincial government provides its citizens: (1) being properly funded health care, (2) properly funded public education.

And so with this amendment, it kind of puts to rest those questions that parents and other stakeholders in Manitoba have been asking about regarding Bill 71 and the property tax rebate. Where are we going to find \$500 million over two years to cover the cost of this rebate?

Many parents and many stakeholders in education have asked, you know, where—what's the priority here? Is the priority ensuring that we have a properly funded system coming out of the pandemic, coming out of these uncertain times, or is the priority trying to find money to cover some tax credit for people that are going to disproportionately benefit from this?

And there are many questions around where are we going to find these dollars when we have unpredictability not only in the school system but also in our economy. How will it recover? And if we're saying that the economy will, through growth, will provide that extra \$500 million for school financing, well, that is, indeed, difficult to track. It's even difficult to see in some of the numbers that are provided by this government.

And so with this particular amendment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we'll be able to have a clear indication that not only are we going to meet the needs of the system, based not just on a CPI piece, right, which is the bare minimum to ensure that we keep the bare minimum of services for our kids in this province, but also one that will ensure that we have, and we'll have to have a plan for, and how we cover that plan coming out of the pandemic to ensure that kids are properly supported in our public schools.

And this is the piece that's really important here because so far we haven't heard or even seen a road map for how the education system is going to recover; not only the system but more importantly, the kids, right? What plan is there right now in place? Is there any communication in place to saying, from this government, where are our priorities for public education coming out of the pandemic? And they're going to be different than just having some general ones because we know that there's going to be a tremendous demand.

I know, in speaking to some high school students, there's a tremendous amount of uncertainty around some of the courses that will be available to them, options, right, at the high school level; ones that they certainly have an interest in taking, such as coding, such as being able to, you know—what it means to be an entrepreneur in Manitoba. These are type of courses that kids are asking for, and we need to ensure that there's—in that plan coming out of the pandemic—this type of planning so that kids can prepare, right? And so these are very, very important pieces.

And the other probably most important thing here is transparency and accountability. We need to know that when a government publishes its numbers, when

it says its going to spend X amount of dollars on a particular service, that it, indeed, does that, especially when it comes to something like public education because we know we're going to require tremendous investment for our students and for our youth to ensure that they have the services that they require.

And all Manitobans really expect a properly funded, fully sustainable public education system because we know how foundational that is, not only to the economy but also to us as a community and to us as individuals here in Manitoba because many, many members in this House attended a public school, a properly funded one under the NDP governments. And you will see that—how many of us have benefitted from that. Even later on in our careers, you are seeing a lot of that proper investment has resulted in—and many of us engaged in some outstanding debate.

* (15:00)

And so just as a reminder to members that education is not a line item cost. Education is about having the proper human resources to educate the young people of Manitoba, to ensure that whenever there is a demand for services—be they clinical, occupational therapy, physiotherapy; be they speech and language; be it psychological assessments; be it the need to be in a classroom, say, from K to 3, that is—that does not have over 24 students in it, that has early years classrooms capped at 20—because we know, and we know as research shows, that when you cap a class size from K to 3 at 20 or fewer students, you're able to provide the services so that later on in that student's career they won't be in demand of other services because they were properly built on a foundation, early on, in K to 3, that gave them the confidence to not only be lifelong learners, but also know that they are a confident learner and able to tackle the challenges that are in a typical Manitoba classroom and do that with not only a great deal of competence, but also knowing that they have the support not just of their teachers but also of their school district and also of their government.

So here, again, is an opportunity for members opposite to take a look at this amendment and say, you know what, this is an amendment that makes sense. This is an amendment that only—not only builds in accountability, but also allows us to plan for coming out of the pandemic where we can provide the very best education system for our students and their families.

At this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'll conclude my remarks.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm going to put a few words on the record on this report stage amendment. It deals with Bill 71, and it deals with restrictions on paying rebates, and there are two.

That the rebates (a) will only be repaid after the government has tabled in the budget—in the Assembly a budget and supporting Estimates of expenditure for the government reporting entity for the fiscal year—and this, we are certainly in agreement with. We believe that it is important that the government, whatever government it may be, be accountable and that the budget and supporting Estimates of expenditure should clearly need to be tabled early on.

The second part or restriction, in section (b), is more problematic. It says, only if the Estimates of expenditure show that on a per student basis the amount to be voted for operating support for Manitoba's K-to-12 education system exceeds the amount that was voted for that purpose in the preceding fiscal year by at least the percentage increase in the consumer price index for Manitoba for that year.

Now, let us look at an example. The introduction of the rebate, which is, in this year, \$248 million, this will create, immediately, a shortfall of \$248 million, going forward, to the education system. Clearly, that shortfall of \$248 million needs to be made up, as well as the consumer price index adjustment.

And yet, what this bill—or report stage amendment says, it only allows for the—or accounts for the percentage increase in the consumer price index for Manitoba for that year. And so this amendment would be \$248 million, plus consumer price index on that number, short. And so it is very problematic to have a report stage amendment which will leave the education system \$248 million short. We can't support such a concept that would leave our education system so far behind. And so we can't support this amendment.

But before I conclude, I do want to put a little bit on the record in terms of the importance of education of—and of education funding. Ensuring that our children—and in some cases, adults—have the education that they need is of vital importance, not only for our children but for the future of our society.

And what has become clear is that the government, in its approach, seems to want to standardize everything and forgets that each child is an individual and that each child has their own individual needs, and that school boards are really best at being able to

adapt the measures that the school board takes to support schools so that individual needs can be met.

When you standardize a system for the whole province, it will be far harder to ensure that the individual needs, particularly of children who are at higher risk, who are struggling in school; particularly for these children they need to adequately be supported. And we have sadly seen, though the government's rhetoric time and time again says they're going to do something, time and time again they fall through.

I think that it was Joe Biden who said: Don't tell me your values. Show me your budget and I will tell you what your values are. And what we can tell from looking at the budget that has been put forward by the Conservatives is that they don't adequately value schools and school boards. And this is a real problem moving forward.

So we certainly can't support the whole Bill 71. We can support in this report stage amendment clause (a), but we can't support clause (b) because it would leave schools—K-to-12 schools \$248 million, plus the consumer price index, short.

Those are my comments, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you for this opportunity to put them on the record.

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): This report stage amendment (1) is an amendment put forward by the honourable member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) that prevents the government from issuing tax rebates if they have already cut funding for education. So the wording of the amendment is that a school tax rebate may be paid only after the government proves to Manitobans that the budget for Education is not cut compared to the previous year's budget.

The reason why we need to have an amendment like this is because for the first time in a generation, education funding is not keeping up with enrolment—which is a growth about 1 per cent—and a growth in the economy. According to the consumer price index in 2021, there is a 1.6 per cent increase.

