

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ADAMS, Danielle	Thompson	NDP
ALTOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen	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, Hon.	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
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REYES, Jon, Hon.	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	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
<i>Vacant</i>	Fort Whyte	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 7, 2021

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Introduction of Bills. The honourable member for Tyndall Park.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I move, seconded by the honourable member for St. Boniface that Bill 240, The Recognition of National Day for Truth and Reconciliation Act (Employment Standards Code and Interpretation Act Amended), be now read a first time.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

The member that is seconding a motion has to be in their chair. I wonder if the member for Tyndall Park would agree to start her introduction of her bill.

Ms. Lamoureux: Yes, Madam Speaker. May I ask permission—if the member is in his chair?

Madam Speaker: He is now. Go ahead.

Okay, let's start this again.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 240—The Recognition of National Day for Truth and Reconciliation Act (Employment Standards Code and Interpretation Act Amended)

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I move, seconded by the honourable member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont), that Bill 240, The Recognition of National Day for Truth and Reconciliation Act (Employment Standards Code and Interpretation Act Amended), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Lamoureux: On August 12th, I wrote to the Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations (Mr. Lagimodiere) and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) asking that the government of Manitoba join the federal government in recognizing September 30th as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation by declaring the day as a provincial statutory day.

Madam Speaker, the federal government has already declared this to be a federal stat day and I believe the Province has a responsibility in doing this as well, as it would fulfill call No. 80 on the provincial level from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action.

Thank you.

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

Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Madam Speaker: And I do have a tabling.

In accordance with section 28.1 of The Elections Act, I am tabling the Elections Manitoba proposal to modify the voting process, Vote by Mail – Byelection.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

2020 Olympic and Paralympic Athletes

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Premier): I am pleased today to recognize and congratulate Manitoba's athletes who competed at the recent 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games. Of course, they were delayed because of the global pandemic.

Six Manitoba athletes attended the Summer Olympic Games, held July 23rd to August 8th, and Manitoba sent one athlete to the Summer Paralympic Games, held August 24th to September 5th. We are very proud of our athletes and would like to read their names into the record to officially acknowledge them as part of today's legislative proceedings.

Our Olympians on Team Canada included: swimmer Kelsey Wog, tae kwon do competitor Skylar Park, cyclist Leah Kirchmann, triathlete Tyler Mislawchuk, water polo athlete Shae La Rock [*phonetic*] and soccer star Desiree Scott.

Our lone parliamentarian—badminton para-athlete Olivia Meier, is unique on more than one front. Not only was she Manitoba's only Paralympic athlete on Team Canada in this Olympics, she was also the only badminton player from all of North America to qualify for the 2020 Tokyo Summer Paralympic Games.

Madam Speaker, all of our athletes competed with pride, dignity and fierce determination to do their best, and we could not be more pleased at how they represented Manitoba on the world's biggest stage in every way.

One athlete, of course, reached the highest level of Olympic achievement, having won a gold medal in women's soccer. Of course, that is Desiree Scott and her teammates; enthralled all of Canada as we all watched that game and the exciting shootout and we're glad that it went our way.

Madam Speaker, our athletes faced innumerable challenges on the road to Tokyo. The global COVID-19 pandemic disrupted their training plans and led to cancellations of virtually all the lead-up events that are part of the Olympic year.

Eventually, even the games themselves had to be postponed a year, of course, and while under threat of being cancelled all together, they still persevered and prepared for the Olympics.

Throughout these troubling times, our athletes remained focused, they did their best to prepare and remain committed to their dreams and goals.

These games and these athletes were unique in virtually every way, and we want to commend their efforts and all the organizers of the Canadian Olympic Committee and, of course, the host country—Japan—who overcame so much to make these games a truly memorable experience.

I ask all members to join me in recognizing and congratulating our tremendous Olympic and Paralympic athletes who competed in the Tokyo Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: And I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings had been provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate all of our Olympians and Paralympians from Manitoba. We are so proud of you.

Our Manitoba NDP team was very honoured to welcome Desiree Scott to the Manitoba Legislature so that we could honour her in a very good way, and it was really nice to see that we were able to do that. I should credit the member for Union Station (MLA Asagawara) who's a good friend of Desiree's

and was able to help facilitate that—but to see the important work that she does to help inspire sports for women, for girls, for people of all genders, was truly amazing.

We had a beautiful ceremony where we were able to present her with a certificate of achievement and wrap her in star blanket. And on that day, we called on the government to increase funding for sports for women, for girls, for gender nonconforming people.

I also want to acknowledge all of the others who participated in Tokyo. We know that ground was broken by Olivia Meier of Winnipeg, who became the first Canadian to compete in para badminton at the Paralympic Games, and this was the first time that para badminton was contested as a sport at the Paralympics. So, a milestone, for sure.

I also want to applaud all eight Manitobans who participated in the Olympic Games, including cyclists Leah Kirchmann from Winnipeg and Kelsey Mitchell from Brandon; water polo player Shae La Roche from Winnipeg; triathlete Tyler Mislawchuck from Oak Bluff; taekwondo athlete Skylar Park from Winnipeg; volleyball player T.J. Sanders from Winnipeg; swimmer Kelsey Wog from Winnipeg; and, of course, Desiree Scott from the great constituency of St. Johns.

When the pandemic finally recedes, we will remember these nine Manitobans as athletes who helped our province through a difficult time. They gave us hope and inspiration during a tough period. They truly held the torch for our province.

Thanks so much.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to speak in response to the minister's statement.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave for the member to respond to the statement? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Lamoureux: It is my pleasure to speak virtually here today to pay tribute to the individuals who participated in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympics, especially to the Manitobans who had the honour to represent their communities and country in Japan.

After a delay due to COVID-19, nine athletes with connections to Manitoba represented us in Tokyo this summer, and I want to use this as an opportunity to highlight a few of their stories.

Number one, Madam Speaker, Skylar Park competed in tae kwon do. Born and raised in Winnipeg, the 21-year-old Skylar grew up with a family of black belt masters. Her dad has been her coach and was able to be in Tokyo with her as a result.

* (13:40)

Number 2 is the 22-year-old Olivia Meier, who represented Canada in para badminton, where she made history as the first Canadian athlete to compete in para badminton at the Paralympic Games during its debut at the Tokyo 2020 games.

Madam Speaker, No. 3 is a name that is likely not unheard of to anyone in these Chambers or Manitoba. Desiree Scott is a two-time bronze medal winner at both the 2012 and 2016 Olympics. As a mid-fielder with the Canadian women's soccer team, Desiree added to her medal count by bringing home a gold medal after a nail-biter game that was decided on penalty kicks.

Number 4 is Tyler Mislawchuk from Oak Bluff, who competed in his second Olympic triathlon after placing in the top 15 in Rio in 2016. Even though the result didn't pan out as planned because of an injury that flared up on the race, Tyler 'preserved' and crossed finish line.

Madam Speaker, other athletes with former and/or present connections to Manitoba are Kelsey Wog, Kelsey Mitchell, T.J. Saunders, Shae La Roche, Leah Kirchmann, and through them we have experienced how sport creates opportunities for athletes that are more than sport itself. Whether on a team or individually, sport fosters community, and that is why I want to congratulate those who competed in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympics and thank the athletes for bringing so many of us together and making us so proud.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Health and Seniors Care, on a ministerial statement, and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings had been provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

World Mental Health Day

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery): I would like to acknowledge that Sunday, October 10th, 2021, is World

Mental Health Day. The World Health Organization proclaims this important day to raise awareness of mental health issues worldwide and to encourage efforts that promote positive mental health.

Our government recognizes that mental health is just as important as physical health, especially as Manitobans continue to feel the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on their mental well-being.

For that reason, the Ministry of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery was created to help build a strong and co-ordinated system for mental health care, supports and treatment across Manitoba. This year, Madam Speaker, the theme for World Mental Health Day is Mental Health Care for All. And this emphasizes the importance of ensuring that mental health, wellness and recovery supports are available to everyone who needs them. We are committed as a government to improving the equity and accessibility of Manitoba's mental health-care system so that no one is left without the care and supports they need.

The Ministry of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery is currently undertaking an extensive consultation process to inform the development of a five-year action plan for a strong and co-ordinated mental health supports, treatment and recovery system. This consultation will help us identify and eliminate the barriers that are currently preventing Manitobans from accessing the quality mental health care they need.

One of the five cornerstones of the Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery Action Plan is service, access and co-ordination. This reflects our government's priority of improving the accessibility and equity of mental health support services across Manitoba and our commitment to World Mental Health Day's mission of mental health care for all.

I encourage all Manitobans to spread the word by using the hashtag #WorldMentalHealthDay and to reflect on the importance of positive mental health and wellness. Mental health care for all, let's make it a reality.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, this year's theme for World Mental Health Day is Mental Health Care for All: Let's Make It a Reality. While it's vital to raise awareness and increase our understanding about the mental health issues that people are experiencing all around the world, we need to go beyond that and take concrete

action to ensure that everyone has access to real support in whatever form they need it.

Mental illness is the single largest category of disease that affects Canadians today, with one in five Canadians experiencing mental health problems or illnesses every year. Living through a global pandemic has only made the mental health crisis more urgent. Some groups, including health and other front-line workers, students, people living alone, those who are targeted and marginalized and those with pre-existing mental health conditions have been particularly affected.

These issues deeply impact Manitoba families and communities, and NDP MLAs have heard concerns from communities about the government's failure to adequately support the mental health of Manitobans. Many people experiencing mental health issues or even crises in Manitoba have to wait for months to get a mental health assessment from a professional or to access life-saving treatment.

Besides the obvious impact on a mental—on an individual's well-being and relationships, there is a significant economic cost when trauma, adverse childhood experiences, mental illness and substance use problems go untreated and when we fail to invest in promotion, prevention and other support services.

This is echoed by Dr. Daniels, president of the world federation of mental health, who asserts that mental health is an investment and not an expense and should be prioritised to avert a further catastrophe.

