

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

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AL TOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	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, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	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	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle, Hon.	Turtle Mountain	PC
REYES, Jon, Hon.	Waverley	PC
SALA, Adrien	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SMITH, Andrew, Hon.	Lagimodière	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Vérendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Thompson	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 7, 2022

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

An Honourable Member: Madam Speaker, on a matter of privilege.

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

Madam Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on—*[interjection]*—order. The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on a matter of privilege.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Madam Speaker, I rise on a matter of privilege.

This matter is important. In the words of Bosc and Gagnon, and I quote: The right to seek information from the ministry of the day and the right to hold that ministry accountable are two of the fundamental principles of parliamentary government. Members exercise these rights principally by asking questions in the House. And the importance of questions within the parliamentary system cannot be overemphasized and the search for or clarification of information through questioning is a vital aspect of the duties undertaken by individual members. End quote, Madam Speaker.

Before I begin the substance of my complaint, I would note this is my first opportunity to raise this matter in the Chamber. I had to consult with the procedural authorities and perform the relevant research to present these facts and expert opinions to the House.

The prima 'facia' case is clear.

In the words of Speaker Jerome, and I quote: If the essence of Parliament is government accountability, then surely the essence of accountability is the question period in the Canadian House of Commons. End quote.

It is the job of members of this Legislative Assembly—every single member—to hold the government accountable. That is the essence of parliamentary democracy. That is one of the most important rights and privileges of all MLAs and it must be protected.

One of the only places to exercise that accountability is in question period. That means the government needs to participate, and the leader of that government, the person most responsible for the actions and decisions of government and the person accountable for those actions and decisions must participate and explain and defend those things.

It would appear that this is a simple idea, but it is not being followed, Madam Speaker.

On several occasions, the President of the Executive Council, the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), organized events outside this House as an excuse to avoid accountability and not participate in question period. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: The Premier's actions—her refusal to participate in the essential proceeding of the House that is question period—means we as MLAs cannot do our jobs. The Premier is responsible for answering questions about the whole of government. That is her role as President of the Executive Council. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: Repeatedly refusing to participate in question period means she is trying to avoid that responsibility. It means Manitobans do not receive the information and the accountability they rightly deserve. It means MLAs—every single MLA who is not a Cabinet minister in this House—cannot properly do their job.

Premiers have many choices to make in their jobs, but it must be stated the choice to accept responsibility and to participate in question period, to be accountable to members in—of this House and, by extension, to all Manitobans, is fundamentally important to the work we each do.

Not participating in question period violates the rights and privileges of members to do our jobs properly, and to hold the Stefanson government to account.

As a result of this Premier's failing, I move, seconded by the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), that the member—the matter of the Premier's failure—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Fontaine: —that the matter of the Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) failure to participate in question period be condemned, and that the matter be referred to a standing committee of this House for review.

Miigwech.

Madam Speaker: Before recognizing any other members to speak, I would remind the House that remarks at this time by honourable members are limited to strictly relevant comments about whether the alleged matter of privilege has been raised at the earliest opportunity and whether a prima facie case has been established.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, the member opposite failed to reference any rule, any practice when it comes to question period. She knows and she'll know—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Goertzen: The Leader of the Opposition can heckle me from his seat or from the loge, or if he wants to go to the gallery and he can heckle me, that's fine. I'm not bothered by it, Madam Speaker. But what I am bothered by is when members in this House try to assert that rules and practices exist when they do not.

Madam Speaker, you will know—and I'm sure that your office will look and examine past practice—you'll know when it comes to, frankly, who answers questions in a House, it is a matter and the discretion of the government. The opposition can pose questions to whomever they want, and government can decide whom answers those questions.

The issue, though, about a first minister or, frankly, any minister being in question period is one that, as an Opposition House Leader, when I served in that role, or now as the House leader, many times I've had discussions with the other side, depending which side it was on.

And when a NDP first minister, for example, wasn't here because they were at an announcement—and that happened many times—or they were at a federal-provincial-territorial meeting—and that happened many times—or there were other instances or reasons why they couldn't be here, that was always understood and that was always allowed for because a first minister, a minister and, frankly, MLAs, often have many things that they have to do, Madam Speaker.

Now, in this particular case, I think the member opposite is having some sort of concern about a \$15-million announcement for seniors, for personal-care homes. She doesn't seem to like the announcement, doesn't think the money should be spent—I don't know. But that doesn't give her the reason to come in here and try to assert that a particular rule has been broken.

I would say, though, Madam Speaker, and I'll conclude with this, because I don't want to give this lack of credibility—I don't want to give credibility to something that doesn't deserve credibility by going on too long about it. But I would say this when it comes to the issue of the importance of question period: the opposition, I believe, in the last two years, has probably cancelled about 20 question periods by filibustering the day. More question periods in the last two years than I can remember in recent history have been lost because the opposition wouldn't allow question period to actually be held.

So, on the one hand, their leader—or the—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: —Opposition House Leader stands up and says how important question period is; on the other hand, her and all of her colleagues participated in stopping question period more than 20 times, I believe, over the last couple years.

If they truly believed—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: —that question period is important, they would not only allow it to happen but improve the quality of their questions, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, in my more than two decades experience in the House, there have been many occasions when premiers have not been here for question period for one reason or another.

The absence of the Premier is not determined by a matter of privilege or a point of order. But the absence of a premier is certainly noticed by many and is a reason why governments are not perceived as credibly as they might be. But it doesn't make a valid point of order on this case.

Thank you.

* (13:40)

Madam Speaker: A matter of privilege is a serious concern. I am going to take this matter under advisement to consult the authorities and will return to the House with a ruling.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Madam Speaker: I have one to table.

In accordance with section 28(2) of The Auditor General Act, I am tabling the Auditor General's report, titled Department of Education and Early Learning Leadership of the K-12 Pandemic Response, dated March 2022.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage. And I would indicate that the 90 minute notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

Vimy Ridge Day

Hon. Andrew Smith (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): Madam Speaker, I rise today in the House to recognize Vimy Ridge Day, which is officially observed this Saturday, April 9th. World War I began in 1914 and was the largest military battle in the world as seen to that point. Britain, and by default Canada, along with other Allied countries engaged in a four-year battle that was bloody and brutal and left an indelible mark on soldiers around the world.