So for the fifth year in a row, this government has made a de facto cut to education in 2021-2022 of about 0.5 per cent; that was from a news release on February 5th, 2021 on the government's website.

And then the NDP uncovered documents which show that the Pallister government made an absolute reduction of \$4.2 million to education funding this school year. And again, this is the first time in the

last 15 years that education funding was in the negative in absolute terms.

* (15:10)

We also have the documents that show a nearly \$3-million cut to teachers' salaries, meaning that there are fewer teachers and larger class sizes. In 2016, the Pallister government said that they believe that small class sizes improve learning, especially for young students. That was from April 14, 2016, but they're not putting the correct and sufficient amount for budgeting that would ensure that our children in Manitoba have access to these class sizes.

The reason why we are asking for this government to accept our amendment and to agree to the amendment, to vote with this amendment, is because of this government's record in cutting education since they came into power. Since then, in 2016, they have cut education in real dollars by 7.6 per cent. Certainly, this PC government's funding for education has been below the rate of inflation and also below the rate of growth in student population.

Two Christmases ago, I attended a seniors party at the Canada inns near Polo Park. There were seniors there from my constituency that, you know, usually attend the Brooklands Active Living Centre and activities there. There were seniors there from the Bluebird Lodge seniors residence, and seniors there from Westlands at Oddy and seniors that are active in the Keewatin/Inkster Neighbourhood Resource Council.

And I gave them an update, you know, after some raffles and after having dinner together. You know, they're very, very up-to-date with the news and with what governments are doing, and we even have a few seniors there that actually watch question period. And so they're news buffs, and whenever they get to see me in the past, they would always ask me what's going on in the House.

And so I told them about, you know, different bills that we had in front of us and about future plans that we'd just been hearing about. And I told them about the future plans at that time because it was almost—it was over two years ago—about this tax rebate for education—for the education portion of their property taxes.

I told them that the rough low estimates that are about a loss of about 500 to 800 million dollars and that it might be even more over time about what would be lost from the revenue that is collected from the education portion of property taxes. And together we had a discussion about what that 500 to 800 million

dollars pays for—everything from nutrition programs, adult crossing guards, infrastructure upgrades, you know, school staff like the education assistants that provide crucial support to students and to teachers, inclusion support staff and programming.

And the seniors and their families that were there at this party, they asked, well, how will education be paid for, then, without collecting the education portion of property taxes? And I told them the truth, which was that I wasn't sure.

Now, this amendment would help me answer that question to these seniors who care about their grandchildren's education, because I'm hoping that I'll be able to see those folks again, you know, once this pandemic is more under control.

And it's not just my friends there at the Westlands at Oddy and Brooklands Active Living Centre in Weston that are asking the same question, how are these funds going to be made up for? Teachers that I know, education assistants and many, many parents are also concerned about how hundreds of millions of dollars in lost revenue will be made up.

And this amendment, put forward by the honourable member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv), would ensure that Manitobans would know what the budget for education would be through a tabled budget and supporting Estimates of expenditure for that fiscal year.

And this amendment, put forth by the honourable member for Fort Garry, would ensure that the government's tabled expenditures for Manitoba's K-to-12 education would be noted on a per student basis, and this amendment would ensure that the government is not shortchanging Manitoba's public education system by making sure that the budgeted amount would account for inflation by any percentage increase in the consumer price index for Manitoba for all items for that year.

Again, the reason that we are asking for such a specific amendment is because of this PC government's track record, since 2016, of funding education below the rate of growth in student population and below the rate of inflation.

Manitobans want a strong and thriving public education system for our children.

In general, the NDP agree that schools across the province should be funded by the Province and not through revenues collected by school divisions through property taxes. So—but by taking away

revenue from that source, it must be made up and buffered at the provincial level.

The honourable member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw) has put forth this amendment to ensure that the Province will make up for hundreds of millions of losses—millions of dollars in losses that school division communities will no longer be collecting from property taxes.

Now, the Minister of Education (Mr. Cullen) has stated multiple times that the Province will be making up the shortfall of hundreds of millions of dollars, and supporting this document will show that the PCs do intend to somehow make up for this shortfall. And it will give community members—like those seniors that I've spoken to, like the teachers and the education assistants and many parents who are very, very nervous about what this massive change is going to mean for our schools and for our kids.

We know that investing in public education is so important to our communities, investing in our schools. I am not a very, very emotional person; I—my husband was the one who cried at our wedding, not me. And before our vows, he said to me, you have a heart of stone, because he was crying and I didn't even shed a single tear. I don't cry at movies and things like that.

But I did cry the first time I went to Pinkham School, which is on 765 Pacific Ave. in Winnipeg. I, you know, had—was one of my first visits after I got newly elected and I was there to meet the principal, Principal Val Mowez. And, you know, I was there with my constituent assistant Rey Sangalang. And Tito Rey, you know, parked and dropped me off and then he was going to meet me around.

And I was trying to walk around—trying to find where the entrance of the school was, and I noticed that there was no playground at that school. They just had markings on the concrete like, you know, four-square and things like that, but no playground. And I said to Tito Rey, am—are we in the right place? Like, why does this school not have a playground? And he's like, well, it should have a playground. And we're looking around: no, there wasn't a playground.

And so one of the first things that I asked Principal Val was, I noticed you guys don't have a playground; why is that? And she said, well, you know, we have—

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

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): It's an honour to put a few words on record in support of my colleague, member from Fort Garry, his amendment—report stage amendment No. 1 which is—I would like to support this amendment brought forward which prevents the government from issuing tax rebates if they have cut funding to education.

So with restrictions on paying rebates, I'm going ahead and putting some words on record to support this.

First of all, just to put on record, I wanted to read the restrictions on paying rebates. It specifically says for the 2022-2023 fiscal year of the government and for each fiscal year after that, a school tax rebate under this part may be paid (a) only if a government has tabled in the Assembly a budget in reporting Estimates of expenditure for the government reporting entity for the fiscal year; and (b) only if the Estimates of expenditure show that on a per student basis, the amount to be voted for operating support for Manitoba's K-to-12 education system exceeds the amount that was voted for that purpose in that preceding fiscal year by at least a percentage increase in the consumer price index for Manitoba for that year.

* (15:20)

So, just by going over the original bill that was proposed and speaking on a few amendments—and this is my second opportunity—but there's still some questions that are left unanswered, such as: What is this government's concrete plan for creating the economic growth needed to make up for this \$900-million shortfall?

Another question that we can ask is can the minister assure Manitobans that their children's education will remain fully funded even if the—even if economic growth does not make up for this \$9-million loss in revenue?