Mental health advocates are calling on the government to invest in public health supports our system needs, and to confront the stigmas that preventing Manitobans from reaching out and receiving the assistance they deserve.

On this year's World Mental Health Day, let's take real action so that we can all enjoy strong mental health and wellness across Manitoba.

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

Madam Speaker: Is there leave for the member to respond to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, as has already been commented, mental health is as important as physical health. World health day is a reminder of this.

For years, mental health has been underfunded in Manitoba, relative to physical health. This needs to

change. For today, although there are many, many things that need to be done, I will suggest two practical steps that the minister could take.

First of all, the minister should publicly deliver the plan to address the backlog of diagnostic tests, surgeries and, indeed, mental health supports. This can help in reducing the uncertainty which is present now. Thousands of Manitobans are suffering in physical pain. The physical pain and uncertainty as to when they might receive diagnostic tests or surgeries is contributing to anxiety and depression. This can be changed.

Second, we need to recognize that lead exposure of children and adults is a significant cause of poor mental health. There are now numerous studies which show that those who are exposed to lead, particularly but not exclusively in childhood, have higher rates of mental illness, including but not limited to anxiety and depression.

The government should take this more seriously than it has and begin testing children between the ages of one and three in lead-affected areas of Winnipeg, where the incidence of high lead levels is predicted to be high from a study from Intrinsik, which the government unveiled in 2020.

Action in these two areas—two small but practical steps—would be a straightforward and useful way to address some of the mental health and mental illnesses that we see today.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Thanksgiving

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): Thanksgiving holiday weekend is an annual opportunity to pause and remind ourselves of all we can be thankful for. This year has had its challenges, but there are still many things for which we can be grateful.

I'm thankful we can share Thanksgiving with family and friends in our homes and thankful for warm weather in this fall, and the many walking trails in my constituency and across this city and the numerous provincial parks a short drive away.

I'm thankful for our children and that they are at school, in person. I'm thankful businesses are open.

I am thankful pro sports teams are playing, and concerts are happening and places of worship are open. The zoo is also open, as are museums, movie

theatres, swimming pools and gyms. I'm thankful for those things, too.

I'm thankful I can get a haircut, celebrate birthdays and attend in-person meetings. I do get a haircut once in a while.

* (13:50)

I'm thankful for health-care workers, doctors, nurses and support staff. Some of them are my friends, and these last 18 months have not been easy at all. I'm thankful for our medical system, which has saved the lives of people in our community, including some of my friends.

Gratitude can transform difficult situations like those we all find ourselves in. Thanksgiving is good for our mental and emotional health, so let's practise Thanksgiving this weekend and make it a habit in every season of life. It's hard to grumble when you're grateful. Despite the challenges, let's not lose sight of all we can be thanking—thankful for.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MAD Camp

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I am honoured to rise today to highlight the good and important work of Music, Art, and Dance Camp, also known as MAD Camp.

MAD Camp is a free, week-long mental health and wellness youth day camp organized by the Mood Disorders Association of Manitoba. Through music, art, and dance, MAD Camp aims to educate youth from ages 12 to 17 about mental wellness, while also providing a safer 'spathe'—space for youth to connect with peers and build friendships.

Youth from all lived experiences are encouraged to take part in the camp and express themselves through artistic channels.

This August, I attended the MAD Camp showcase, as did my colleague from Point Douglas, which is a weekly event organized by the youth to showcase the songs, dances and artwork they created. I was absolutely blown away by the creativity and bravery of all the young artists.

Madam Speaker, I believe that we need more initiatives like this. Having a safe space to learn coping skills for anxiety, depression and harm reduction is imperative, especially for young Manitobans who are navigating their teen years.

The mental health of youth in Manitoba must be prioritized when thinking of a post-pandemic recovery plan. In Manitoba, nearly 11 per cent of children ages 6 to 12 have experienced a significant mental health or addictions issue. For youth aged 13 to 19, this rate increases to nearly 20 per cent.

I'd like to thank the executive director Rita Chahal and youth co-ordinator Dana Lance for their hard work and all the youth camp leaders who made man camp—MAD Camp a success. The contributions of MAD Camp to our communities is immeasurable.

And I'd like to ask all members of this House in joining me in recognizing the good work of MAD Camp and all of those involved.

Thank you.

Portage Heritage Advisory Committee

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): I rise today to acknowledge Les Green, Brian Barrett and James Kosuchuk [*phonetic*], members of the Portage Heritage Advisory Committee, for receiving the 2020 Margaret McMillans—McWilliams book award from the Manitoba Historical Society.

The committee worked with Matthew Lacroix to create a book entitled historic photographs of Portage to prairie, 1870 to 1939 to celebrate Manitoba's 150th anniversary. The book won the award in the most popular history book category.

Driven by their passion for local history, Kostuchuk and photographer Lacroix sought out the old, never-before-published photographs of Portage la Prairie to offer a visual glimpse of the city's people, places and events from the 1870s to the 1930s.

The book outlines the historical resiliency of the city. It was a time of boom and bust, with fortunes made and promptly lost.

A serial arsonist destroyed much of the city's core in the 1880s one building at a time.

In the 1920s, a major cyclone hit the city, causing substantial damage, and a massive flood turned the streets into rivers.

The book also features photos of life in Portage depicting how freight and supplies were transported by oxcart and steamboat until the arrival of Canadian Pacific Railway in 1881.

In 1907, Manitoba—or, Portage was incorporated as a city and from that point on managed to keep a red—a gradual rate of growth and development,

serving as a regional hub for agriculture, retail, manufacturing, transportation in central Manitoba.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating the Portage history book creators for publishing and ultimately receiving the renowned literary prize.

Thank you.

Bourkevale 30 Campaign

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I am very pleased to have an opportunity to recognize the incredible work of the Bourkevale Community Centre and their efforts in increasing the safety and livability of the Bourkevale neighbourhood through their Bourkevale 30 campaign in St. James.

The Bourkevale 30 campaign is a community-driven campaign spearheaded by the Bourkevale Community Centre which calls for a speed limit reduction on residential streets surrounding the community centre. Members of this community want their streets to be safer for their families and their kids as they walk, ride and run throughout their neighbourhood.

To support this improvement in their quality of life, the board at the Bourkevale Community Centre has developed an inclusive and proactive campaign that has brought the community together for the safety of all and in delivering results.

In a few short months, they successfully collected over 330 signatures for a petition calling for Bourkevale to be selected as part of the 30-kilometre-an-hour reduced speed pilot project, which is being conducted by the City of Winnipeg's Public Works Department. These signatures were collected door to door by community members young and old, and the momentum they've created is undeniable, as Bourkevale 30 signs are now visible on every single street in the neighbourhood.

While this campaign has been driven forward by a wide range of community members, Bourkevale Community Centre board members Daavid Ramey and Scotty Nystrom are deserving of special recognition for the time they've personally invested in helping to rally our community around this worthwhile cause.

Madam Speaker, I'm immensely thankful for the work which has been done by Bourkevale Community Centre volunteers in seeking to improve the safety of our local streets. And I'm very hopeful that their work will be recognized through their inclusion in the

upcoming 30-kilometre-an-hour pilot which is being conducted by the City of Winnipeg.

I ask all members to join me today in congratulating the organizers of the Bourkevale 30 campaign for their efforts in improving safety in my community.

Thank you.

Afghanistan—Provincial Response

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, the situation today in Afghanistan is becoming a humanitarian crisis.

Members of the Afghan community in Winnipeg tell me stories of many families who are having to stay in their homes for fear of the Taliban. If they go out, they fear they will be taken by the Taliban or killed by the Taliban. Some are now running out of food and are starving, for they have no way to get food and no money to purchase it. Others, who are in hiding, are having to change locations frequently for fear of being found by the Taliban.

One of the most heart-rending stories I heard was of a father giving his son a gun and telling his son that if the Taliban arrive his son is to kill him—his father—because he doesn't want to be tortured by the Taliban.

There needs to be an effective federal and provincial response to the situation. It is urgent.

From a provincial perspective, we need, as was done with the refugees from Syria, to have an agreement with the federal government to accept 2,000 people from Afghanistan in Manitoba.

Many who have come from Afghanistan to Winnipeg in the past now have relatives back in Afghanistan who desperately need help. Members of the Afghan community in Winnipeg are ready to do their part, but the provincial government needs to help to deal with issues which arise when the newcomers get to Manitoba.

I suggest the provincial government convene a group, including members of all provincial parties represented in our Chamber, to work with individuals in the Afghan community and with individuals who are helping refugees to do everything possible to help the situation in Afghanistan and to advocate with the federal government for action to improve the ability of family members in dire straits in Afghanistan to get to Winnipeg where they can be safe.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

ORAL QUESTIONS

COVID-19 Fourth Wave ICU Capacity

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, we are in the fourth wave of the pandemic and yet this government is still making the same mistakes that Brian Pallister did.

We know that right now the number of patients in ICU is above what our entire ICU capacity was prior to the pandemic. Reason why is because they cut the number of ICU beds under Brian Pallister. In fact, it was the interim PC leader himself—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —who ordered those cuts.

Now, we know what happened in the third wave as a result. Many, many Manitobans had to be sent to intensive-care units in other provinces. And, tragically, at least one died when a patient who should've been transferred was attempted to be moved.

Now, we can't afford to send patients out of province again as we go through the fourth wave. And that's why they need to finally come up with a real plan on the PC side of this House.

* (14:00)

Will the interim PC leader tell us today what the plan is to enhance ICU capacity in the fourth wave?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Premier): I thank the member for the question.

First I'd like to acknowledge that yesterday Kai Madsen passed away, long-term and long-time director of the Christmas Cheer Board. For more than 52 years Kai was involved with the Christmas Cheer Board, 25 of that as the executive director, and really was the embodiment of what the spirit of Christmas is: more than 17,000 hampers delivered every year, Madam Speaker.

When it comes to ICU capacity, of course, we more than doubled ICU capacity during the third wave, Madam Speaker, to about 152 beds. We continue to prepare for the fourth wave. We have had additional time because of the measures that've been taken. As of this morning, there's 15 people in ICU with COVID-19.