In 1916, after two and a half years of intense fighting, with no significant advances, the Allied forces planned a major attack on the region of Arras, France. The plan tasked the Canadian Corps with recapturing Vimy Ridge from the Germans, who had previously taken control and transformed the area into a defensive stronghold.

The conflict, now referred to as Battle of Vimy Ridge, began on Easter morning 1917 with 15,000 soldiers advancing towards the top of the ridge. For three days, amid horrible weather, knee-deep mud and excessive shellfire, our soldiers fought their way to the top, taking control of the area on April 12th.

Madam Speaker, the success of this assault on Germany changed the course of the war, and in turn the course of history.

Today, as we mark the 105th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, we must recognize and remember that the victory did not come without considerable loss, as almost 4,000 Canadians were killed in action, as well to the 7,000 wounded and those who returned without physical injury. We need to understand that survival did not come without significant consequences to them and families who supported them.

Therefore, we must never forget the immense sacrifice and we must be forever grateful for their fierce determination, incredible bravery and unwavering resolve to defend democracy.

Madam Speaker, sadly, over the past few weeks we have watched the fear and horror as courageous people of Ukraine have had their lives and democracy threatened. It is appropriate, if not imperative, that on this anniversary we pay homage to those who fought and to those who paid the ultimate sacrifice on the Battle of Vimy Ridge while also taking the opportunity to pay homage to those who are fighting to defend Ukraine's rights to exist.

As a member of this Legislature, I am proud our government is standing with Ukraine.

Madam Speaker, we recognize this war is in stark contrast to the values and freedoms of those we are honouring today.

On behalf of my colleagues here in the Legislature and all Manitobans, I sincerely thank the Canadian soldiers who valiantly fought in the Battle of Vimy Ridge. I also want to thank the current and former members of our military for their valour, sacrifice and commitment to protect our independence and preserve our country's proud legacy of service.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Madam Speaker, 105 years ago hundreds of Manitobans died while taking a German defensive position. Today we pause to remember them and all those that died at Vimy Ridge in service to our country and freedoms.

Often these soldiers are reduced to statistics. But we should remember them as individuals with unique stories and motivations and families and loved ones left behind. All these soldiers deserve individual remembrance and we commend the historians of this province who laboured to provide this information for all of our benefits.

One of these men was Robert Edward Kipling, a Cree man from Peguis First Nation. Born in March 1893 in St. Peters, Manitoba, Robert married Charlotte at some point before enlisting in Selkirk in 1916 and sent to England. Eventually, he was assigned to the Winnipeg Grenadiers, which participated in one of the frontal assaults in Vimy Ridge and some of the fiercest fighting in the battle: 600 members of Winnipeg's Grenadiers were killed, wounded or lost during that battle, including Robert. Robert's body was never recovered, but lies somewhere below Vimy Ridge memorial. He left the entirety of his property to his wife Charlotte. He was only 23 years old.

We can only imagine the life that Robert would've lived had the world not lost itself in the madness of a war 100 years ago. But we know that, as one of over 4,000 Indigenous peoples who enlisted in the First World War, he helped to advance the recognition of Indigenous peoples in Canadian colonial society in the face of discrimination.

Today, I'm proud to highlight Robert's sacrifice and contribution as just one example of so many who died at Vimy Ridge. We will always remember them.

Miigwech.

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

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

Mr. Lamont: Both my grandfathers and several great-uncles served in the First and Second World Wars.

My grandfather, Robert Barrett, was the youngest of nine. He was born in 1899, and at 19 he trained with the RAF. His older brother Alfred died at Vimy serving with the Canadians, and while his name is on the Vimy monument, his body and final resting place were never found.

My great-uncle Frank Bastin, who was part of the Canadian shock troops who fought at the Somme, at Vimy and through to the liberation of Belgium and my other grandfather, John Lamont, liberated Mons, Belgium, on November 11th, 1918.

Frank Bastin was at Vimy for months before the Canadians finally took it. He wrote at one point: Up to this point I have never mentioned airplanes because, while they had made an appearance in the sky above the battlefield in the Somme, our concern was with mundane affairs, such things as machine

guns, shells, trenches, lice, wire and mud, and we were not aware that air supremacy could affect the outcome of our battles. But on the Vimy Ridge front, air battles became more frequent, and we often watched those thrilling combats. I recall seeing a group of Richthofen's fighters—that's the Red Baron—with their decorated planes follow one of our artillery observation planes with the observer firing his machine gun until it crashed.

Months after Vimy, Frank Bastin was shot, stripped of his gear and left for dead. But a few weeks later, to the great surprise of his family, who had been told he was deceased, he sent them a telegram informing them he was alive. But he was scarred for life. On his deathbed in his 80s, he was heard saying over and over, I just want to do my duty and not be afraid.

My grandfather Robert Barrett lost one brother, Alfred, and another, Gilbert, suffered PTSD after crashing many times serving with the RAF.

The First World War was considered the Great War, the war to end all wars, which it definitively was not. But the suffering and sacrifice is a lesson we must bear in mind as we seek a swift and decisive end to the conflict in Ukraine, in Ukraine's favour. There is a time for war and a time for peace, and respect for the suffering and sacrifice of our veterans means finding ways to avoid putting current and future generations through that sacrifice and suffering.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Green Shirt Day

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services): Madam Speaker, today, April 7th, is Green Shirt Day, a day to bring attention to organ and tissue donation for transplants. It is also a day to honour Logan Boulet and the Logan Boulet effect.

Logan Boulet was one of the Humboldt Broncos who died as a result of the tragic bus crash on April 6th four years ago. The summer before, Logan had decided to sign up to be an organ and tissue donor.

Madam Speaker, we've all seen evidence of the Logan Boulet effect. The number of people signing up to be an organ and tissue donor skyrocketed after they learned of Logan's selfless act. I believe Canadians were all looking for some positive impact from that tragic crash. We found part of it in Logan's impact on organ and tissue donation.

Madam Speaker, April 7th, Green Shirt Day, is a day dedicated to promoting organ donation awareness while honouring the Logan Boulet effect. I'm wearing my green shirt. I encourage all of my colleagues and all Manitobans to consider organ and tissue donation. The central tower of the Manitoba Legislative Building will be lit in green this evening, as will many other Canadian landmarks.