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this tax cut and into—which will take away revenue from our education system for our children—this tax cut is a bad idea. As a parent, I'm severely concerned about my own children's education. I have one going to Margaret Barbour Collegiate Institute with the Kelsey School Division and I have one child going to Oscar Lathlin Collegiate on Opaskwayak Cree Nation. I—just by talking to many parents, seeing teachers and the amount of interest just on bad—regarding bad legislation brought forward by this government—example, Bill 64—it's nice to see that people are concerned and

want to be informed about two certain bad bills that are coming from the other side of the House.

The question is, where's this shortfall in revenue going to come from? Like I tried to explain last time, this tax is a wolf in sheep's clothing. This is not helping us. This tax cut will only diminish our children's education where, here in the northern region, Kelsey School Division, we're already are struggling.

You know, I can't imagine—this seems like it's—this is a three-layered cut to my school division where my children go to school and where I have a wonderful school just down the block, half a block away from me.

So whenever I hear about cuts to education, I think about the children going back and forth as they walk in front of my house, back and forth to home. I think about myself, too, as a property owner. I think about commercial property owners. Okay. So we're going to be saving these folks money, right? So, in the long run, where is our investment going to go? In our pockets for maybe one day?

Or should we just get rid of this bad idea and continue funding our schools? Because property owners, commercial—and commercial property owners are going to be needing health-care aides. We're going to be needing doctors. We're going to be needing teachers. We're going to be needing people in the trades. But by removing even more money underneath our school divisions, those goals are going to be diminishing, you know. It's going to be harder for our kids to reach whatever standards that post-secondary, college may have in place. That's what I'm afraid for.

Another example that I'm afraid for is the school, Mary Duncan School. Member for Notre Dame (Ms. Marcelino) brought up an emotional story about crying when entering a school, which was like a poor school, and that's what I did too when I entered Mary Duncan School, when the principal and school counsellor reached out to my office to ask what kind of other resources can we provide our children. And like I said, Mary Duncan School has a very special place in my heart because that's where our children go to school when the other schools give up on them; they're either suspended, expelled.

So, we have these children, who are 95 per cent living or been touched by the CFS system, and by providing a safe place for these children, who leave, sometimes, homes that have trauma in them, addictions issues, CFS, Mary Duncan School is that place of safety. And by just removing any kind of revenue,

or should I say, even more revenue, from our education system, I'm afraid for these children; that they'll be lost. A school such as this can lose even more funding, maybe lose their space in our school division. There's a reason why we have this type of school open for our children.

For example, the K-to-12 education review, which I call a sham review—with mental health and poverty, that was the two top issues that were discussed when I was in a room full of educators—which was an honour. It was everyone from Flin Flon to Cranberry, The Pas, everywhere. It was really nice to be in a room full of them, with our educators.

And I just wanted to share that, you know, when we're talking about—with this amendment, you know, by taking away revenue from our schools and into the pockets of a few, you know, only for short 'term'—short term is a mistake because we need to look at long term.

And, in regards to providing funding for our school, child poverty needs to be addressed. It's—I think these topics are going to fall even way more behind once the issue of providing any kind of resources to get resources to battle these issues that I'm pretty sure every school in Manitoba has to deal with.

And so with that, you know, I just feel like this government has no respect for our teachers and our students, again, exemplified by what section 71 is trying to propose. And that's why I'm here, to put a few words on record to support my colleague's amendments in regards to the rebate cheques to Manitobans, which, again, I think is just another political ploy by the other folks on the other side of the House, and I think we should be showing more respect to our children and our teachers and staff, especially during a pandemic.

This is, to me, like a third layer cut. You know, it needs to stop.

Ekosi.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Any further speakers?

Is the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the amendment, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

Recorded Vote

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): A recorded vote, please, Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A recorded vote has been requested. Call in the members.

* (15:30)

The question before the House is report stage amendment No. 1 for Bill 71, brought forward by the honourable member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv).

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Yeas

Adams, Altomare, Asagwara, Brar, Bushie, Fontaine, Kinew, Lathlin, Lindsey, Maloway, Marcelino, Moses, Naylor, Sala, Sandhu, Smith (Point Douglas), Wasyliv, Wiebe.

Nays

Clarke, Cox, Cullen, Eichler, Ewasko, Fielding, Friesen, Gerrard, Goertzen, Gordon, Guenter, Guillemard, Helwer, Isleifson, Johnson, Johnston, Lagassé, Lagimodiere, Lamont, Lamoureux, Martin, Michaleski, Micklefield, Morley-Lecomte, Nesbitt, Pedersen, Reyes, Schuler, Smith (Lagimodière), Smook, Squires, Stefanson, Teitsma, Wharton, Wishart, Wowchuk.

Deputy Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): Yeas 18, Nays 36.

* (15:40)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The motion is accordingly defeated.

* * *

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now we'll call on report stage amendment No. 2.

Mr. Wasyliv: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare),

THAT Bill 71 be amended in Clause 9(1)(a) in the proposed definition "applicable percentage" by adding the following after clause (c)–

THAT Bill 71 be amended in Clause 9(1)(a) in the proposed definition–by adding the following after clause (c):

As an exception, "applicable percentage" means 100% in relation to a taxation year for an individual who rents their principal residence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv), seconded by the honourable member for Transcona,

THAT Bill 71 be amended to Clause 9-1-a in the proposed definition "applicable percentage" by adding the following after clause (c)–

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Dispense.

The honourable member for Fort Garry—before we get to honourable member to Fort Garry, would it be will of the House to actually put in Hansard as written—by the member—put forward in the amendment? [Agreed]

THAT Bill 71 be amended in Clause 9(1)(a) in the proposed definition "applicable percentage" by adding the following after clause (c):

As an exception, "applicable percentage" means 100% in relation to a taxation year for an individual who rents their principal residence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The amendment is in order.

Mr. Wasyliv: Now, we've talked a lot about—in this Chamber—that this bill, in its current form, basically is a huge tax giveaway to the wealthiest Manitobans and the largest corporate landlords.

And, as bad as that may be, and as unfair as that is, and as much as that's going to ultimately hurt the Manitoba education system and make our tax system even less fair and more skewed to the wealthiest Manitobans than it currently does, there is another consequence from this bill, whether intentional or not. It will absolutely, a hundred per cent, hurt renters.

And how it will do that is that renters, currently, under the present model, get a \$700 education tax credit on their income tax. And it's going to be reduced 25 per cent this year, and another 25 per cent next

year, and if this government gets its way and eventually the education property tax is completely phased out, the tax credit will be completely phased out as well, which means that renters will lose \$700 in benefits each and every year.

And unlike who this bill was written for, people like the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and the Finance Minister and you know, the donors in the Conservative Party, this actually will affect Manitobans' most vulnerable.

We know who rents in Manitoba. Seniors rent. Newcomers rent. Young workers rent. These are all the people that been hit hardest during the pandemic. And not only have they been hit hardest, not only have they been ignored by this government, not only has this government put in very few supports to recognize their sacrifices, and their impact on the community, to add insult to injury, the government now takes away what little support they currently get in the education tax credit.