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

Vaccine Policy at the Legislature Requirements for MLAs

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, it's very concerning that, just like under Brian Pallister, this government still doesn't have a plan to increase ICU capacity in a sustainable way. It resulted in Manitobans being sent out of province during the third wave. I fear that we're repeating that mistake as we head into the fourth, because we still don't see leadership from the PCs.

Here's why we don't see leadership: right now in Manitoba, if you want to go into a Tim Hortons, you have to prove that you're vaccinated. If you want to go into a gym, you have to prove that you're vaccinated. If you want to go to a Bombers game, you have to prove that you're vaccinated. But not if you want to go into the PC Cabinet or caucus room.

It's a hypocrisy that alienates Manitobans and stymies our efforts against the pandemic. Will the interim PC leader simply announce that he will ensure all of his MLAs are vaccinated or that he'll kick them out of Cabinet?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Premier): Madam Speaker, one of the things that was made clear by the Peachey report, which was commissioned by the NDP when they were in government, is that there was a lack of ICU capacity—staffed ICU capacity—under the NDP government.

So not only, of course, did we prepare and enhance that during the third wave, more than doubling what the NDP ever had for ICU capacity, we've been training nurses to be able to work in the ICU, Madam Speaker. We've been ensuring that we're preparing for that.

Now, of course, we've been able to blunt the fourth wave, delay the fourth wave. As a result of that, while other western provinces were beginning their fourth wave in July, we were able to do an additional 500,000—half a million—doses of the COVID-19 vaccine because we were able to delay that.

That is real action for Manitobans, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Kinew: Do you remember right before the third wave, when Brian Pallister kept saying how much better we were doing than the other provinces? I do, and I fear that the interim PC leader just jinxed us.

But again, let's go through the facts, Madam Speaker. If you want to go to a Tim Hortons, like many Manitobans do, you have to show that you're vaccinated. If you want to go to a Bombers game—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —you have to show that you're vaccinated. If you want to go to a Jets game, you have to show that you're vaccinated. If you want to go to Smitty's for wings, you have to show that you're vaccinated. But if you want to be in Cabinet or the PC caucus room, no such requirement.

Why is that? Why is it that the PC party refuses to confront the anti-vax element in their base?

Absolute silence is absolutely telling. They refuse to step up, Madam Speaker, and ensure that all of their MLAs—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, sometimes the questions are so foolish, you just get into a stunned-silence mode, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, this is a province that has done better than almost any other province when it comes to the vaccination rate. That is because we ensured that we had the infrastructure when it came to vaccinations, ensured that we were promoting the 'vaxation', that we're working with Indigenous communities around the province to get the vaccine to the various—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: —places in Manitoba. That is why we were able to administer another 500,000 doses of the COVID-19 between July, when the fourth wave began in many other western provinces, and now, to prepare us for the fourth wave, Madam Speaker. That is why Manitoba is recognized as a leader when it comes to proof of vaccination.

He doesn't want to recognize all of that because he knows that is something that Manitobans support, they approve of. He can yell all day long, but it's not going to change the fact that we're doing the right things for Manitobans.

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

PC Party Leadership Election Political Party Memberships

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): No one should be able to buy the premier's chair. It is against the law to buy a membership in a political party for someone else. But that's exactly what is happening in the PC leadership race right now.

Numerous reports have revealed that the former chief financial officer of the PC Party was supported by an illegal scheme to sell memberships. Now, credible reports state that we could be talking about thousands of memberships here. We need a clear statement from the interim leader of the PC Party that this scheme is illegal, and that every dollar raised and every membership obtained in this scheme will be rejected.

Will the interim PC leader commit today that his party will reject these funds and these memberships?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Premier): Madam Speaker, the member opposite knows that Elections Manitoba is charged to do these acts. Of course, the individual that he's speaking about, there was a vetting process within our political party. Of course, if there was a true vetting process within the NDP political party when it came to leadership candidates, they wouldn't be in the tough position they're in now. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, this party wants to court anti-vax support. They want to obtain the money from anti-vaxxers, but they refuse to take the risk of publicly embracing anti-vax sentiments in their policy positions. That's at the heart of this issue.

They may distance themselves from their former chief financial officer, but they are all continuing to accept the money that was raised through those illegal memberships. We could be talking about tens of thousands of dollars that the PC Party of Manitoba continues to sit on right now.

We know that this was obtained through illegitimate means, and yet this leader, this party continues to sit on those funds even though they know that they are wrong.

Will he simply order that every illegal dollar will be returned and that every illegal membership will be rejected today?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, the member knows that Elections Manitoba investigates a number of different things.

He also knows that there was a vetting process when it comes to the particular candidate and our party took action, unlike their party, which refused to vet their leadership candidates. But he knows, of course, that Elections Manitoba does investigations, because when the NDP had a leadership candidate with three leadership candidates, investigation took place by Elections Manitoba that there were illegal contributions, because they were paying for delegate fees. So he might remember that.

Of course, he might also remember that Steve Ashton made a number of accusations against him when he was a—running for the leadership—candidate. So I know he knows full well about allegations during a leadership candidate. He might want to let the process play out.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, Madam Speaker, we know that Brian Pallister was terrible at respecting election laws, and it seems that the interim PC leader is continuing that shameful tradition. That's because, right now, thousands of memberships were sold through an illegal scheme. And while the PC Party may have disqualified a candidate that was going to take over from their chosen one in caucus, that party is still sitting on tens of thousands of dollars. That's money that they are going to use in the next election that was obtained through illegal means.

* (14:10)

We have filed a complaint with the elections commissioner, but is the moral obligation of the PC Party to return this money that it knows is wrong and to reject the memberships so that they cannot influence who sits in the premier's chair next.

Will the PC Party, under the direction of their interim leader, simply return every dollar and reject every membership raised through this scheme: yes or no?

Mr. Goertzen: I don't deny that the member might know more about illegal means than I do, Madam Speaker, but I certainly know that there's a elections body that investigates things. They've investigated

many things against the NDP. They've investigated things, of course, when the member opposite was running for leader. There were allegations against the member opposite when he was running for leader.

I remember when the NDP had to repay \$76,000, Madam Speaker, at one point, because the unions were providing labour to the campaign and then they claimed that as an election expense, even though there was no cost incurred to the NDP. And so, four years after, they sheepishly paid back \$76,000 of taxpayers' money.

So the NDP know an awful lot about breaking election laws. We'll let this process play out, Madam Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Are people having trouble seeing that the Speaker is standing?

PC Party Leadership Election Political Party Memberships

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): We know that Brian Pallister didn't care about Manitoba's election laws and now the rest of PCs are showing that they're no different. Reports have revealed that maybe 4,000 PC memberships have been bought using an illegal scheme, Madam Speaker.

No one should be allowed to illegally buy the premier's chair, and that's what's happening here. And the PC Party is doing absolutely nothing about it. We need independent oversight—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —if the PC Party won't act.

So, will the Attorney General (Mr. Friesen) get up today and commit to an independent oversight 'procay'—process for the PC Party leadership election?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Premier): There is an independent process. It's called Elections Manitoba.

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

Ms. Fontaine: The PC Party leadership election is on October 30th. Manitobans need to know that this process is not tainted by the illegal purchases of memberships.

Those very people who are going to vote for the new premier, they need to know that you cannot illegally buy this chair to sit in this Chamber. They

refuse to do anything to be open or transparent about the process. We need an independent oversight.

Will the Attorney General (Mr. Friesen) get up today and set up an independent oversight process for the PC Party right now?

Mr. Goertzen: The independent process is called Elections Manitoba, Madam Speaker.

I would remind the member opposite that it wasn't that long ago—and she would have been connected to the government—where the premier of the day, Greg Selinger, was running an election campaign out of room 204—out of the premier's office, Madam Speaker. I'm still scared every time I open the doors in our office that an NDP membership book might fall out, because he was running the campaign out of the premier's office.

We need no lessons from those members how to run a leadership campaign.

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

Ms. Fontaine: There are potentially 4,000 illegally purchased PC Party memberships. That's tens of thousands of dollars: illegally donated funds. The PC Party has shown that they will not act in this regard. The reports have been public for weeks and they have done nothing to comply with the law, Madam Speaker.

The issue goes to the heart of our democracy. It is about who can legitimately occupy the premier's chair, Madam Speaker.

Will the Attorney General get up—he's got a duty to make sure the laws of this province are followed. Will he do so today?

Mr. Goertzen: Boy, with these questions, Madam Speaker, I think I might last longer as the leader of this party than the Leader of the Opposition might last as his party.

Let's be clear here what's going on, Madam Speaker—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: I know this is sensitive to him, Madam Speaker. It should be sensitive to him because he had a party, a premier, who ran a campaign right out of the office of the premier—right out of this building, ran an election campaign. He has a party that took \$76,000 and didn't return it for four or five years after illegally claiming back expenses that didn't occur.

When the election laws were first written to not allow for corporate donations, they bundled union donations, Madam Speaker, in the early 2000s and had to pay all that back again. Almost every election they've done something to try to bilk the taxpayers out of money that they didn't deserve.

We will take no lessons on how to run anything when it comes to the NDP, Madam Speaker.

PC Party Leadership Election Political Party Memberships

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Madam Speaker, these are serious matters. It's alleged that many Conservative memberships were bought illegally. No one should buy their way to the premier's chair—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

MLA Marcelino: We've written the Commissioner of Elections. They confirm that an investigation has been opened. In the meantime, the fates of thousands of potentially fraudulent memberships remain unclear. This could determine who will be Manitoba's next premier.

The minister needs to be clear today: Are all memberships sold in this fashion going to be disallowed: yes or no?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Premier): I know that the members opposite, they're worried. They should be worried. Manitobans are going to elect the first female premier in the history of this province in 30 days.

And it's clear, Madam Speaker, it's clear that they're already running and they're already trying to tarnish—in a scurrilous and an unfounded way—this election campaign, but this election campaign for Manitobans will be historic. It'll put Manitoba on a new and a better path, and no amount of mudslinging from the NDP is going to change that.