* (13:50)

Madam Speaker, as you know, this is very personal. Our daughter Jessica has had two kidney transplants from living donors. But not everyone has a living donor available, and that is why signupforlife.ca and Green Shirt Day is so important.

I know it's even more personal for the Boulet family. They continue to honour Logan's memory and bring attention to the critical importance of signing up to be an organ and tissue donor. His parents, Bernadine and Tony [*phonetic*] were recently honoured in Winnipeg and were given the key to the City in addition to speaking at a Jets game about Logan's decision. That decision made by Logan changed the lives of six people.

We all have the ability to follow Logan's example. Please become a part of the Logan Boulet effect at signupforlife.ca and become a donor. You need your health card number, and please remember to discuss your wishes with your family and your loved ones, as they will be asked about your intentions.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Safe Consumption Site

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): No one has ever died of an overdose in a safe consumption site. It's hard to find a clearer statistic around drug more around—about drug use than that.

In 2020, 372 Manitobans died from an overdose here in our province. Think of the hundreds of Manitobans who would still be with us today if they were given access to these sites.

I recently travelled to Victoria and Edmonton to visit and study their safe consumption sites. The conversations I had with the employees, the advocates and the users all reinforced just how effective safe consumption sites are. There is a desperate need for them here in our province. Our NDP team continues to urge the Stefanson government to immediately approve and fund these sites. These sites will not over—not only reduce overdose deaths for on-site users, they will end them.

We understand the concerns that many have about safe consumption sites, but safe consumption sites are well-proven methods of harm reduction and invaluable access points for addiction treatment. No individual has ever started using heroin or meth because they know that there was a safe consumption in their area. This will lead to fewer overdoses and longer life.

In the important words of mayor from Ithaca, New York, and I quote: The first time I ever heard about safe consumption sites, I thought it sounded like we were just enabling people to use drugs. But the truth is, in the places where it's worked, in Australia, Europe and Canada, more people get off of drugs. People who use supervised injections are 30 per cent more likely to enter into treatment, and they're 100 per cent more likely not to die.

Our NDP team is once again asking members opposite to reconsider their opposition to life-saving sites. You have the power to save lives here in our province.

Genesis House—Caring Dads Program

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, it's my privilege to bring to the attention of the Chamber an initiative in my constituency focused on breaking the cycle of domestic abuse through a program designed for men.

Genesis House is a shelter for women and children. For 37 years it's provided a safe place to stay, receive counselling and engage in support groups.

Last October, Genesis House launched a three-year pilot project focusing on men's family violence intervention through the Caring Dads program, the first of its kind in southern Manitoba. Caring Dads is a nationally recognized program that treats men who have abused or neglected their children or exposed them to domestic violence.

The Manitoba government is proud to be helping fund this program through the Victim's Assistance Fund, a program that focuses on principles of being aware of and taking responsibility for your actions, a desire to learn and practise child-centred fathering and make a connection between the safety and well-being of their children and that of their mother. The program sets high expectations for the men to be honest and vulnerable, and those who have attended the program give feedback like saying they were gaining so much and seeing that changing me is changing how my family feels about me.

Research has shown that effective intervention programs and group format programming has shown a significant decrease in reoffending. Angela Braun, executive director at Genesis House, said the shift for shelters is that we recognize that dads are part of this. They're part of the whole system. We need to figure out how to support those dads who want to make the change.

Thank you, Genesis House, Ange Braun, for seeing the need and for working with the family as a whole to break the cycle of abuse in families.

Judge Vincent George Sinclair

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): It is my great honour today to congratulate my stepbrother, Vincent George Sinclair, on his recent appointment as Provincial Court judge in Thompson, Manitoba. His appointment is a huge achievement and the result of years of dedication and hard work.

Judge Sinclair was born and raised in the North and is a member of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation. He received a bachelor of arts in sociology from the University of Saskatchewan.

While becoming a lawyer was his childhood dream, this dream would only become a reality 14 years later. Judge Sinclair was deeply involved at Opaskwayak, having been elected to chief and council, appointed to the education authority board, the OCN child and family services board and recently to the OCN government services board.

He returned to law school at Robson Hall and received his call to the bar in June 2010. Since then, he has worked as a Crown attorney with Manitoba prosecutions and has practised criminal law. And Judge Sinclair also attended circuit court in Moose Lake, Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Easterville, Pukatawagan and Grand Rapids.

Judge Sinclair has stated that he will always remain in the North, as he has a wealth of experience working with First Nations, collaborating with provincial and municipal governments on many local projects and initiatives. He has been influential as a member of the Indigenous advisory council for Manitoba prosecutions and the Law Society of Manitoba. He is also appointed as one of the Manitoba representatives for the federal 'jujisiowary' advisory committee.

Judge Sinclair's accomplishments in the field of law make him a role model for many Indigenous Manitobans, including myself, especially when there

is a need for increased representation of First Nations people working within the justice system.

Please join me in congratulating Judge Sinclair on his appointment as Provincial Court judge.

Ekosi.

Seniors Advocate

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): It was on November 22nd, 2016, that I first started to call for a seniors advocate in the province of Manitoba.

I have spoken about it over the years, in different contexts. For example, on November 27th, 2018, in my response to the Throne Speech; on March 19th, 2019, in a budget response; October 26th, 2020, during question period; and many other times here and in between.

Now, since then, the NDP have decided to support our call for a seniors advocate, in which I am grateful. But, Madam Speaker, we need this government to get on board, as well.

The reason we need a seniors advocate extends beyond the devastating issues that arose during the pandemic. We need a seniors advocate to address issues such as ensuring seniors are in long-term-care facilities best suited for their needs.

This government seems to believe that personal-care homes are the only type of long-term-care facility. Meanwhile, we also have supportive housing homes, independent living homes and many seniors who want to remain in their homes, Madam Speaker.

Home care has become an enormous issue. I have one constituent who has been waiting for over three months for a home-care worker.

And on top of helping seniors remain in their homes and communities, we need to talk about home repairs.

I do want to thank the minister responsible for seniors, as he recently helped me assist a constituent in the need of a ramp to access their home. But, Madam Speaker, this should not have been so difficult. There should be a dedicated program for funding that can go towards small home repairs if it's the difference in enabling a senior to remain in their home.

Another big issue, Madam Speaker: senior isolation and their physical, mental and emotional health that is being neglected. Senior day programs have doubled in prices, prescribed medications are often

difficult to come by financially and transportation continues to dictate the days of many seniors when they need to run the smallest of errands.