And it's not a small amount of people. This is 400,000 Manitobans. That's a full 30 per cent of our population that they basically have decided they don't value. And their financial well-being, their kitchen table, as it were, has to be sacrificed so that the Finance Minister can get a huge tax break; so the Premier can get a huge tax break; so all the corporate donors to the PC Party can get a huge tax break. The people that have the most benefit the most from this tax giveaway.

And the people that are going to have to pay for this tax giveaway are the renters, and they suffer the most from this. My riding: 50 per cent of the population rents. So, that's an amazing amount. And I know others in the Chamber have equal numbers in their ridings. And so—and it's concerning because it's obvious that this government rushed this bill. It's obviously—that it was slapped together last minute, that there was not forethought. And I'll give them the benefit of the doubt that this was an unintended consequence.

Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

But there's been no public consultation in relation to this change. And now that they've been alerted to the problem, what's concerning is they don't seem to care.

So, it's one thing, okay, you didn't do the work. You rushed something together because this is a cheap political stunt—not cheap in money. It's an expensive political stunt, but cheap in its moral value. But now

that you know there's a problem, now that you know that 400,000 Manitobans are going to be worse off because of this move, why aren't you doing something about it?

And that's where we get to this amendment. This amendment will protect renters. It will undo the damage done by this wealthy tax cut. It will allow renters to keep 100 per cent of their tax rebate in place, that there will be absolutely no reduction at all. It would take an exceptionally regressive and unfair tax bill and make it a little less regressive. I mean, this isn't, you know, this isn't the Garden of Eden or anything like that, but it certainly takes some of the rough edges off this bill.

And, you know, \$700, that's—you know, imagine the Premier, the Finance Minister—that's what they spend when they go out for dinner, but to average Manitobans, that's a lot of money.

* (15:50)

And we heard from the Social Planning Council that for many low-income Manitobans, that \$700 is the difference between being in financial crisis and just getting by. They use that money to catch up on bills; it's the type of money that they use to invest in education or other—some life-supporting goals. It's that extra bit of money that they need in order to try to advance their lives, and it is, you know, a safety net for them in many ways, because there's always unforeseen expenses during the course of the year, and this extra little bit of money helps them get through.

And, you know, I don't know if any of the members opposite have ever actually talked to a renter or met them, and when they have it's always been in, I imagine, a situation where they're their landlord and there's a, you know, a power imbalance and they're there to get their rent. And I imagine there's probably not a lot of conversations in that context about, hey, how's it going? How, as your MLA, can I make your life better? I imagine it's pretty perfunctory; just sort of, give me my money.

And we see that same kind of attitude here with this bill. So this is—and actually, if you're talking about somebody with a modest income, \$700 is a sizable percentage of that income. And to take it away without consultation, without forethought, without planning, is cruel and it's unnecessary. And we can correct that mistake and give the government the benefit of the doubt that they just simply didn't think about this.

But if they don't correct this mistake, if they vote against this 'amenet'-amendment, what message are they sending to 400,000 Manitobans? What are they saying about their kitchen tables? What are they saying about the supports that they currently get and whether they value them?

Well, what they're saying is that we think a man that owns four homes and has a six-car garage deserves a tax break and you don't—a tax break that's going to be 10 times the benefit that you get. This government is going to say that they value giving such a person \$7,000 where we think that you shouldn't get that \$700; that's what they would be saying from this.

So the government will come back and say, well, you know what, yes, this is really embarrassing for us, and we had to, you know, slap some lipstick on the pig and so we're bringing in this freeze for rent for two years. The problem is we know that that's not the case. We know that a huge loophole in Manitoba rental laws is applying for above-guideline increases, and every time a landlord does this, they get it. And it's affected over 24,000 units with increases of over 10 to 30 per cent. That's shocking. That's forced people into rent evictions. It's a crisis.

And again—that's another thing—government knew about this for over a year, and they have done nothing—absolutely nothing—on this. And, you know, they'll throw out some political stunt like saying that they'll do a freeze and then, you know, when they're told, well, you know, often landlords may ignore this, then they just fall back on empty formulas: well, they can go fight for their rights at the Residential Tenancies Branch.

Well, you know, that's not easy. And oftentimes it's a barrier and a hurdle, especially for a lot of people who may not speak English or may not understand Manitoba culture because they're newcomers; for a lot of young people, they may not have the wherewithal or the maturity to pursue something like that. And so it just creates yet one more barrier and makes their lives that much more difficult, and it makes things much harder for them.

So this amendment deals with all that and gets around that in a very simple and very elegant way. And I'm hoping that this government will support this amendment to support the 400,000 renters in Manitoba. Thank you.

Mr. Altomare: Thank you, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker. It's great to see you in the Chair this afternoon.

We spent some time last Friday, and I always look forward to this time when we can debate these issues that come before us here in the House, one of which right now is quite a significant one. And I do want to thank the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw) for bringing forward this amendment. This amendment really is one that cannot be overlooked by members of this House.

As members of this House here in Manitoba, in this Legislature, we are tasked to ensure that we look after the welfare of every Manitoban, not just those Manitobans that are doing well, not just those Manitobans that this pandemic has really disproportionately favourably impacted, because of what we have right now is, right here before us, is a bill, in Bill 71, that grossly disproportionately disadvantages 400,000 Manitobans that rent their domiciles, that rent their homes, that rent their apartments. That is 30 per cent of Manitobans that are reliant upon this government to make sure that they don't make their life more expensive.

And what we have here in Bill 71 is a disproportionate piece that impacts those people that relied upon that \$700 tax rebate that, according to the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, is a significant piece that keeps them above water, that keeps them able to pay their bills, that allows them to take that money and put it into areas that they deem is necessary for them, like education or maybe purchasing that RESP for their child that they will, you know, sock away later on for their post-secondary education. There is not a better gift that a parent can give a child than a future that they look forward to.

And what this particular amendment does is that it fixes a wrong that is existent in Bill 71. You can't have a bill that disproportionately impacts Manitobans to the point that this does. You can't ignore 400,000 people in this province that rent.

And just like my colleague, the member from Fort Garry, brought up, you know, members opposite may say, oh, we've frozen rents for two years. Well, that's a hollow thing to say, simply because every time a landlord applies for above-level rent increase, 100 per cent of them are successful. And we know that renters feel that; they feel that sting. So not only are they feeling the sting of rent increases above what they are allowed to increase their rent by, but they also now feel the extra sting of a government that is taking away their \$700 tax rebate.

This speaks to how quickly this bill was put together. Manitobans expect a government, when they

bring forward bills, to bring forward bills that are well thought out, well researched, that don't impact people that are—that have a hard time with making a living disproportionately. That's cruel to do that. And now what we have before us is that we're debating a bill that impacts those that can least afford it.