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

MLA Marcelino: Madam Speaker, this situation is rotten and it's just the latest round of concerns that Manitobans have regarding this Conservative government's conduct around elections.

One of their first acts was to make it harder to vote by implementing restrictive voter ID laws. They increased the donation limit and tax credits to favour wealthy donors. All of it undermines free and fair elections.

The current situation is serious and deserves a serious answer.

Will thousands of potentially fraudulent memberships be rejected, and when will Conservatives make that clear?

Mr. Goertzen: We are very excited that Manitoba's going to have their first woman premier, Madam Speaker.

I know why the NDP aren't very excited about that. I know that the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) has been in ministers' office measuring the drapes already, Madam Speaker, ready to go into the ministry. I know the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) has been walking by room 204, wondering what it would be like to walk into the door. Probably a few NDP memberships came out of the door on the bottom from when Greg Selinger was running the campaign out of there.

Well, I would tell them, you know, I respect the electorate. We'll give the electorate their final word when a general election comes. I don't think they should be too ready to move into the offices because there's a better and a new day coming to Manitoba, Madam Speaker.

* (14:20)

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

MLA Marcelino: Madam Speaker, the party that brought Manitobans the vote-splitting scandal now has thousands of memberships that are under a cloud of suspicion. No one should be able to buy their way to the premier's chair.

Conservatives need to address this today and come clean about how many fraudulent memberships they have sold and return all money raised through this alleged illegal scheme: Will they do so, and will they do so today?

Mr. Goertzen: I remember that day, Madam Speaker, when Greg Selinger reached into the union hall and hired a union operative—at, I think, more than \$100,000 a year—to come into this building while he was trying to hang on to his leadership. Out of the union hall, used government money to hire somebody to come in here and run his election campaign out of the premier's office.

That stain and that tarnish—I'm still wiping the walls to try to get the tarnish off of the premier's office from what they did to deface that office, trying to use

it as a political office to run a campaign. We're not going to do that.

We look forward to the first woman premier coming into this Chamber. They don't want it because they know it's not good for their fortunes. That's okay. It's good for Manitobans' fortunes, Madam Speaker.

Indigenous Reconciliation Minister Former Premier's Comments—Apology Request

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): The current Indigenous and reconciliation minister is Brian Pallister's hand-picked appointment to replace the member from Agassiz, who stepped down because she could not condone Brian Pallister's comments towards Indigenous people. Yet, this current minister himself would not condemn Brian Pallister for his comments and his actions.

So I ask the minister: How is he going to advance reconciliation towards Indigenous people when he is a member of the so-called team Manitoba that still has all the same players that they did everything to hinder reconciliation. And now that Brian Pallister's not in the room, will the members opposite finally—finally—rise and condemn his divisive and harmful comments?

Madam Speaker: The honourable minister of—*[interjection]*—order.

The honourable Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations.

Hon. Alan Lagimodiere (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations): I do respect your question, but I would be remiss at this point in time if I didn't take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank the former minister of Indigenous—or, Indigenous and Northern Relations, the MLA for Agassiz, for the strong relationships and her work towards reconciliation.

The member from Agassiz was first elected in 2016 and became the minister of Indigenous and Municipal Relations that same year, before the ministry was later renamed Indigenous and Northern Relations.

Madam Speaker, one of the many strengths of the member from Agassiz is her commitment to her community and to this province. And thank you again for all your work, for everything you've been doing and the last years, and we encourage you to continue on your journey to better Manitoba for all Manitobans—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Keewatinook, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Bushie: I'm not sure if that was an answer or rather a concession speech, the one he shuffled out of that Cabinet post.

PC leader Brian Pallister characterized division between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people: overnight hunting is a race war. PC leader Brian Pallister said that prioritizing Indigenous people for COVID vaccinations, quote, puts Manitobans at the back of the line. PC leader Brian Pallister said that the colonization of Canada was done with good intentions.

All the while their leader was spewing this rhetoric, not one of the members opposite stood up and disagreed, but rather they applauded his speeches and his agenda.

Is the minister able to stand in his place and take responsibility for his inactions, for his leader's comments, and tell us why he stayed silent?

Mr. Lagimodiere: The Path to Reconciliation Act speaks of four areas that we need to have—follow.

The first one is respect: respect for each other and the people that we are dealing with in our consultations. The second is engagement: engagement with people on an honest and forthright manner. Understanding: understanding of the shared history that we have in the past and how we can move to better that situation in the future. And the last one, is the action that we take in our departments to move those areas forward.

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

Mr. Bushie: It's interesting that he goes through the checklist.

So this minister's idea of advancing reconciliation is to go through the PC Indigenous relations checklist. So let's see: make a phone call, check; stop at the airport, check; show up at one event, check; blame Justin Trudeau, check; hope the issue goes away, big check.

So I ask the question, Madam Speaker, and the minister has had months and months to prepare knowing full well this was going to be the question asked of him: What are you doing to advance reconciliation for Indigenous people here in Manitoba right now?

Mr. Lagimodiere: Well, I believe the—thank you, Madam Speaker—and I believe the member opposite knows that following my appointment I engaged on a listening and understanding relationship with First Nations people throughout the province. And I've travelled thousands of kilometres, visiting, sitting down, speaking to leaders, speaking to—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lagimodiere: —our elders, speaking to our survivors, speaking to our knowledge keepers. I've sat down in residential school sites, shared tears, shared laughter with residential school survivors.

And it's very important for all of us to embark on those journeys of engagement and understanding, and I would encourage everybody in this House to do that.

Madam Speaker: I just need some clarification. I have on my list the member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin) asking a question, but it's the member for Thompson? Okay.

Child-Care Spending During Pandemic Wait-Time Reduction and Staffing Support

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): Madam Speaker, the wait-list for child care has grown by thousands under the Conservative government. It is now at 19,000 children waiting for care. Only a fraction of the spending has been—set aside during the pandemic has actually been spent. They're not meeting the needs of parents and families.

Why won't this government put committed resources to use, and why are they waiting so long?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): Our government has committed \$25 million more for child care this year than the NDP ever committed. Our government has committed to building 5,000 new spaces a year, compared to their record of about annual 500 new spaces a year.

So our government understands that we need affordable, accessible child care throughout the province. That is exactly what we're doing, unlike what members opposite did when they were in government. They created a wait-list because that's all they were doing. They weren't creating child-care spaces, they were creating wait-lists.

We're actually creating child-care spaces.

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

Ms. Adams: Madam Speaker, the minister is not meeting the needs of children and families for child care today. Millions of dollars pledged have not—gone unspent. The Pandemic Staffing Support Benefit designed to support front-line workplaces to shore up their workforce was underspent by 92 per cent. That's millions of dollars unspent.

In the words of—the words of this government are not matching their actions.

Why is the minister not taking this seriously?

Ms. Squires: To date, our government has approved 346 applications that we have received under the Pandemic Staffing Support Benefit program, a program that our government had created recognizing the needs of our various sectors in relation to pandemic expenses.

And I'd also like to remind the member that we are not out of the woods yet. We are still currently in the pandemic and we still have applications that are being brought in on a daily basis. The intake is still open and we're wanting to work with all of our child-care centres and all of our sectors to ensure that they are stabilized throughout the pandemic.

I'd also like to remind the member that last year we were able to give an additional \$4 million to child-care centres throughout the province to help them out with some of their operating costs, and we thank them for keeping their doors open during this very challenging pandemic.

* (14:30)

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

Ms. Adams: Well, Madam Speaker, it is clear that the minister does not understand the child-care file, as the Conservative government has not delivered on their promises. A majority of child-care centres in Manitoba are no longer able to support children with special needs. As parents simply call looking for spaces, the answer is no, they don't have the capacity. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Adams: The wait-list has grown to 19,000 under her watch. The minister's plan is to cross her fingers and wait for the federal government. That's not enough.

Why won't the minister put resources already pledged to work for Manitoban families?

Ms. Squires: I understand why the NDP needed a wait-list. They were only creating an average of 500 spaces a year for the entire 17 years that they were in government. They never took child care seriously. They never acted on creating the spaces that were needed and they voted against—in the last session they voted against putting the inclusion support program in legislation.

Madam Speaker, that is shameful. That was that member. She voted against—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: —inclusion support programs. I wonder if she's bothered to explain to her constituents in her riding that she voted against supports for children with special needs in child care.

COVID-19 Public Health Orders Enforcement Concerns

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): We're once again heading into a wave of COVID that will likely fill our ICUs, and we're still getting mixed messages and double standards on the pandemic. There have been PC MLAs and staff who defied public health orders in code red, some others spread misinformation about vaccines with no consequences. Organizations and businesses have been getting fine after fine after fine, but are allowed to stay open, and of \$3.1 million worth of tickets, less than 10 per cent has been collected.

Is this government going to get serious about enforcement to put a lid on cases? Why is this government letting scofflaws drive a fourth wave?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Well, Madam Speaker, the member is wrong. His premise is erroneous.

As a matter of fact, our government takes very seriously our obligation to enforce, in COVID-19, to keep Manitobans safe. That's why we have almost 3,300 personnel across Manitoba working every day, empowered to enforce the public health orders. These include the RCMP, the Winnipeg Police Service, law enforcement agencies, provincial employees, municipal partners, including the City of Winnipeg. We'll keep doing this.

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

Rural Paramedic Services Working Conditions and Wages

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Still on health care, Madam Speaker,

We've heard from rural paramedics that, like so many others, they are burning out, it's understaffed and that they're afraid that it could be putting the lives of the people they care for at risk.

Now, the NDP and PCs alike closed rural hospitals and clinics and shuttered ambulance stations, and while they've been expecting paramedics to pick up the slack, that isn't happening because there isn't the capacity. It's been nearly two years since wait times for service have been posted publicly. Rural paramedics make \$14 an hour less than paramedics in the city of Winnipeg. They've been without a contract for four years. In the Interlake the number of open shifts is between 20 and 30 per cent, and the burnout and PTSD is real.