Madam Speaker, seniors deserve better here in Manitoba.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Prairie Mountain Health Nurse Vacancy Rate

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, it was five years ago today that this government announced their plan to cut ICU beds and close emergency rooms in Winnipeg.

* (14:00)

It was the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) who stood up and announced this plan to cut nursing positions and to make health-care wait times longer. And, of course, he was succeeded by the members for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen) and Tuxedo and, really, all of the PC caucus, who said it would reduce wait times, but we know what happened.

Today, if you go to the Grace, you can't get a bed; you can only get a spot in the hallway. And if you go to HSC, you could be waiting half a day simply to be seen. What they hoped at the time is that nobody would notice the damage to our health-care system and that they tried to save a few bucks along the way.

This has been extraordinarily damaging to the people of Manitoba.

Given what we've seen with their cuts in Winnipeg, why are they trying to make the same sort of health-care cuts in rural Manitoba?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): The only cuts in rural Manitoba happened under the previous NDP government, Madam Speaker, where they shut almost 20 hospitals and emergency rooms.

We will continue to make those investments, through our clinical preventative services plan, in the province of Manitoba to ensure that we enhance health care for all Manitobans and so that they have the health care that they need closer to home.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, we brought some facts to QP today: documents from this government that prove that health care is cut in rural Manitoba.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: And yet there they go, applauding—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —cuts to health care in rural Manitoba, Madam Speaker.

What the documents prove beyond a shadow of a doubt, inked in pen by this government, is that the vacancy rate for nurses in the Prairie Mountain Health region as we speak is 22 per cent. At the Dauphin health centre alone, it's 36 per cent.

Why do the members of the PC party applaud for, and why does this Premier implement, cuts in the Parkland and Westman regions of Manitoba?

Mrs. Stefanson: I was listening intently to the Leader of the Opposition, Madam Speaker, to listen and hear where those facts would be in his preamble, and they were non-existent. Once again, nothing factual about what the Leader of the Opposition is talking about.

We go back to their days, the NDP dark days in government, Madam Speaker, where they shut down almost 20 rural hospitals. We don't ever want to go back to those dark days of the previous NDP government.

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

Mr. Kinew: Five years ago, this Premier stood by and stood up for plans to close emergency rooms right here in Winnipeg, and the documents that I'll table right now show that she presides over cuts in health care to Westman and the Parkland region that are leaving one in five nursing positions empty.

The personal-care home in Brandon has a vacancy rate for nurses of 23 per cent. In Grandview, they're missing 40 per cent of their nurses. In Swan, they're down to 22 per cent. Madam Speaker, it's a bad situation across the region.

Given the facts, why has the Premier caused such a nursing crisis across the Prairie Mountain Health region that is hurting families in the Westman and in the Parkland?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, once again I listened very closely to the Leader of the Opposition to see where the facts were in what he said in his preamble, and, in fact, once again, they are non-existent. The member opposite will know—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson:—that there is a nursing shortage across the country, indeed across North America, Madam Speaker. This is nothing that is unique to Manitoba. The Leader of the Opposition should know way better than maybe he does that this is not a situation that is unique to Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, the facts are that we have invested almost \$1 billion more than the previous NDP ever did when they were in government, almost \$156 million more than last year alone invested in our health-care system. And next week, on Tuesday, stayed tuned to what will come in our next budget.

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

Agency Nursing Costs

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Premier for confirming that there's a 22 per cent nursing vacancy rate in the Prairie Mountain Health region. That's what the document on the table right there shows: one fifth of nursing positions across the Parkland and Westman regions are sitting empty even as we meet here today.

That's an increase over last year, Madam Speaker. Things are getting worse under their watch.

Now, what is the only response that this government has to date? Well, I'll table it. It's to take resources out of the public system and shift it into the private system. They're hiring agency nurses to the tune of \$7 million in Prairie Mountain alone over only the last few months.

Why is the Premier spending millions on agency nurses instead of hiring people in hospitals like the ones in Brandon and Dauphin?

Mrs. Stefanson: What I confirmed, Madam Speaker, is the litany of—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson:—false accusations, the continuation—of the Leader of the Opposition that puts false information on the record.

He knows full well that there is a nursing shortage across the country, Madam Speaker. There is a 'nursing' shortage across North America. This is a very serious situation.

That's why we have announced 400 new nursing seats, Madam Speaker. That's why we are working with our internationally educated nurses to ensure that

they can get licensed as quickly as possible so that they can start to work on the front line.

We are taking action next—Madam Speaker, and stay tuned to next week for more good news in health care. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, Manitobans know that it's going to take years to fix the damage that the PCs caused to the health-care system.

But the good news is this team, our NDP team, is up to the task of fixing health care in Manitoba.

Again, I'll refer to the documents that this government has created. Not only is there a 22 per cent nursing vacancy in Prairie Mountain, the only solution that this government has is to spend \$7 million over the last few months on agency nurses.

That's bad economics, Madam Speaker. Hiring nurses through an agency is more expensive than hiring through the public system because you have to pay a premium to the agency. What's more, it's bad health care because there's less familiarity with the patient at the bedside.

Certainly, Manitobans deserve much better than they're getting from this government.

Why is the Premier intent on repeating these cuts to health care in rural Manitoba?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, on one side, the Leader of the Opposition says that we don't have enough nurses on Manitoba, and then he said—and we're investing—we're not investing enough. And then on the other hand, Madam Speaker, he says we're investing too much in nurses. He can't have it both ways.

The facts of the matter are: \$1 billion—almost \$1 billion more invested in health care than the NDP ever did in their—in—when they were in power, Madam Speaker, they shut down almost 20 rural hospitals.

I don't think Manitobans ever want to go back to the dark days of the NDP government.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, what we've established here today is that there's a 22 per cent vacancy rate for nurses in the Westman and in the Parkland. That

means one in five nurses who should be at the bedside simply aren't there.

What's more, \$7 million has been spent in the last five months on agency nurses. And here is why that's also bad: an agency nurse costs more expense than a nurse hired through the public system because you have to pay a premium to the agency. What's more, it delivers poorer health outcomes to the patient because there is less familiarity with that patient being cared for at the bedside.

This is further proof of the intense damage the PC government has caused to our health-care system.