And that's the piece that really, you know, as a new MLA in this Chamber, really has me thinking, like, what is the true motivation here? Or is it just the fact that this bill was so poorly constructed that it's a good thing that we do have members opposite that don't think in this manner in order to bring up amendments that will actually, you know, make this bill slightly more palatable, especially for those that are disproportionately impacted by this?

* (16:00)

And, you know, these are—this is a responsibility that we have as members of this House. We have to ensure that when we bring forth bills, that these bills benefit Manitobans and don't single out a portion that will be disproportionately impacted.

Twenty-five per cent rebate the first year—gone; 50 per cent of the rebate the second year—gone. We know where this roadmap leads: third year—75 per cent gone.

And by the fourth year? Well, that won't happen Mr. Deputy—Assistant Deputy Speaker because by then, we know who will be in government. It will be a fair government that'll ensure that this kind of legislation will never be brought forward onto the floor of this House to be debated, simply because we will ensure that anything that comes forward won't disproportionately harm other Manitobans like this bill does.

And so, when we think about these things, we need to think hard about what was the motivation behind this—originally—behind this bill? Many members of this House have put on the record that the motivation was a cynical one; and how unfortunate, right? To have that type of mentality.

Because, we know that education—and we on the other side of the House, believe that we needed to have a fulsome dialogue on how we fund public education here in Manitoba; one that—a public education system that is actually, you know, quite the envy of the world, one where students do very well here in Manitoba because of the dedication of the—of our educators and of the people that run the system, right.

And so, when we think about these bills, we have to ensure that there isn't a disproportionate portion of the population that is going to be footing the bill for this \$500–\$500-million tax rebate. And what it looks to us now is that 400,000 Manitobans are going to bear the brunt of Bill 71 and the elimination of the property-tax rebate for renters. That \$700.

I want to remind the House that, just as the member from Fort Garry put on the floor, that there are—that \$700 is a significant amount of money for people who rent; especially young Manitobans, especially for seniors. I think of my mother- and father-in-law who are in an assisted-living situation right now, who rent.

Well, you know what, that rebate is now going away. These are people on fixed incomes. These are people that rely on that particular tax rebate to ensure that—you know—they can enjoy their golden years without worry or without thinking about a government that's going to come in and take away something that they rely upon.

And this is the piece that we need to rectify—one of the many—and I want to thank the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw) for bringing forth these amendments. Because these are important amendments that will make this bill somewhat more palatable, especially for renters: young renters, senior renters, people that are new to Canada.

What a welcome, right? Come here—oh, you know, we're going to take away that rebate now, simply because we want to reward our donors or we want to reward people that are disproportionately already being rewarded by this government.

So, this is something that—this amendment, Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker—will allow for renters to ensure they have that \$700 rebate and would also ensure that every member of this House understands that we can't disproportionately impact Manitobans by the introductions of our bills—

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): The member's time has expired.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): We are in favour of this amendment.

We've—I've spoken against this bill a number—Bill 71—number of times. And the fact is is that we need to come to grips with the fact that not everybody in Manitoba is equal. We all know that.

In terms—we can all talk about how much we—and I think every political party has its own ideas about

how equality works or how equity works, and either that everybody should be treated exactly the same—that's one way of treating everybody fairly—and the other way is acknowledging that people are different and doing what we can to make them more equal—which is equity.

The one thing that I do want to put on the record is that when it comes to rent and when it comes to rent control in Manitoba, there are massive loopholes that, under the previous government, under the NDP, there were thousands of exemptions that were allowed to go through in terms of landlords putting up their rents. And rent is often going up faster than the amount that people are going—are actually—are getting raises. And that is a fundamental problem.

That—I'm not quite sure what the member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare) is talking about when he talks about the supposed fairness of the NDP, because the NDP's tax policies were extremely similar. They also, in 2008, 2009, brought forward tax rebates for farms. They brought forward tax rebates for people. And they boasted in 2008 that they'd introduced \$1 billion in tax cuts, which is roughly what this PC government has done as well.

And the overwhelming beneficiaries of that were not people who rented, were not people who worked for a living. It was overwhelmingly people who own for a living.

So, once again, I'm just in this position of being able to point out, as the Premier (Mr. Pallister) often does—I disagree with him on a great many things, except when he points out that he's doing exactly what the NDP do. And when it comes to being unfair to renters and unfair to people living in poverty or EIA, the record of the NDP and the PCs is extremely clear, and it is no different.

So, that being said, we will support this measure because I think it's completely—that the current plan to reduce—to give away tax rebates the way it is is colossally unfair.

And it is simply—when we use the word average, it is incredibly important that none of us are really—fall into this average category. The fact is that when it comes to distribution and being realistic about the way—who owns what and who earns what in our society, there's some people—and sometimes it's hard work and risk taking and all sorts of other things—who have amassed a lot of wealth and some people who have very little. And—but they're also people who've worked really hard and who've taken huge risks and

who are also making just a little bit of money as well. There's no guarantee that the one turns out into the other.

So we have to do something to be fair. And Bill 71 is a fundamentally unfair bill. I do think that this amendment makes some steps to making it—takes some steps to making it a bit more fair, which is why we will support it.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Marcelino: Report stage amendment 2 is an amendment put forward by the honourable member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv), and it will allow for renters to keep their \$700 annual tax credit.

The reason why we are asking for this very important amendment is because we need to protect seniors on fixed incomes and we need to protect low-income families and others who rent and depend on this \$700 annual tax credit.

Bill 71 takes away this \$700 tax credit. And you have to ask: why are renters getting punished, especially during a pandemic, where so many low-wage workers have already lost hours, or lost jobs, or as moms have been forced to stay at home and care for their children during remote learning stages?

So Bill 71 takes away this \$700 tax credit to renters, and to supply these tax rebates to property owners with, you know, cheques with the premier's name on it, this PC government will have to beg, borrow and steal, and they are taking money away from Peter to give to Paul.

So, it has been established in previous debates that we are already facing the largest deficit that the province has ever faced, due to this pandemic, yet the PC government is still borrowing more money and they're willing to go into further debt to pay for this regressive tax rebate.

* (16:10)

And to further pay for this tax rebate, to force this issue at this time when we are facing the worst deficit, the PC government is doing it by taking away money from some Manitobans who have the least amount to give. Again, the PCs are begging, borrowing and stealing in order to pay for this tax rebate that's being pushed through with Bill 71.

Again, the NDP is largely in support of a general thrust that schools across the province should be funded by the Province and not through revenues collected by school divisions through property taxes.

But Bill 71's timing amounts to risky fiscal mismanagement, and to do it on the backs of renters is punishing those Manitobans who rent. And again, some of them make up those in our community who have been the hardest hit by pandemic job loss.