Is this government going to address the crisis in rural paramedics, make sure that burnout is covered and that rural paramedics are getting the support and wages they deserve?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Premier): We appreciate very much the work of paramedics. This a government that has long supported paramedicine and paramedics and the work that they do, of course, moving to self-regulation, something the former government refused to do for them, but they were looking for many, many years, Madam Speaker. But we also know that this has been a challenging time for them during the pandemic. Of course, there are a number of different issues when it comes to wages and labour that I can't speak about.

Members will know that all Manitobans are pleased that Shared Health and the Manitoba Nurses Union were able to come to a tentative agreement. We won't speak any further about that contract until it's gone through its internal process, but it is an indication that we value the work of our health-care professionals.

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

Cochlear Implant Software Provincial Coverage for Upgrades

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, Madam Speaker, hearing is critical for communication among our fellow human beings. Everything possible must be

done to ensure our elders can maintain their hearing in their senior years.

At a rally at the Legislature today, Gladys Nielsen and many others called for the provincial government to cover the cost of updating the software, the processors in their cochlear implants. These should be covered under medicare so that they—these individuals with cochlear implants can continue to hear. Petitions signed by 1,000 Manitobans, which Manitoba Liberals have read in this Chamber, support this.

I ask the Minister of Health: Will she ensure the cost of 'coverling'—covering the cochlear implant upgrades—the processors—will be included in the health-care budget this coming year?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): I thank the member from River Heights for the question.

I've had the pleasure, in my capacity as the Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery, now in this capacity as Minister of Health and Seniors Care, to meet with the Seniors Coalition. They've shared with me many issues and concerns and innovative solutions to address health-care concerns such as cochlear implants. We have taken this under advisement.

We continue to talk with our health insurance branch within my department, and we will continue to address concerns for seniors, vulnerable populations here in our province, Madam Speaker.

Truth and Reconciliation Residential School Recognition

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): On September 30th, 2021, Manitoba observed its first national day of truth and reconciliation. Our government recognized this important day so Manitobans had the opportunity to learn and reflect on the lost children and survivors of the tragedy of the residential schools.

In what other ways is Manitoba leading the way forward on the path to reconciliation?

Hon. Alan Lagimodiere (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations): Thank you to the MLA for Dawson Trail for that very important question.

We all have a role to play in the path to reconciliation. And Indigenous people have suffered a great deal of trauma in residential schools, and with the

recent tragic events of the discovery of unmarked graves across Canada, this has reopened many wounds for our survivors.

In 2017, our government passed legislation to recognize September 30th as Orange Shirt Day to encourage meaningful discussions about the trauma of our residential schools. And on this side of the House, we are committed to listening, learning and working with meaning—in meaningful relationships with leaders and knowledge keepers, elders, survivors—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

U of M Faculty Association Collective Bargaining Negotiations

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Yesterday—just yesterday in Estimates—I asked the Minister of Advanced Education three times if he had knowledge about a mandate letter that this government sent to the University of Manitoba. Now, today CBC reports that the PC government has, in fact, imposed mandates in negotiations with the University of Manitoba.

Now, this government—it seems that they have a choice right now about—on their hands. Do they continue down this damaging path that Brian Pallister laid out for them, or do they actually allow fair negotiations between U of M faculty and administration?

So I ask the minister now: Is there anything that he's going to change and allow fair negotiations between the faculty and the—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): I thank the member for the question.

Before I get to his answer, Madam Speaker, I do want to take this opportunity that—on behalf of my family, I want to thank all those health-care workers that worked in the Selkirk vaccine supercentre that provided my family and many, many other Manitobans the vaccines that we needed to fight this COVID-19. So I want to reach out and say thank you, on a personal note, to all the staff, the navigators, the ambassadors, the health-care workers and, of course, the volunteers.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Madam Speaker: Are there any petitions?

Cochlear Implant Program

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

* (14:40)

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

There are no up-front 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. Assistive Devices Program in Ontario covers 75 per cent of the cost, up to a maximum amount of \$5,444, for a cochlear implant replacement speech processor. The BC Adult Cochlear Implant 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 Brian Mashinter, Sheri Armour, Joyce Coreau and many, many other Manitobans.

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

Abortion Services

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Manitoba women, girls, two-spirit, gender-queer, non-binary and trans persons deserve to be safe and supported when accessing abortion services.

(2) Limited access to effective and safe abortion services contributes to detrimental outcomes and consequences for those seeking an abortion, as an estimated 25 million unsafe abortions occur worldwide each year.

(3) The provincial government's reckless health-care cuts have created inequity within the health-care system whereby access to the abortion pill, Mifegymiso, and surgical abortions are less accessible in northern and rural—for northern and rural individuals than individuals in southern Manitoba, as they face travel barriers to access the handful of non-urban health-care professionals who are trained to provide medical abortions.

(4) For over five years, and over the administration of three failed Health ministers, the provincial government operated under the pretense that reproductive health was not the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Seniors Care and shifted the responsibility to a secretariat with no policy, program or financial authority within the health-care system.

(5) For over four years, the provincial government has refused to support bill 200, The Safe Access to Abortion Services Act, which will ensure the safety of Manitoba women, girls, two-spirit, gender-queer, non-binary and trans persons accessing abortion services and the staff who provide such services by establishing buffer zones for anti-choice Manitobans around clinics.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately ensure effective and safe access to abortion services for individuals, regardless of where they reside in Manitoba, and to ensure that buffer zones are immediately legislated.

Signed by many Manitobans.

Louise Bridge

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Over 25,000 vehicles per day cross the Louise Bridge, which has served as the vital link for vehicular traffic between northeast Winnipeg and the downtown for the last 110 years.

(2) The current structure will undoubtedly be declared unsafe in a few years as it's deteriorated extensively, becoming functionally obsolete, subject to more frequent unplanned repairs and cannot be widened to accommodate future traffic capacity.

(3) As far back as 2008, the City of Winnipeg—the City has studied where the new replacement bridge should be situated.

(4) After including the bridge replacement in the City's five-year capital budget forecast in 2009, the new bridge became a short-term construction priority in the City's transportation master plan of 2011.

(5) City capital and budget plans identified replacement of the Louise Bridge on a site just east of the bridge, and expropriated homes there on the south side of Nairn in anticipation of a 2015 start.

(6) In 2014, the new City administration did not make use of available federal infrastructure funds, and instead decided to fund an off-the-list, low-priority Waverley Underpass.

(7) The new Louise Bridge Committee began its campaign to demand a new bridge and its surveys confirmed the residents wanted a new bridge beside the current bridge, with the old bridge kept open for local traffic.

(8) The NDP provincial government signalled its firm commitment to partner with the City on replacing the Louise Bridge in its 2015 Throne Speech. Unfortunately, provincial infrastructure initiatives, such as the new Louise Bridge, came to a halt with the election of the Progressive Conservative government in 2016.

(9) More recently, the City tethered the Louise Bridge replacement issue to its new transportation master plan and eastern corridor project. Its recommendations have now identified the location of the new Louise Bridge to be placed just to the west of the current bridge, not to the east as originally proposed.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to financially assist the City of Winnipeg on building this three-lane bridge in each direction to maintain this vital link between northeast Winnipeg and downtown.

(2) To urge the provincial government to recommend that the City of Winnipeg keep the old bridge fully open to traffic while a new bridge is under construction and consider the feasibility of keeping it open for active transportation in the future; and

(3) To urge the provincial government to financially assist the City of Winnipeg in keeping the old bridge open for active transportation.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

* (14:50)

Madam Speaker: Are there any further petitions?

Epilepsy Treatment

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

And the background to this petition is as follows:

One in 10 Manitobans will have a seizure in their lifetime, and the incidence of epilepsy in the Indigenous population is double the national average. Epilepsy occurs just as often as breast and lung cancer worldwide.

(2) COVID-19 has cancelled epilepsy surgeries booked for Manitoba patients elsewhere in Canada because they cannot receive the 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 in an orthopedics ward with an orthopedic staff, rather than 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, and results—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; and

(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.

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

Abortion Services

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Manitoba women, girls, two-spirit, gender-queer, non-binary and trans persons deserve to be safe and supported when accessing abortion services.

(2) Limited access to effective and safe abortion services contributes to detrimental outcomes and consequences for those seeking an abortion as an estimated 25 million unsafe abortions occur worldwide each year.

(3) The provincial government's reckless health-care cuts have created inequity within the health-care system whereby access to the abortion pill, Mifegymiso, and surgical abortions are less accessible for northern and rural individuals and individuals in southern Manitoba as they face travel barriers to access the handful of non-urban health-care professionals who are trained to provide medical abortions.

(4) For over five years and over the administration of three failed Health ministers, the provincial government operated under the pretense that reproductive health was not the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Seniors Care and shifted the responsibility to the secretariat with no policy, program or financial authority within the health-care system.

(5) For over four years the provincial government has refused to support bill 200, The Safe Access to Abortion Services Act, which will ensure safety of Manitoba women, girls, two-spirit, genderqueer, non-binary and trans persons accessing abortion services and the staff who provide such services by establishing buffer zones for anti-choice Manitobans around clinics.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately ensure effective and safe access to abortion services for individuals regardless of where they reside in Manitoba and to ensure that buffer zones are immediately legislated.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Epilepsy Treatment

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): 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 worldwide.

(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.

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(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 many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Pursuant to rule 33(8), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe). The title of the resolution is Calling on the Provincial Government to Implement a Consistent Vaccine Mandate at the Manitoba Legislative Building.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Concordia. The title of the resolution is Calling on the Provincial Government to Implement a Consistent Vaccine Mandate at the Manitoba Legislative Building.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): A few announcements and a couple of leave requests, Madam Speaker. I'd like to announce that the long-awaited Standing Committee on Rules of the House will meet on Tuesday, October 12th, 2021, at 6:30 p.m. to consider the following: amendments to the Rules, Orders and Forms of Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

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Mr. Goertzen: I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Wednesday, October 13th, 2021, starting 30 minutes after the House rises, to consider the following proposals by Elections Manitoba to modify the voting process: Vote by Mail – Byelection; Vote Anywhere in your Electoral Division on Election Day.