Given the dark anniversary of the closures of emergency rooms in Winnipeg, why are they so intent on repeating their mistakes across rural Manitoba?

* (14:10)

Mrs. Stefanson: I think what we've established here today, Madam Speaker, is that the Leader of the Opposition and all of the NDP don't want us to hire more nurses, but we couldn't disagree more with them.

We recognize the need for more nurses in our province, and that's why we have announced 400 more seats—nursing seats—in the province of Manitoba; that's why we're working to ensure that our internationally educated nurses get licensed as quickly as possible so that they can start to work in the front line.

Madam Speaker, we have invested almost \$1 billion more than the NDP ever did; \$156 million more than last year. And, again, stay tuned. Next week, there will be more good news when it comes to health care in Manitoba. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

COVID-19 Outbreak Status in PCHs Reduction in Public Reporting

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, COVID is everywhere right now, including in our personal-care homes. The virus is still here, but, unfortunately, the data is not.

Without warning, the PC government has stopped reporting regularly on outbreaks at personal-care homes across the province. That doesn't make any sense.

Will the minister reverse the decision to hide the outbreak status of personal-care homes in Manitoba?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I thank the member for Union Station for the question.

Before I respond, I'd like to share with the House today that US federal judge Ketanji Brown Jackson was confirmed by the Senate as the first Black woman on the US Supreme Court. Judge Jackson has made history as the first Black woman to reach the top court, and it's not a Manitoba first or a Canadian first, but it's a great day for all women, Madam Speaker, and I congratulate her on her appointment.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) told Manitobans this year that they're on their own, that they have to look after themselves when it comes to COVID-19.

Yet now, the PC government took down regular reporting that helps guide the public as to the status of outbreaks at personal-care homes. In fact, it could have helped the Premier, who scheduled a large press conference at a PCH site experiencing just such an outbreak.

Will the minister reverse this decision to hide the outbreak status of personal-care homes for all of our sakes?

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): I appreciate the fact that the member opposite is bringing to the attention of the House the excellent announcement that the Premier and myself were able to make yesterday, here at the Legislature: \$17 million invested in our seniors, as per the Stevenson report.

And it doesn't matter where we made that announcement; we made the announcement.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, the PC government booked a press conference at the site of a COVID-19 outbreak, mere days after her government pulled down the regular reporting on those very outbreaks.

The Premier says that seniors and families are on their own when navigating this pandemic. Madam Speaker, then give them the data. Give Manitobans the information they need to make safe and informed decisions.

Will the minister reverse the decision to hide the outbreak status of personal-care homes in Manitoba?

Mr. Johnston: First and foremost, let's correct something right off the bat: there was never, ever a situation

where the Stevenson—Dr. Stevenson could not investigate everything in regards to Maples. So, let's—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Johnston: —ensure that that gets straightened out right off the bat.

Madam Speaker, our announcement: over \$15 million—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Johnston: —to support enhanced infection prevention and control within long-term-care sector, including provincial program manager, regional leads and 50 infection control staff.

That's something that the industry was asking for and that's something that we gave them.

Education Property Taxes Reduction in Credit for Renters

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Madam Speaker, the PCs are raising taxes on renters. Tens of thousands of Manitobans who rent are losing \$175 this year alone and that's because of a decision made by this government.

In fact, for many Manitoban renters, the first time they'll learn about the change will be when they file their taxes this year.

I ask the minister: Will he reconsider this regressive approach and stop raising taxes on Manitoban renters?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Well, Madam Speaker, we always welcome questions on affordability when they're raised by the NDP because we know they have no credibility. Manitobans, though, more importantly, know that they have no credibility when it comes to questions on affordability.

We were pleased last year to bring a 50 per cent reduction to the amount of education property tax that was paid by Manitobans. We sent out cheques to 460,000 Manitobans. [interjection]

So, while the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) screams at us from across the way, we'll just—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: —remind them that Manitobans appreciate the savings, the affordability, even now, that

we'll continue to bring. They can yell; we'll keep bringing affordability to Manitobans.

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

Mr. Sala: Madam Speaker, Manitoban renters need a break, but instead, this government is raising taxes on them by \$175.

The Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) forgot about \$31 million, so maybe \$175 isn't a lot to her. And the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan) got an even \$500,000 in a friendly deal with this government, so maybe \$175 isn't a lot to him.

But I assure them, it's a big deal to Manitoban renters. With inflation north of 5 per cent, it can mean putting food on the table.

Will the minister reconsider his approach and stop raising taxes on Manitoban renters?

Mr. Friesen: I'm happy to remind that member and all the members of the record of our government during the pandemic. Not only were we there as a government to distribute—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: —hundreds of millions of dollars to Manitoba families—low-income families, but we were also there, and we—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: —brought a two-year freeze in the—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Would the—can the Clerk stop the clock.

I cannot hear the minister's answer. So, please, I'm asking for co-operation. We do have guests in the gallery, and we do actually have almost 1,000 people that do watch every day through YouTube and on the website. And that keeps going up now that they know that we're sitting. So, people are watching.

So I'm going to ask everybody—you might want to behave a little bit better in here and respect each other. Listen to the questions, listen to the answers because they're important. And I need to be able to hear in case I need to call out on some breach of the rules. So I'm asking everybody's co-operation, please.

The honourable Minister of Finance, to conclude his answer.

Mr. Friesen: I know that the NDP don't want to hear and don't want to remember that this government 'frozen' rent increases during the pandemic for two years. We disallowed rental increases. Why? Because Manitobans needed the break. We were there to give them that break with the education property tax credit. We'll keep going on that.

All I can say to them is stay tuned for Budget 2022 next Tuesday, when we'll bring more good news about the way we're bringing affordability for all Manitobans.

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

Mr. Sala: Madam Speaker, rent is going up. Gas is going up. Groceries are going up. Hydro is going up.

But the PCs decided to raise taxes on renters and, as a result, it means increased costs for tens of thousands of Manitobans who rent their homes.

* (14:20)

Renters are going to lose \$175 from their wallets this year.

Will the minister reconsider this regressive approach and stop raising taxes on Manitoban renters?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I'm always happy to take a question from members opposite about affordability and lifting Manitobans out of poverty.

Our government was very pleased last year—last week to read the Statistics Canada report that showed since we'd formed government, we've lifted 80,000 Manitobans out of poverty, including 35,000 children.