I know of a newcomer Filipino family; they reside in the Assiniboia constituency. They have arrived here, to Winnipeg, from Bahrain, where they worked there for a few years before coming here. They both worked in finance, and the other one—sorry, the mom worked in finance and the dad works in IT—and they have been renting for the past four years while they have been saving up for a down payment. The mom has been working part time because they have two very, very young children, and the mom has had to cut her hours due to remote learning.

When they found out that, you know, their tax—their rental tax rebate will—their rental rebate will now be forfeited, they were very, very upset. They used that money every year to save for a down payment on a home that, you know—on a small modest home that they're hoping to be able to get soon. And they just don't think that this is fair. And it's not fair.

The PC government, in their previous budget, they promised to freeze rent increases for a couple of years, and—but we know that there is a way that rent gets increased through above-guideline increases. AGIs are any increases above and beyond the yearly maximum increase amount set by the residential tenancies board, which is usually 0.5 to 2 per cent per year.

Again, the PCs have promised to freeze that amount, but we know that, typically, this does not stop above-guideline increases.

To find out the extent of the problem across the province, the honourable member for St. James (Mr. Sala) submitted a FIPPA request and our caucus was able to learn that, out of 310 applications for above-guideline increases which had gone to the government in 2019, a total of 310 of these applications had been approved. So that was every single above-guideline increase application submitted to the RTB was approved that year.

So in that one year—in 2019—a total of 20,440 rental units in Manitoba were affected by these above-guideline increases, and of those 20,440 units, where approximately 2,700 units saw rent increases of 20 per cent or more, with many of those units seeing increases that were even higher. So this—so, the member for St. James proposed legislation last week,

on Thursday, and we know that the PC government, you know, did not support the member for St. James' private member's bill that would ensure a fair balance between the needs of landlords, especially for small landlords, and the needs of renters.

So, in addition to the fact that the PC promise for a two-year rent freeze is not a real promise that they'll be able to keep due to these above-guideline increases that get approved 100 per cent of the time, on top of that, now they are taking away the \$700-per-year rebate that many low-income renters depend upon. So this is, you know, just a real double whammy for many renters across the province at the worst possible time.

Again, you're robbing Peter to pay Paul. You could say to borrow Peter to pay Paul. You could say to unclothe Peter in order to clothe Paul. But any way you put it, it's the renters that are literally paying for this rebate that we're going to be giving to, you know, disproportionately, the wealthiest Manitobans.

And that's not fair for low-income earners and this just amounts to more unfair taxation across this province, more unfair taxation policy that Bill 71 was, you know, proposing to put through.

And I would urge all members to consider, you know, all the renters that they know. Most of us know many low-income relatives or friends, or—connections to low-income seniors, or seniors on fixed incomes. And, as it stands, they're already at a serious risk of being subjected to massive increases in their living cost, you know, potentially being forced to leave their apartments because we're allowing—this government is allowing current RTB legislation to stand. So, in addition to that, now they are also going to be losing the \$700 rebate.

And, I mean, it's going to be hard for us to be going door-to-door and look them in the eye and say, you know, this is what this government is doing in order to pay for rebates for the wealthiest Manitobans.

Thank you Mr. Deputy—Mr. Assistant Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): It doesn't bring me any pleasure to once again stand and talk about things that this government is doing wrong, but it does bring me pleasure to say that we in the opposition have better ideas, have better ways of doing things. And, certainly, this particular amendment is one that every member of the government should be listening to, because it is a better way of doing things. It does make more sense.

You know, while the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his Finance Minister stand up and spout off their nonsensical statements about leaving more money on your kitchen table, they've got their hand in your pocket, stealing your wallet.

And that's exactly what they're doing here. They're talking about, well, we're going to freeze rents for two years—which sounds like a good thing, except we've already seen that 100 per cent of requests for over-guideline rent increases are approved.

So, while they're saying they're going to do that, they're actually reducing the amount of money you'd get back on the \$700 tax rebate.

You know, I see in my own community, a lot of young people that are coming from communities with abject poverty. And they're renting because they can't afford to buy while they work at low-wage, part-time jobs.

But they're trying to have a better life. They're trying to do something better for their families, for their children, for themselves. And what does this government do? They kick the skids out from underneath them by making rents less affordable.

So, many of those folks will say, well, what's the point? I've tried, and here's a government that has just made sure that I won't succeed, that I won't be able to get myself out of poverty thanks to this Pallister government and thanks to every one of those members opposite that sits on their hands, and ignores every renter in their constituency.

And I'm sure each and every one of those members opposite has renters in their constituency, but I suspect most of them don't spend a lot of time talking to them, because they're too busy with their well-heeled friends because that's who contributes to their success as—getting elected. It's not the poor people that vote for this bunch.

* (16:20)

So, I don't want to spend a lot of time; I just want to commend the member from Fort Garry for bringing this forward, for trying to make bad legislation better.

It's unfortunate that I don't suspect for one second that this Premier or this Finance Minister will listen, but each and every one of us should do everything in our power to try and make legislation that works for Manitobans. This particular piece of legislation, Bill 71, as it presently stands, only works for wealthy Manitobans.

So with those few words, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, I hope that the government will listen for once, show a new way of doing business and vote in favour of this particular amendment and show that they may actually care about Manitobans.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Are there any further speakers?

Hearing none, is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment? [*interjection*]

Oh, is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Okay.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): I hear a no.

Voice Vote

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): All those in favour of the amendment, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): In my opinion, the Nays have it.

Recorded Vote

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): A recorded vote, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): A recorded vote has been asked for. Call in the members.

The question before the House is report stage amendment No. 2 for Bill 71, brought forward by the honourable member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw).

* (16:30)

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Yeas

Adams, Altomare, Asagwara, Brar, Bushie, Fontaine, Gerrard, Kinew, Lamont, Lamoureux, Lathlin, Lindsey, Maloway, Marcelino, Moses, Naylor, Sala, Sandhu, Smith (Point Douglas), Wasyliw, Wiebe.

Nays

Clarke, Cox, Cullen, Eichler, Ewasko, Fielding, Friesen, Goertzen, Gordon, Guenter, Guillemard, Helwer, Johnson, Johnston, Lagassé, Lagimodiere, Martin, Michaleski, Micklefield, Morley-Lecomte, Nesbitt, Pedersen, Reyes, Schuler, Smith (Lagimodière), Smook, Squires, Stefanson, Teitsma, Wharton, Wishart, Wowchuk.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Yeas 21, Nays 32.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Motion is accordingly defeated.

* * *

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): We will now move on to report stage amendment No. 3.