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the voting process: Vote by Mail – Byelection; Vote Anywhere in your Electoral Division on Election Day.

Mr. Goertzen: Could you please canvass the House for leave to make the following permanent change to the Estimates sequence: Economic Development and Jobs to be considered before Conservation and Climate in the Chamber.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to make the following permanent change to the Estimates sequence: Economic Development and Jobs to be considered before Conservation and Climate in the Chamber? Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

* (15:00)

Mr. Goertzen: One last leave request, Madam Speaker. Could you please canvass the House for leave to allow the House to consider a ministerial statement during orders of the day this afternoon with the following conditions: (1) this statement will be on the passing of Mica Schellenberg; (2) the statement will take place immediately after the question has been put and resolved on the second reading motion on Bill 72, The Disability Support Act and Amendments to The Manitoba Assistance Act; (3) the First Minister will make the statement with responses from the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) and the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont); (4) each member will speak for no more than three minutes; and (5) the House will not see the clock until all three members have spoken.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to allow the House to consider a ministerial statement during orders of the day this afternoon with the following conditions: (1) This statement will be on the passing of Mica Schellenberg; (2) the statement will take place immediately after the question has been put and resolved on the second reading motion on Bill 72, The Disability Support Act and Amendments to The Manitoba Assistance Act; (3) the First Minister will make the statement with responses from the Leader of the Official Opposition and the member for St. Boniface; (4) each member will speak for no more than three minutes; and (5) the House will not see the clock until all three members have spoken.

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Goertzen: Pursuant to the sessional agreement, can you please call for debate on Bill 72?

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider second reading of Bill 72 this afternoon. So I will now call Bill 72, The Disability

Support Act and Amendments to The Manitoba Assistance Act, standing in the name of the honourable member for St. Vital, who has 15 minutes remaining.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 72—The Disability Support Act and Amendments to The Manitoba Assistance Act

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): So we're discussing Bill 72, and I've already spoken at length on this in the last opportunity we had to debate Bill 72, and so I will conclude my remarks and just summarize by saying that it's clear that we realize our goal with this is to ensure that every Manitoban, no matter their ability, feels included, feels supported and feels that we, as a government and people in the Legislature, are reducing barriers and providing equitable access to services for all.

And in Bill 72, it's clear that there are some gaps that bill seventy-two does create, in terms of its ability where it talks about people with disorders or who are—don't have the capacity are likely to continue for—that are likely to not continue for more than one year—so, less than a year—may be excluded from the bill, from Bill 72. And that's unfortunate because it clearly goes against the idea of providing services for all Manitoban regardless of their ability.

And so, regardless of the other aspects of Bill 72, it still has some ground to make, it still has some areas where it should be improved, and I hope and I urge this government to make those improvements to Bill 72.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): I appreciate the opportunity to put a few words on the record regarding Bill 72 today. Unlike the member opposite, I have not had a chance to speak to this bill before, and I am grateful for the opportunity.

I think, you know, it's—this is something—this is a bill that addresses, I think, a need that all of us will recognize that people who are *[inaudible]* place in our society, and they deserve to be—they deserve to receive—sorry, can you hear me okay?

Madam Speaker: We can hear you, thank you.

Mr. Teitsma: Okay, good.

So they deserve to receive, I think, special care and special attention within our society and also within this Legislature and within legislation and

government programming. And that's, I believe, what Bill 72 sets out to do.

Just by way of reminder, for those of you who might not remember where we were when we were last discussing this bill months ago, it does feel like quite a long time ago. Maybe that's just the COVID time warp that my brain and, it appears, the brains of many of my family members and friends and colleagues, has also been experienced, and it's really hard to get a grasp of time, I think, over the last year and a half sometimes, such a disruption that the pandemic has had on our lives.

So—but just to remind everybody, like, why, what is this legislation and why is it even needed? We had done some public and stakeholder consultations in 2019 and heard a lot of support for a new income support program specifically for persons with severe and prolonged disabilities and to keep that separate from the Employment and Income Assistance Program.

I want to assure the member for St. Vital that those with, you know, short-term episodic disabilities or medical conditions, they'd still receive the attention of this government. And I can assure the member of that, and that they'll be treated equitably, because I think he and I share that goal. So I can give him that assurance, at least for my part on this side of the House, that that is—that's a goal that we share, that there be equitable treatment and that there be appropriate supports in place for people who need them.

But in the case of severe and prolonged disabilities, I think a different set of supports or a different approach to those supports could be necessary; and so this new act creates a framework for income support for those individuals who really have no other means of supporting themselves. It's tailored to the needs of that particular population and that's why it's been kept separate.

I think this—it's good that this new legislation recognizes the distinct barriers that people with severe and prolonged disabilities face. They're—these are unique barriers. They're significant. And it also takes away the sense of obligation of employment, right?

And that's something that most of our employment services—Employment and Income Assistance, after all, has got that name in it—that that's what they're focused on. And I think when you think about how to provide support for someone who's—who has episodic disabilities or moderate disabilities or medical conditions, employment is part of the picture there, and it's

an appropriate part of the picture. But here where you have severe disabilities, you know, maybe that's not appropriate. And so I think that's why we have this act before us today and why it's been written this way.

I'm really glad to see that we do have support, appears that we have support at least on all sides of the House. I'm pleased to see that our legislative order or sessional agreement, I guess, for the few days that we're sitting here in the month of October, is going to ensure that this important bill does get passed. It is a bill that needs our attention and certainly shouldn't be designated or delayed or filibustered in any way. This is something that we should be moving forward to, and all Manitobans agree with that.

And so I'm happy to see that, you know, as far as I know, at least, that all members of the House agree with that as well and that we will be able to see this bill move forward.

I want to thank the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) for championing it and for bringing it forward. I think it's one of the most important aspects of her role is to be able to be part of providing supports for these kinds of individuals in our society, these people who have these special needs. And we're—we are ever so grateful to have them as part of our community and to have them and to recognize their personhood and to recognize their value and their worth and their contributions that they make and what they can also produce in us in response to them.

There's nothing quite the same as being able to share time and to share your heart and your giving with someone who has, you know, severe disability, and maybe isn't even able to show that appreciation. But I think that's a really fundamental expression of our humanity and our common humanity, our shared humanity. And it's an expression of where we establish value and worth in our society. And it's not on how much money you can make or what colour skin you have. It's rooted in that humanity. And that's what we all have in common, including with these individuals.

So, in terms of the nuts and bolts of the program, we're not—I don't believe we're making people jump over from where they are today to this new program immediately. I think it's been put forward with a, you know, fairly responsible approach to how to manage the bureaucratic needs of the transition.

* (15:10)

So then they'll have to make an application. Individuals have to make an application to enroll

in this new disability support program, and I'm optimistic that in fairly short order they'll see that there're probably benefits—there could be benefits to doing so.

And I hope that they'll do so and I also encourage MLAs and caregivers and anybody else in a leadership and caregiving position in our society to—that works with individuals with severe and prolonged disabilities to take a look at this and to see if they can assist in ensuring that they make that application and that they get enrolled in this new program.

The benefit levels are still, I believe, in development. I haven't heard details there but certainly we look forward to all of that getting worked out. And, you know, I do remember the efforts that were put forward to getting the supports of—for EIA programs to be 75 per cent of median market rents. That did take a bit of effort on the part of members of my caucus and I'm pleased to see that that was put in place. I expect that would continue in this realm, as well.

But really, this program is intended to support these Manitobans and to ensure that they get the support they—they get the support that they need.

And so part of that, of course, is going to make sure that they actually qualify for the program, that they're the people who we do need to support. Certainly wouldn't want anybody taking advantage of supports or using these that weren't eligible, and the purpose of these programs is to focus on people like that.

One thing that I think is important, too, is to recognize that often these individuals will require supports for navigation, as well. It's not always obvious how to get through all the government hoops and we need to make sure we're reducing those barriers.

And appreciate the member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses) talking about that and talking about ways to, you know, to ensure that we're being equitable, we're being fair and we're showing love fundamentally to these kind of individuals, to these people who are in our society, and that we—and we do it in a way that shows compassion and care for them and values their—or, that values them for who they are.

And so I think with those few words I'm going to, you know, soon conclude my remarks. I think this morning—I thought I was done speaking for the day but apparently not, so I'm going to once again take the opportunity now—especially with Madam Speaker in the Chair, maybe I'll direct my comments directly to

her and encourage her to have a happy Thanksgiving weekend and to enjoy some time, you know, with family and friends, as you're able, and to encourage all my fellow colleagues in this House to do the same, and to truly take time to be thankful and to think about that. And I think one of the best ways to show that we're thankful is also to be generous and kind.

Bill 72 speaks to that, I think from a legislative perspective, but I also encourage you to make, you know, a donation to Winnipeg Harvest or to your local food bank or, I know in my constituency, I'll be dropping by the Plessis Family Resource Centre and giving them a donation. I think that's a great way to also show thanksgiving is by giving of ourselves, of our time and our talents and our treasure.

So I encourage all my colleagues to do the same and I hope that we can have a respectful debate in the remainder of this afternoon.

Thank you.

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): This bill enacts The Disability Support Act and makes amendments to The Manitoba Assistance Act.

The Disability Support Act creates a new support framework for individuals living with a severe and prolonged disability, who have no other adequate means of support. Individuals can apply for basic disability support payments as well as shelter assistance.

The act also allows for additional discretionary support payments in special cases. Disability payments under The Manitoba Assistance Act remain available for individuals who do not qualify for assistance under The Disability Support Act, but only for disabilities expected to continue for more than one year.

The Manitoba Assistance Act is amended to add a preamble and statement setting out the act's purpose. The act's provisions are also made gender neutral and obsolete provisions are repealed.

Most and likely all of us will be affected by a disability in our lives. We may have a disability ourselves or be close to a friend or family member who encounters barriers to accessibility. Disabilities can be temporary or permanent; they can also occur at any stage in life and be visible or non-visible. Examples of non-visible disabilities include ADHD, traumatic brain injury and epilepsy.