I know members opposite doesn't want to hear that. They also don't want to hear about our plan where we quadrupled the number of dollars in the Rent Assist program and are now providing the member—Manitoba families—7,000 more Manitoba families are receiving benefits for their rent through Rent Assist. That is something that our government committed to. *[interjection]*

I know the members opposite want to continue to heckle me. They don't want to hear about our plan.

We have a long way to go to continue lifting Manitobans out of poverty, and we're going to continue to do that work until all Manitobans are out of—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Issuance of Government Contracts Request for Premier's Recusal

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Well, we've established that the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) thinks there's one set of rules for herself and one set of rules for everybody else here in Manitoba. We know that conflict laws are clear: when the Premier or her dependants have a financial interest in a company, they shouldn't have any dealings with them.

The Premier has a direct financial connection to Exchange Income Corporation, so we're asking for a clear commitment today from the Premier.

Will she recuse herself from any dealings with EIC?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, that question had so many holes in it you could drive a Tiger Dam right through it.

The reality is, Madam Speaker, people might wonder, why is the government—or, the opposition bringing forward allegations that have absolutely no basis in fact? It's because they want Manitobans to forget. They want Manitobans to forget their record. They want Manitobans to forget that they raised taxes every year that they were in government. They want Manitobans to know that we had the worst economic performance west of Quebec under the NDP.

That's why they bring forward these questions that have no basis in fact, because they're trying to get Manitobans to forget.

Manitobans won't forget, and we won't let them forget that they can't afford to go back to the NDP.

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

Ms. Fontaine: We know that this government has plans to issue new contracts that EIC is poised to bid on, Madam Speaker. These are significant contracts that are worth millions of dollars. That means the Premier should not be involved in any way. The Premier should recuse herself because of her husband's direct financial connections to EIC.

So, again, it's what leaders should do: they should follow the rules like regular Manitobans and everybody on this side of the House.

Will the Premier commit to this House that she will recuse herself from any dealings with EIC?

Mr. Goertzen: I haven't seen the NDP this happy since they were all getting free Jets tickets from Crown corporations, Madam Speaker.

But I know why they raise these questions to Manitobans, because they want—or, Madam Speaker—they want Manitobans to forget. They want Manitobans to forget that under the NDP and when they had their leadership problems, they gave \$700,000 to political staff to leave the office because they were an embarrassment to the premier at the time—\$700,000 were handed out of taxpayers' 'monery'—money to the NDP staff so they'd leave the premier's office. And then they hired a bunch of union people to come in and run things out of the premier's office. That's what they did with taxpayers' money.

They didn't just raise taxes on everybody, the PST on haircuts, on private—or, property insurance—they did that as well.

Manitobans will remember they can't afford to go back to the NDP.

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

Ms. Fontaine: We know that there's a long relationship between the Premier and EIC. She has a direct financial relationship with the company.

EIC and its associated people gave her nearly 10 per cent of the monies that she raised in her leadership campaign. That means, when it comes to contracts worth millions of dollars, it's important that the rules about conflicts are followed, Madam Speaker. That means that the Premier should recuse herself. It's a simple request.

Will the Premier step back from any government work with EIC? Yes or no?

Mr. Goertzen: We understand that the opposition doesn't understand how Treasury Board works. We know that because we can read an Auditor General's report which simply said that the NDP and—in government didn't know how Treasury Board worked because they had a \$5 million contact that never got tendered. Instead it went to their friends, Madam Speaker, and the Auditor General had to reveal that and indicate that. They don't know how Treasury Board works.

But I know why they do this. They want Manitobans to forget. They want Manitobans to forget that under that government, we had the highest ambulance rates in all of Canada, Madam Speaker.

They want Manitobans to forget that 65 kids in care were in hospital instead of care.

We won't let Manitobans forget that they can't afford to go back to the NDP.

Provincial Parks Reservation System Outsourcing to Private US Company

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, it's another year, it's another minister and yet thousands of Manitobans had a terrible time with the province's parks reservation system. Some said it's the worst it's ever been.

One camper, Cheryl Mowat, couldn't book her site and is now exploring camping in the US. She says Manitobans shouldn't have to leave the province if you want to camp, and we agree.

Why has this government failed to fix the problems with the reservation system?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Environment, Climate and Parks): Certainly, we know the facts and we'll share them with the members opposite.

Madam Speaker, we know that our government inherited a mess that was started back in 2006 under the parks reservation system. We know that the NDP completely walked away from our provincial parks under their management—or, mismanagement. We know that they cut, cut and cut continuously. In 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and, yes, they cut in 2016 our provincial parks.

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

Ms. Naylor: Madam Speaker, the PCs kicked this reservation issue down the road last year, but let's look at what they have done.

Park visitors have had to use a Texas-based company, day passes have doubled in cost, Manitoba's sending \$600,000 a year to an American company.

Does the minister intend to outsource the parks reservation system to Texas as well?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly, one thing the NDP is not familiar with is transparency, Madam Speaker.

We know that we're still fixing the mess that was left under the NDP when it comes to parks, Madam Speaker. Not only parks, but almost every single department in government they left a mess in.

Madam Speaker, we know by 9:44 a.m.—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wharton: –yesterday morning–by 9:44 a.m.– please listen, folks across the hall–9:44 a.m. the queue had been completely cleared, 6 hours before it was last year.

That's better, Madam Speaker. I don't know where they're getting their facts from.

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

Ms. Naylor: Madam Speaker, the parks reservation system is still frustrating thousands of Manitobans. Manitobans are having to look elsewhere just to spend time in nature this summer. This has to be fixed.

This government's track record shows us that we are in store for higher costs, outsourced contracts and more inconvenient service.

* (14:30)

So, can the minister answer the question: Does the minister intend to outsource the parks reservation system to Texas? Yes or no?

Mr. Wharton: Well, Madam Speaker, again, we'll talk about NDP cuts under their management. We know that things like grass cutting–yes, that's correct: in provincial parks, they weren't cutting the grass. Go figure that.

Madam Speaker, we know, thankfully, that our government will–*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wharton: –continue to clean up the mess they left. We also know, by 5 o'clock yesterday, over 16,000 Manitobans had booked their reservation in their park.

Stay tuned. Next Tuesday, more great information, investment in our provincially owned parks.