Mr. Wasyliw: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Notre Dame (Ms. Marcelino),

THAT Bill 71 be amended in Clause 15 by adding the following at the end of the proposed subsection 302(1.1):

But the information or material must not include the name, image or title of a member of the Executive Council.

Motion presented.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): The report stage amendment is in order. Debate can now proceed.

The member from Fort Garry. The member needs to unmute himself.

Mr. Wasyliw: Sorry. Thank you.

Under the current legislation as written, the Province of Manitoba is giving itself the power and the mandate to force provincial tax information to be included in the distribution of municipal property tax assessment. So basically, it's one level of government forcing another level of government to distribute their information and—a cynic would say—their propaganda, you know, from the Province.

And in—herein lies the problem. It's what type of information does the Province want to force municipalities to include. If it's just simply tax information and just, you know, informing Manitobans about what their obligations are and the explanation for that, I don't think anybody would have too much problem with that.

The problem is that's not what this government wants to do. And the concern is that this will be used, this loophole—because that's what it is; they're actually building a loophole into the legislation as a form of taxpayer-funded political advertising that they will force municipalities to basically distribute government propaganda at government expense, meaning taxpayers' expense. Now, keeping in mind, again, this is a government that is borrowing money to give a huge tax break to our wealthiest landowners and corporate landlords, and it's going to be Manitobans paying off the interest on this loan for a generation.

And we know that one of the plans that the government has is they want to mail out a cheque with the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) name or the Finance Minister's name or signature on it or, who knows, even their picture, and that's going to cost \$1.3 million in postage.

And, of course, that's completely unnecessary. They don't have to distribute the money that way; they can certainly do it in a much cheaper way. But they want to spend \$1.3 million of borrowed taxpayer money so that they can actually treat this like a campaign literature.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

And that's unethical; it subsidizes the party in power. Opposition parties don't have those access to resources; they can't use taxpayer dollars to fund their political advertising. And this amounts to a subsidy to the governing party, and it's free advertising for them.

And what's really hypocritical about all this is that this government has been on record condemning this type of behaviour, and they were rightly critical of the previous government for doing similar stunts like this. And they had even brought in legislation to counter this type of behaviour. And the one that comes to mind is the Pallister government brought in blackout legislation for government announcements close to an election.

* (16:40)

And they were concerned—and certainly the previous Filmon government did this and the previous

NDP governments did this—is that they would use the power of government and the power to be able to, you know, hold a press conference announcing some type of government rollout or some type of building or something, and they could time it during an election, or near an election, for maximum advertising effect. And it went way beyond just, sort of, informing the public of what you're doing and it became a subsidy of free advertising using taxpayer dollars.

And they rightly pointed out that that was wrong. It was wrong when their previous governments did it. It was wrong when NDP governments did it. And they changed the law to make sure that that didn't happen and that all parties were on a much more even playing field, and a government couldn't misuse sort of taxpayer dollars in the form of free advertising to skew an election.

In Manitoba, we have caps on how much parties can spend; how much candidates can spend. And we do this in order to have free and fair elections that doesn't give unfair advantage to anybody.

So if that was the right thing to do then, why are they now creating a new loophole in which a government party can use these rebate cheques as a form of tax-subsidized advertising?

And it's one of these things that—be careful what you wish for because this is a tired, spent, failing government that is, you know, on their last legs. They're dying. They're going to be out of office in two years. And I think, you know, Manitobans will rightly pass judgment on them—and it will be harsh but I'm sure very fair and certainly deserving.

And they will be, you know, out of power for, you know, perhaps another 17 years—maybe if Manitobans are lucky, much longer than that. And they have to ask themselves, do they want an NDP government to start using these type of cheques to subsidize their electoral campaign?

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

Point of Order

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

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): I do believe that, possibly, the Liberal member, though I may be mistaken, has not turned off his microphone. We're getting background noise. I just wanted to bring that to your attention. I believe that members are requested

to turn off their mics while virtually participating. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes. I just want to remind everyone that—it's not a point of order, but if everybody could put their microphone on mute we'd be really appreciative.

Yes, for some reason—the honourable member from—for St. Boniface was on mute on my screen, but for some reason we could hear his background. So I don't know what happened there.

* * *

Mr. Wasyliv: So, it would be refreshing if this government actually believed their own rhetoric and actually legislated and brought in laws that were consistent and not situationally hypocritical.

So, the purpose of this amendment would prohibit the inclusion of the name, the image or the title of the member of Executive Council. And that's a fancy way of saying the Premier (Mr. Pallister) or Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding), or whoever they want to, sort of, provide profile to.

And in short, when the Province would send out tax information, out through municipal tax bills, it would just be factual information that taxpayers need to know. They wouldn't be able to subsidize partisan political advertising.

And I don't think you're going to find any disagreement across any party lines. I think this is just such common sense things that, in 2021, most Manitobans would be shocked to hear that any government could be doing this—any government could be playing games like this.

And, you know—and that's why this amendment is so important, because, as we see with this government, nobody believes them. We have a Premier who doesn't have any credibility; we have a Health Minister who has no credibility, who replaced the last Health minister, who had no credibility.

And we see that when, you know, the Pallister government loses credibility, the ducks come home to roost, because what happens here is now they want Manitobans to get vaccinated—we support them in this—but there's going to be a portion of their political base that so mistrusts them and government, that will not accept any scientific information that they put out.

They see a Premier who flaunts public health orders. He runs around the Legislature without

socially distancing, without a mask on; and how is he modelling good behaviour?

And this type of cynicism affects people's behaviour. They're not going to listen to this Premier. They've already tuned him out, and that is real danger for Manitobans because it means Manitobans won't get vaccinated or they won't follow public health rules. Why? Because, well, my Premier doesn't. If he doesn't have to follow the rules, why do I? And that's, you know—as, you know, childish as that attitude may be, it's also very logically consistent.

And so that's why we cannot allow the Premier (Mr. Pallister) or the ministers to put their picture or their signature or their name on these type of rebate cheques. And that's why this amendment is so important, because it goes beyond this political stunt that the Pallister government is trying to put in and it goes to the heart of our own democracy that will outlive this government.

And it's about doing things that doesn't automatically cause an eye-roll from Manitobans and it just adds to, you know, Manitobans having trust in their government and knowing that they're not going to engage in these kind of childish stunts and that they're there for all Manitobans, you know, when they need them.

And right now, they don't have that. Right now, this is sorely missing from this government, and it just doesn't magically appear. And every time they pass this type of legislation, it just, you know—public trust in government goes down, cynicism goes up, and can you blame them? And if this government doesn't pass this amendment, you certainly can't.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Altomare: It's always an honour to rise in this House to put some words on the record regarding this amendment.