The Canadian Survey on Disability conducted by Statistics Canada in 2012 found that 15.6 per cent of the Manitoba population or 145,270 individuals

age 15 years or older reported having a disability that affected their daily activities. According to Barrier-Free Manitoba, our numbers currently are closer to 175,000 persons in Manitoba who live with a disability.

Manitoba has an aging population. Disability frequently rises with age. In 2012, 4.1 per cent of Manitobans age 15-24 years reported having a disability, whereas 49.1 per cent of those 75 and over reported a disability. With an aging population it is projected that the number of Manitobans with disabilities will rise over the years, and according to a Manitoba Bureau of Statistics discussion paper, the prevalence of disability in Manitoba is expected to increase to 17.4 per cent by 2036.

The trend is one towards a steadily growing population of people with disabilities in the medium- and long-term future. Living in an increasingly accessible and barrier-free province is therefore important for Manitoba's residents and visitors.

It's important to ensure that every Manitoban no matter their ability, feel included and supported by reducing barriers and providing equitable access for all. And while the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) says this bill will increase support for those with more permanent disabilities, that still remains to be seen.

What is clear is that this bill will leave some Manitobans with less support if their disability persists for less than one year. Subsection 5(1) strikes out, quote, physical or mental incapacity or disorder that is likely to continue for more than 90 days, end quote; and substitutes, quote, incapacity or disorder likely to continue for a period of more than one year.

This change means that disability supports will effectively only be available to Manitobans who have what amounts to a permanent disability or disability that persists for longer than one year. We on this side of the House are worried that when people currently in receipt of supports have their conditions reassessed, they will be kicked off of their supports.

Twenty-two thousand Manitobans currently receive disability supports. The Department of Families has said that they anticipate that 10,000 people will meet the new definition of disability for the purposes of the act. That means that going forward 12,000 people with disabilities could be negatively impacted as a result of the Minister of Families' bill.

This decrease is due to the change from anyone experiencing a disability for more than 90 days

currently being eligible for supports to only those who'll experience a disability for longer than a year being eligible for supports. Thus, this bill could potentially leave behind Manitobans who are experiencing significant but shorter-lasting disabilities.

This bill leaves fundamental questions unanswered: how much more support the 10,000 people on disability supports will actually receive? The net outcome should not be a cut to Manitobans with disabilities. Some of the 12,000 Manitobans that could receive less support due to this bill are amongst the most vulnerable in our province and we need to make sure that they do not fall through the cracks.

Overall, the net effect of this bill, it's still hard to tell. Some people may receive no support and there is no guarantee that current levels of support will be maintained. All disabilities should be taken seriously and an intermittent disability that is likely to continue for more than 90 days is incredibly difficult for someone to deal with as it is. But this is exacerbated if they are not eligible for financial support.

* (15:20)

The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, has caused suffering for many people and prolonged some people's disability. Due to our hospitals being overloaded from COVID patients, surgeries have been postponed, resulting in Manitobans waiting longer for procedures that could help them return to health.

There is a better way to help all people with disabilities, whether they are short- or long-term, during a once-in-a-century global pandemic. The minister could properly support all Manitobans with disabilities without kicking anyone off. This would reduce stress and improve the quality of life for thousands of Manitobans. At a time like this, no expense should be spared when it comes to helping and supporting our province's most vulnerable citizens.

Another concern that we have with this bill that was raised numerous times is that it continues a worrisome trend, under this government, of deferring specifics to regulation and giving the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) broad, regulatory powers to do as government pleases. This bill should provide more concrete guidelines for eligibility criteria and provide information on monetary payments.

Manitobans living with disabilities deserve to have this information readily accessible to them, rather than having it left up to the minister's discretion. This bill gives the minister significant power and

control over disability payments and eligibility criteria.

Unfortunately, limiting supports for some Manitobans living with disabilities seems to be a theme for this government and this minister, and this has become more evident and urgent in light of the global pandemic. They need to provide more meaningful supports for Manitobans living with short-term disabilities and certainly not limit supports and services that they already depend on.

The government continues to try and balance the budget on the backs of our most vulnerable citizens, including pre-school children who have special needs. They tried to put a hold on funding applications for the Child Care Inclusion Support Program and force parents to reapply, and they only publicly reversed this decision when they were faced with public uproar. But they've continued to undermine this inclusion support program at every turn.

They have frozen funding for St. Amant's autism programs for four years, and this year, they cut the number of hours of support each child receives. The government eliminated the funding for the Manitoba Community Services Council. Non-profit groups supported by the MCSC include the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities, and according to the law, the province needs to develop a plan that will create a fully accessible label market by 2023, but Barrier-Free Manitoba launched the Broken Promise campaign, calling out this government for failing to meet those obligations under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act.

And now the government is changing rules so that only employers with only—with over 50 employees have to comply with the AMA—before, it was 20—and that exempts 95 per cent of all businesses.

We don't know how many businesses have complied and were required under the accessibility employment standard regulation. They haven't surveyed or asked any questions to find out. This record does not exist.

The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth released a systemic view of services for children with disabilities this past March. Ainsley Krone said Manitoba families are struggling. Manitoba services for children with disabilities are underfunded and under-resourced. This is not just the case for children with complex medical and behavioural needs. Our caregivers survey, in consultations with parents,

reveal that gaps in service exist for many children with disabilities and their families.

Yet, families that experience multiple layers of disadvantage struggle more, including Indigenous caregivers and single-parent households. Some children with disabilities may enter the car of child welfare in order to receive services even when no child protection concerns exist.

And some recommendations from the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth include to find a plan to reduce wait times for diagnostic assessments and to enact a new law to provide a continuum of supports and services for children with disabilities and their families that is in line with their rights.

Together with the NDP critic for MPI and the NDP critic for persons with disabilities, we sit on a committee for accessible transportation, together with colleagues from the Independent Living Resource Center, cerebral palsy Manitoba, Transportation Options Network for Seniors, the Amalgamated Transit Union and Handi-Transit drivers and cab owners.

This was a committee that we helped initiate because of the hardships and, frankly, human rights violations that folks with accessibility issues are encountering within our province regarding their rights to access public transportation.

We are a long way away from fulfilling our duty and responsibilities set out in the Accessibility for Manitobans Act that became law in December 2013. The government of Manitoba—we set a goal to make Manitoba more inclusive for everyone by 2023 but we are a long way away from a barrier-free province.

The Manitoba Human Rights Code says that no person, business, or organization can discriminate against persons with disabilities. That means customers, clients and tenants with disabilities have the right to equal treatment and equal access to facilities and services.

Public and private educational providers also need to make sure their facilities and services are accessible and that appropriate accommodation is available for students with disabilities. It also means that employers must accommodate the needs of people with disabilities.

The concerns that we've raised regarding Bill 72, we will continue to raise them in the upcoming committee hearing and hopefully this government will agree to necessary amendments. Specifically, that too

much—much too much—is left to the regulation phase, including who meets eligibility criteria and the amounts of financial support, the amount of shelter support; all this is left to the regulation phase.

The minister says that this bill will increase support for those with more permanent disabilities but that still remains to be seen. Also, we have grave concerns that this bill will leave some Manitobans with less support if their disability persists for less than one year.

We hope this government and this Families Minister address these serious concerns with Bill 72.

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

The honourable member for St. Boniface?

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Yes, please.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Boniface.

Mr. Lamont: I think there are some—in some ways, this is—takes some small steps forward in terms of support.

And I've gone on the record more than once saying that our EIA system here in Manitoba is—I think—it's more than a generation out of date and it's, frankly, sadistic in some of the ways that it treats people.

I'll give you—I spoke to an EIA advocate who first started advocating in 1999. And the case that he was brought on to discuss was, at the time, a person on EIA had a rotten tooth that needed to be pulled. And EIA would pay for their surgery but they would not pay for the anaesthetic.

And I think that, to me, sort of symbolized part of everything that's wrong with our EIA system, is that it's—and there are other ways in which it's incredibly unfair. I have dealt with people who were struggling in all sorts of ways. And just the fact that—I believe that in 1992, the government of the day rolled back EIA rates to 1986 levels and in many cases those have not changed.

So we're all—we're still looking at \$900 a month, roughly, for some people including children, and it has been absolutely miserable for people with disabilities. I've heard some truly tragic stories.

But I will—I'll focus on the bill. One is that we do need clarity around the definition. And I certainly

hope the government will be open to, and the minister will be open to, making amendments.

We need clarity around the—what the definition of the severe and prolonged disability is because we certainly do not want to be excluding people who need help and who need assistance and are unable to work because of their disability. The last thing we need to do is to hold out false hope to them that things might get better and they won't.

We need—also need clarity on implementation of this program, to show how people will be transferred. I will note that one of the reasons is that sometimes there's talk about what we would call people who are the deserving poor as opposed to the undeserving poor. And in this case, this is an example of lifting people up because it's recognized that they—because of their disabilities, they can't work, whereas other people can't, and they are not actually provided any support or increase in income assistance.

* (15:30)

Inferring—an example, if someone was, you know, one of the questions here is in, under clause 9(3), an applicant may be required to undergo a disability assessment, including medical examination. Would this be required for an individual switching over from EIA?

The other, which I'm really concerned about, actually, is the idea that the government will place a lien on people's property. Now, this is, again, this is a—we're talking about a payment of people who have severe and prolonged disabilities who have no longer—no other adequate means of support, and if they're unable to pay their bills, it looks like the government is saying they'll take their house away, which I find alarming.

But there's also a very significant double standard in the difference between ways—the way we would treat somebody on EIA and, say, the benefits of northern and rural MLAs. Northern and rural MLAs get fairly generous allowances for travel and for living, but under those allowances, it's also allowed for MLAs to pay their mortgages. Mortgages are sometimes covered by this.

Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

So the idea that we are going to pay MLAs' mortgages but we're not going to threaten them with a lien or take away—threaten them with taking away—that the government may end up owning part of their property, but for people with severe and prolonged

disabilities who require assistance that we're going to threaten to take their property away is certainly something that needs some very serious examination.

So I just wanted to put those concerns on the record. These are things that absolutely require clarification. This is something that is long, long overdue because there's an extraordinary number of people in Manitoba who are suffering under an EIA system that is over a generation out of date and with the number of people on EIA steadily been going up since about 2008.

And I haven't checked the numbers lately, but it was over 70,000 people, which is an astonishing number of people in Manitoba and a huge proportion of the population. We're talking about the equivalent of entire towns and cities of people who are on EIA. And if you talk to advocates, they will tell you that many of these people could be working but can't. They're being blocked from work. Some of it is that some of them need skills and training; some of them are refugees, but the other is that there are very serious obstacles on EIA to people who are essentially punished if they volunteer or punished if they put in any—or if they work and that the rates actually make it impossible to—for them to achieve what's required of them.

We cannot punish people out of poverty, and I think that's what the entire system is designed to do.

So, while we do look forward to seeing this—to seeing assistance be improved, this bill—I certainly hope that the government will be open to amendments because this bill is in need of them.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Thank you.

Are there any further speakers?

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): Just a few very brief words to support this legislation, which is the result of some consultations that happened, rather extensive in-person and online questions. So, obviously, I don't want to repeat what has already been stated here, but we do want to emphasize that people who live with severe and prolonged disabilities have unique needs. I think this legislation recognizes that, and we want to provide them with targeted supports so they can fully participate in their community.

With those few words, I believe I'm good to sit down and move this to a vote.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Any further debate?

Hearing none, is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): The question before the House is second reading of Bill 72, The Disability Support Act and Amendments to The Manitoba Assistance Act.

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

House Business

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Deputy Government House Leader): I would like to announce that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Tuesday, October 12th, 2021, at 6:30 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 72, The Disability Support Act and Amendments to the Manitoba Assistance Act; and Bill 232, The Emancipation Day Act.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): So it has been announced that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Tuesday, October 12th, 2021, at 6:30 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 72, The Disability Support Act and Amendments to the Manitoba Assistance Act; and Bill 232, the 'emancipation' day act.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, I know we have other business to attend to this afternoon. I would ask for a brief recess—a five-minute recess to allow others to return to the Chamber.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): There's been a request for—is there leave for a five-minute recess? *[Agreed]*

We are now in recess.

The House recessed at 3:36 p.m.

The House resumed at 3:42 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Order. Order. The five-minute recess is up—over, and the House is back in session.

Mr. Friesen: I would just ask, understanding that we're still waiting for some members to return to the Chamber, that we—for leave to add a 10-minute recess period.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Is there leave to call a 10-minute recess? *[Agreed]*

We are now in recess.

The House recessed at 3:42 p.m.

The House resumed at 3:52 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Order. The House is back in session.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Prior to beginning my ministerial statement, I would ask leave of the House, despite the leave that was provided before, that the speakers that follow the Official Opposition House Leader (Ms. Fontaine) and the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont), not be limited to the time that my comments will be.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Is there leave to allow the following speakers to not follow the First Minister's time? *[Agreed]*

So just before we go into that, as previously agreed, the House will now consider a ministerial statement on the passing of Mica Schellenberg. The First Minister, the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) and the member for St. Boniface will each speak to the statement, and the House will not see the clock until all three members have spoken.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Mica Schellenberg

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Premier): The loss of a life at any time brings sadness. The loss of a young life brings almost unspeakable grief. It's not because we only mourn the loss of the person, but we mourn that loss of potential when it is a young person. Mica Schellenberg, originally from Steinbach, died recently at the age of only 23, and we are not only left in sadness for that loss, but we are also in grief for that loss of potential that she had.

Yet, in only 23 years, Mica impressed upon people a desire to live with empathy, to fight for justice, to strive for kindness and to act in grace. Those are not the qualities that are often found in somebody of such a young age. They often only come with many more years of life experience. They're often only developed with years of success, or years of failure, and the long journey to develop personal self-confidence.

And yet, Mica found those qualities at a much earlier age than most of us do, if we ever do. So in that

way, we shouldn't simply grieve that lost potential, but marvel at how quickly those qualities developed in Mica, those qualities that often take a lifetime for many of us to achieve.

I've had the opportunity to know Mica's father, Trevor, for many years. We are friends, and the challenges that Mica faced in recent years were borne by the family as well.

Parents often take on the emotion that our children feel. When our children grieve, we grieve. When our children are going through hardship, we go through that hardship. When we see our children dealing with inequality, we feel that same sense of anger towards that inequality, and as such—and as much as we always want to be able to heal the hurts that our children suffer throughout their lives, that is simply—sadly—isn't always possible.

And yet, even in those difficult times, I saw grow in Trevor a deeper compassion for others, a true understanding that we need to strive to understand each other's differences and a desire to always express compassion instead of judgment.

And while that may sound like a reflection on Trevor, it is really equally one on Mica, because in all relationships, especially between those of a parent and a child, there is a shaping of each other.

So in making this statement, together with the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Party, we do so with grief in the loss of a young Manitoban, but we also acknowledge those—that those who knew Mica and those who knew her well, that her life will live on because it cannot be extinguished because she has shaped those who were close to her and those who she touched so deeply.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Five years ago, I witnessed an act of true courage in the Steinbach board room of the Hanover School Division.

I went there to observe the debate on whether the division would allow 2SLGBTQ topics to be discussed in their schools, and it was a tense, packed room, and I showed up expecting to see many adults debate the topic at hand. Instead, I watched a 17-year-old high school senior named Mica Schellenberg give a speech that, put simply, rocked the house.

Her asks were very simple. Mica told the board: if you are a student-centred school division, you should be able to step out of your comfort zones and

help the students who are struggling, no matter what you may believe.

In the Q & A that followed, some of the school trustees pushed back and they asked if parents shouldn't be informed if their kids were asking about 2SLGBTQ topics at school. Mica stood her ground and she replied calmly: this is part of who they are—meaning the students—and if they're figuring it out they should have the freedom to do that and not be told by someone else who they can and cannot tell.

As I looked around the room, I saw tears, I saw hope, I saw frustration. Like many, I was moved. By the way, about two weeks later, I asked my first-ever question in question period in this legislature about the Hanover School Division.

Now, this sense of standing up for others and standing up for what's right came at an early age for Mica. When she was only five years old, her kindergarten class was gathering to play a game on the classroom carpet and while all the kids were excited and gathering together, Mica stopped and went to the teacher and said: hey, there's another little girl sitting over there by herself; is it okay I go and keep that girl company rather than playing with all the other children? As the teacher remarked to Mica's mom later on, that sort of empathy is rare at such a young age.

That developed throughout Mica's young life, and it manifested in standing up for many important causes, working with Steinbach Community Outreach, here in Winnipeg with Union Gospel Mission, Siloam Mission. Other times, she'd simply give what little food she had to someone that she'd encountered on the street who was in need.

After coming out in high school, Mica began her advocacy work on 2SLGBTQ issues. Though her parents supported her and many people across the province were cheering for her, I'm told that Mica often felt alone in this work.

She told a reporter on the night of that big speech she wasn't sure if it would help usher in any change, but I can tell you that shortly afterwards, her school set aside space for gay-straight alliances to meet. Teachers began to put up rainbow stickers and signs in their classrooms. She made her high school a little bit safer for the other students who came after her when she graduated from Steinbach regional secondary school in 2016. Sadly, Mica passed away recently, peacefully and unexpectedly.

* (16:00)

But her legacy will live on. She changed her high school. She changed her home town. She changed our province. Her time here on Earth offers a lesson for us all. If you know that something is the right thing to do, then do it, even if you feel alone; even if you have to embark on great challenges. And even if you are just that lone, young person, you can change this world for the better.

I offer my sincere condolences to Mica's mom, Cathy; her father, Trev, and stepmom, Lindsay Ray; her brothers; her family. I want her family to know that the Premier (Mr. Goertzen) and I have agreed to meet very soon to see which policies we can enact to honour Mica's legacy. But for now, I want the family to know that she influenced many lives, including many of us right here in this Chamber. Miigwech.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I rise today to pay tribute to Mica Schellenberg, who died last week at the very young age of 23. She leaves behind her family, her friends to mourn. There are few greater tragedies than someone who dies with decades of a life un-lived. There is nothing harder than losing a loved one, and my heart breaks for the family.

When Mica was 17, she made local and national headlines when she spoke at the Hanover School Division in favour of gay-straight alliances in high schools. She was in the *Toronto Star*, she was in *Maclean's*. And *Maclean's* at the time said, the young people in Steinbach's LGBT community describe the harmful effects of the kind of hostility they'd experienced. Every gay young person *Maclean's* spoke to, in reporting this story, struggled with suicidal thoughts when they were teenaged students in the Hanover School Division. All say they felt isolated, cornered and despised. And for that reason, Mica's plea to the Hanover School Division took an incredible amount of courage.

It was suggested that she was part of the reason that Steinbach's first Pride march was so well attended. And sometimes being branded 2SLGBTQ+ is—it's considered that it's a lifestyle, or a choice, when none of us choose the life we are born into.

And, ultimately, this is something much deeper than politics, because at the time that this debate was playing out I remember thinking that the only thing that mattered was making sure that young people finished high school alive and well, because lives are at stake and children need unconditional love—unconditional.

And while it is too late to say to Mica, or anyone else who feels isolated or alone—because there are so many of you—I know I'm not the first to say it: You are not alone. You are loved, just as you are. And it gets better. And we do have your back.

My very deepest condolences to Mica's family, friends and community. And they should know that she left this world a better place than she found it. Thank you.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, I'd ask for a moment of silence.

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Is there leave for a moment of silence? *[Agreed]*

A moment of silence was observed.

Mr. Goertzen: Is it the will of members to call it 5 p.m.?

The Acting Speaker (Len Isleifson): Is it the will of members and the House to call it 5 p.m.? *[Agreed]*

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 7, 2021

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