COVID-19 Pandemic Management Responsibility for Public Health Decisions

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): The weekly results for COVID cases are in for Manitoba, and it is not looking good.

The test positivity rate is up from 13.9 to 18.6 per cent. The case count is up. Outbreaks are up. The highest increase in cases is among those aged 80-plus. Hospitalizations are all up. And as this chart, which I table, shows that for weeks, hospitalizations were holding steady at levels close to the peak of previous waves.

Who made the political decision to override Public Health and put more Manitobans at risk? Was it the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), or are we going to have to blame somebody else?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I want to begin by answering the member for St. Boniface's question with a definition from the Cambridge Dictionary about hiding. To–hiding means to put something or someone in a place where that thing or person cannot be seen or found, or to put yourself somewhere where you cannot be seen or found.

Madam Speaker, the data is available weekly. It is published on the website. Dr. Roussin is not hiding. He was out today. He said the data is appropriate for where we are in the pandemic. Releasing it more frequently doesn't give people any more chance to change behaviour. Regardless of data, you should get vaccinated.

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

Mr. Lamont: Madam Speaker, if this–information is power, this government is still going out–its way to disempower Manitobans and deny them the critical information they need to protect themselves. They've redefined death by COVID. They redefined the meaning of an outbreak in a school.

We're just getting talking points and declarations. Based on what? If it's science, what science? If it's on economics, what economic theory? If it's public health, what public health official is backing this? If it's endemic, whose definition of endemic? Manitobans deserve to know.

Why can't anyone in this government explain who made the decision to override Public Health?

Ms. Gordon: Again, Madam Speaker, it appears that the member for St. Boniface missed the press conference today. Dr. Roussin was out today providing a COVID-19 update.

We are continuing, Madam Speaker, to closely monitor the current variant and we're working very closely with Dr. Roussin and Public Health. And modelling, according to Dr. Roussin–and perhaps the member for St. Boniface wants to watch the recording of this morning's press conference–modelling continues to show a relative plateau in admissions and a downward trend.

We will continue to release the data on a weekly basis so Manitobans can make the decisions that are in their best interest.

Diabetes Prevention Plan Budget 2022

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, for 23 years I've called on the government to implement effective measures to prevent diabetes. For 23 years, NDP and Conservative governments have failed to do this.

Since 2000, the number of youth with prediabetes in the US has jumped from—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gerrard: –11 per cent to 28 per cent, a shocking and stunning increase. I table the scientific paper.

The costs of inaction are large—to the health of individuals and in cost to our health-care system. A diabetes strategy which primarily provides more dialysis treatments and cardiovascular treatments is simply not affordable with this diabetes tsunami.

Will the government do what needs to be done and fund a major effort to prevent diabetes in next week's budget?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): I appreciate the question coming from the member opposite about diabetes.

As the mother of a type 1 diabetic myself, it is close to my heart and it also falls within my portfolio, the Diabetes Strategy, which we are happy to work on with our federal counterparts here in Manitoba. And I look forward to, as well, the budget coming up next Tuesday where we'll hear more good news coming out of our government and the investments we're going to be making in mental health and in wellness.

Thank you.

Long-Term-Care System Review Implementation of Recommendations

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): The past two years have highlighted the need for a long-term-care system that is built on compassion and dignified care.

The Stevenson review was undertaken to identify the root causes of deficiencies and set a path to ensure appropriate long-term-care standards in Manitoba. This Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care has committed to acting on all 17 recommendations of the Stevenson review.

Can the minister expand on how our government will implement these recommendations?

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): I thank my colleague from Dauphin for that excellent question and wanting me to address the very positive things—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Johnston: –that we're doing for the seniors of Manitoba.

Yesterday, I was very proud to stand with the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) to announce \$15 million in additional funding—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Johnston: –to support implementation of all 17 Stevenson review recommendations, Madam Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Johnston: Did I hear somebody say more? Well, I've got more; I've got more.

And, Madam Speaker, further shareholder consultations and planning will take place and there will be significant more investments coming out of the Stevenson review.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

Education System Funding Pandemic Recovery Support

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): We've established that schools don't have what they need and they're struggling with meeting student need, especially coming out of the pandemic.

Base funding we know is just 1.34 per cent, while inflation is above five. Brandon had to cut 10 teaching positions; Seven Oaks had to cut eight permanent teaching positions; and these are positions we need to recover, Madam Speaker, from the pandemic.

Will this government reverse course and ensure that we have proper supports for our Manitoba students?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): It looks like the seatbelt light is off on the NDP side, Madam Speaker. I finally get a question from my Education advocate.

It's interesting that he brings this question up about affordability and funding to school divisions on—he should have read the news release today. Today, our government announced 7 million more

dollars for—Madam Speaker—for students with special needs. That's 127 million more dollars in this upcoming school year.

More good news next Tuesday from the budget.

Madam Speaker, thank you. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Altomare: The minister knows that that is funding that has to happen because that's by law. By law, they have to ensure that students with additional needs are properly funded. That is a fundamental right. He knows about inclusion and he knows that these things are expected.

* (14:40)

So I'll ask the minister again: Will they reverse course and ensure that students are properly supported in this province as we emerge from this pandemic?

Madam Speaker: The—*[interjection]* Order. The honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As my critic, my friend from Transcona, puts it, it is expected. And that's why we're delivering it, Madam Speaker; something they never got right under the NDP government, and is the reason why he decided to run for the NDP, is because they needed a repair, a re-fix, a reboot under the NDP, Madam Speaker.

And that's why this year, in addition to last year, \$327 million more to school divisions. That's a 17.2 per cent increase, Madam Speaker. That is a larger percentage—that's a larger percentage than what the NDP received in the Fort Whyte by-election.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

* * *

Hon. Andrew Smith (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): I'd like to canvass the House to see if there's leave to recognize today as—of course, today we had a ministerial statement on the 105th anniversary of Vimy Ridge, and wondering if there's leave for the House to recognize and have a moment of silence, in light of that.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to recognize the anniversary of Vimy Ridge and to have a moment of silence? *[Agreed]*

Please stand.

A moment of silence was observed.

PETITIONS

Madam Speaker: Petitions? Are there any petitions today?

The honourable member for Point Douglas. *[interjection]* Order.

Foot-Care Services

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The population of those aged 55-plus has grown approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

(4) The northern regional health authority previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurse fillings—filling those positions retired.