I once again would like to thank the member from Fort Garry for bringing forth this very reasoned amendment: one that ensures fairness, one that is really important to ensure that Bill 71 isn't seen as a cynical vehicle for this government to freely advertise on the backs of another level of government that they've shown very little care for. We saw that in previous bill debates about the municipal relations piece that we won't have time to get into here but has certainly left a number at most every municipality scratching their head as to what is the motivation behind any of this that this government brings forward, or any of their bills.

One that many Manitobans have been seeing is—or one reason is that this government likes to—is in a form of power grab when it comes to a number of bills. But we'll go back to the amendment here, to Bill 71 and clause 15, (1.1) in 302: but the information cannot—or must not include the name, image or title of any member from the Executive Council.

And this is very important because—again—just like my colleague from—the member from Fort Garry brought up, is that it reduces cynicism in a time when we, as members of this House, need to ensure that we do our very best to reduce these types of bills that only bring forth cynicism, only bring forth doubt in the minds of Manitobans as to what would be the motivation to do that.

* (16:50)

I want to go back to something that the member from Fort Garry brought up and that was the—this current government brought up something through what was called their blackout legislation, where you can't advertise or use government money or government resources to advertise during election campaigns or leading up to election campaigns, one that completely made sense; one that really, I think, would build trust in people in saying, you know what, maybe this is something that they really mean.

But, evidently, there's this loophole in Bill 71 that kind of undermines that. It undermines that ethos; it undermines that mindset where, you know, we do want to ensure they're not—we're not being cynical, or that we're not bringing forth legislation that would breed cynicism.

And this is—what this amendment does, brought forward by the member from Fort Garry, will ensure that that cynicism doesn't creep in.

So here's an opportunity again for this government to get behind an amendment that, really, ensures that we—when we get into the business of government and do the things that we need to do, that we do it without that cynical lens, without the lens where we need to say, hey, everybody, look. I'm giving you a tax rebate, oh boy.

When really, it could have been easily done. This government didn't need—doesn't need to spend \$1.3 million on issuing cheques. All you needed to do is just increase that line on the education tax rebate on everybody's municipal tax bill. Simple. Done. There you go, you know. And, it would fit in to this—I don't know, this narrative that comes up: they're good money managers.

Well, wow. Well, what does \$1.3 million tell you about how you're going to get these cheques out with a thank you letter from members of Executive Council?

Again, it builds in cynicism—something that we need to do our very best to ensure that it doesn't happen in government. But what we have here now is that we know Manitobans know that this cynicism that's being expressed here through this loophole in Bill 71 is loud and clear, and one that even questions that—this government's ethics.

It is unethical to do this in a manner that—in which this government is going to do this tax rebate, right. And then we have to call it out for what it is. And what it is, again, is a cynical attempt to shore up this government's approval ratings, this government's inability to connect with the citizens of Manitoba.

Now, this afternoon we've brought forward two previous amendments that were certainly reasonable, certainly ones that needed support from members of this House. And now with this last amendment here today, here is another opportunity for members of this House to step up and support something that would really build citizens'—Manitoba citizens' impression of what MLAs do and how they do their business, especially when it comes to the crafting of bills and what is actually in those bills.

And one of these things that can't come forth is something that actually builds even more cynicism, right. It's incumbent upon us as MLAs to ensure that we don't do that. And just like the member from Fort Garry had previously indicated, there are pieces of legislation that ensure that this kind of stuff doesn't go on.

And so we have to ensure that we continue to do this so that we're seen as stewards of this province, not using the provincial Treasury to elevate our political gains or our political aspirations, right. We can't do that. These are things that people will see, again—and I've used this term before throughout this debate—is cynicism, right.

And we have to ensure that we're not going down this path, especially when current legislation already exists to ensure that we don't build this type of ethos into our government.

So this is an amendment that is certainly reasonable; one that I would encourage members of this House to support. And I look forward to hearing more debate around this issue.

And at this time I would like to thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to put these few words on the record.

Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard)—the honourable member for St. Boniface, sorry.

Mr. Lamont: We do agree with this amendment.

Look, there are all sorts of reasons why the idea of putting forward a one point—spending \$1.3 million in order to send out cheques has very serious problems in the middle of a pandemic.

Part of it is what else could we be spending this \$1.3 million on. So—because I know that there are people reaching out to me, there are people in business, people at organizations, sole proprietors who have been unable—who had to shut down their businesses because they had no provincial support. But we're going to spend \$1.3 million on this?

And the real question is: who benefits? Because there are other ways of doing this. This simply could have been done through electronic transfer. And what is the benefit of including a picture of the Premier (Mr. Pallister) or the Finance Minister or telling people about what this tax rebate program is about? It's entirely political and it's campaigning. It's not just political, it's campaigning.

In our view, it'd be best is this—if the government is serious about sending these cheques out, or sending out these letters and spending \$1.3 million on it, it should be a PC Party expense. But what else could you—spending—we could also be sending out letters to every single Manitoban encouraging them to get vaccinated, letting them know about all the programs that are in place. There are all sorts of things that it would be much better spent on other than something—than a question of who benefits, it appears to be self-promotion.

So, this is a long-standing issue in terms of governments and their access to resources in order to be able to—in making that important dividing line between promoting a policy from which citizens will—and residents will benefit and letting people know about programs from which they will benefit—public programs, as opposed to something that they have no choice over.

If you're—it is legitimate to spend money promoting vaccination programs. It is legitimate to spend money letting people know about the things that they

can access from this government that will help them. There is no legitimacy or benefit in letting people—in telling people about a budget that they are not meaningfully going to have a say in or just promoting the agenda of a government.

I don't agree with it. I've never agreed with it at any level of government. It's not an appropriate use of taxpayers' funds.

So we're more than willing to support the NDP in this, because there is—there are all sorts of ways in which—in order to claim that we are going to be fair for campaigning, for politics, is that we are going to place restrictions and regulations and caps of various kinds on everything from fundraising to spending, in order to ensure that when the time comes that Manitobans have the opportunity to vote, that they actually have something approaching a level playing field.

And controlling the purse strings of government is a completely different story. And being able to essentially send out messages that are not directed to the benefit of citizens but are 'primormarily' directed and being communicated for the benefit of the people sending them out is a violation of trust and it is an undermining of what we should be doing in this government. So, once again, we will support—absolutely

support—this motion, and I thank the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw) for bringing it forward.

Thank you.

Ms. Marcelino: Report stage amendment 3 is an amendment put forward by the honourable member for Fort Garry.

It prevents the name, image or title of any Cabinet minister from being included with tax notices. And information or material must not include the name, image or title of a member of Executive Council.

The reason we—why we think this amendment is important is because standard practice is for a civil servant to sign cheques issued to the public to ensure that government payments are non-partisan.

Cheques—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

When this matter is before the House, the honourable member for Notre Dame (Ms. Marcelino) will have nine minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., the House is recessed and stands—the House is adjourned and stands adjourned 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 17, 2021

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