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Smith: —to restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1st, 2020.

And this has been signed by David McDonald, Margaret McCartney and Tricia Griffin.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with our rule 132(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

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

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba:

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) A large percentage of those who are elderly—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: —and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

(4) The northern regional health authority, N-R-H-A, previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1, 2022.

This has been signed by Trevor Rhodes, Jacqueline Spence, Mary Ann Trout and many Manitobans.

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

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

(1) The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

(4) The northern regional health authority, the N-R-H-A, previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, and whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or a lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1, 2022.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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

The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately 25 in the city of Thompson.

A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

The northern regional health authority, N-R-H-A, previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

There is also—there is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1st, 2022.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Thank you.

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) The population of those aged 55-plus have grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

* (14:50)

(4) The northern regional health authority, N-R-H-A, previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson—city of Thompson effective April 1st, 2022.

Signed by many Manitobans.

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

(4) The northern regional health authority, N-R-H-A, previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1st, 2022.

And this petition, Madam Speaker, has been signed by Verna J. Beardy, Anne Spearey, Ron Byer and many other 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 a 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 been 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 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 Avenue in anticipation of a 2015 start.

In 2014, the new City administration did not make use of available federal infrastructure funds.

(7) The new Louise Bridge Committee began its campaign to demand a new bridge and its surveys confirmed 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. The City expropriation process has begun.

(10) The provincial budget due in mid-April 2022 is the Province's opportunity to announce its portion of funding for this long overdue vital link to northeast Winnipeg and Transcona.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Premier to financially assist the City of Winnipeg in her new 2022 provincial budget to build this three-lane bridge in each direction to maintain this vital link between northeast Winnipeg, Transcona and the downtown.

(2) To urge the provincial government to recommend that the City of Winnipeg keep the old bridge fully open to traffic while the new bridge is under construction.

(3) To urge the provincial government to consider the feasibility of keeping the old Louise Bridge open for active transportation in the future.

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Lead in Soils

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) In December of 2019, the provincial government's commissioned report on lead concentrations in soil in Winnipeg was completed.

(2) The report found that 10 neighbourhoods had concerning levels of lead concentration in their soil, including Centennial, Daniel McIntyre, Glenelm-Chalmers, north Point Douglas, River Osborne, Sargent Park, St. Boniface, West End, Weston and Wolseley-Minto.

In particular, the predicted blood lead levels for children in north Point Douglas, Weston and Daniel McIntyre were above the level of concern.

The Weston Elementary School field has been forced to close down many times because of concerns of lead in soil and the provincial government's inaction to improve the situation.

Lead exposure especially affects children aged seven years and under, as their nervous system is still developing.

The effects of lead exposure are irreversible and include impacts on learning, behaviour and intelligence.

For adults, long-term lead exposure can contribute to high blood pressure, heart disease, kidney problems and reproductive effects.

(8) The provincial government currently has no comprehensive plan in place to deal with lead in soil, nor is there a broad advertising campaign educating residents on how they can reduce their risks of lead exposure.

Instead, people in these areas continue to garden and work in the soil and children continue to play in the dirt, often without any knowledge of the associated risks.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

* (15:00)

To urge the provincial government to take action to reduce people's exposure to lead in Winnipeg, and to implement the recommendations proposed by the provincial government's independent review, including the creation of an action plan for the Weston neighbourhood, developing a lead awareness communications and outreach program, requisitioning a more in-depth study, and creating a tracking program for those tested for blood lead levels so that medical professionals can follow up with them.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Eating Disorders Awareness Week

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

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

An estimated 1 million people suffer from eating disorders in Canada.

Eating disorders are serious mental illnesses affecting one's physical, psychological and social function and have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness.

The development and treatment of eating disorders are influenced by the social determinants of health, including food and income security, access to housing, health care and mental health supports.

It is important to share the diverse experiences of people with eating disorders across all ages, genders and identities, including Indigenous, Black and racialized people; queer and gender-diverse people; people with disabilities; people with chronic illness; and people with co-occurring mental health conditions or addictions.

It is necessary to increase awareness and education about the impact of those living with, or affected by, eating disorders in order to dispel dangerous stereotypes and myths about these illnesses.

Setting aside one week each year to focus attention on eating disorders will heighten public understanding, increase awareness of culturally relevant resources and supports for those impacted by eating disorders and encourage Manitobans to develop healthier relationships with their bodies.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to support a declaration that the first week in February of each year be known as eating disorders awareness week.

This has been signed by Raymond Araboy, Godfrey Araboy and Sherry Deug [*phonetic*] and many other Manitobans.

Foot-Care Services

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

(4) The northern regional health authority, the N-R-H-A, previously provided essential medical foot-

care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

(5) The number of seniors and those with disabilities has only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1st, 2022.

And this petition—[interjection]—has been signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Could you please call for second reading debate this afternoon Bill 15, Bill 13, Bill 23 and Bill 32.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider second readings of the following bills: Bill 15, Bill 13, Bill 23 and Bill 32.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 15—The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment and Highway Traffic Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: So I will begin by calling second reading of Bill 15, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment and Highway Traffic Amendment Act.

Hon. Doyle Pivniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Johnson), that Bill 15, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment and Highway Traffic Amendment Act,

be now read a second time and referred to the committee of this House.

This honour—His Honour the Administrator has been advised of the bill, and I table the message.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, seconded by the honourable Minister of Agriculture, that Bill 15, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment and Highway Traffic Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

His Honour the Administrator has been advised of the bill, and the message has been tabled.

Mr. Pivniuk: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to speak to the House today about Bill 15, the drivers and vehicles amendment and the highway traffic amendment act, and it's actually my first bill as Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

This bill makes three key changes that will update and modernize legislation related to administrative tribunals and police reporting.

The first change is related to the Medical Review Committee. As a bit of background, the Medical Review Committee is a 'ministrative' tribunal that hears appeals in cases where a person's driver's licence has been suspended, cancelled or refused on a medical grounds by a registrar of the motor vehicles. The Medical Review Committee is currently made up of five members, including at least three medical practitioners.

Mr. Dennis Smook, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Under the act, the three medical practitioners must be a 'nuologist,' a 'cardiarologist' and an internist and a general practitioner, an 'othamolgolist' and a optometrist. We recognize that these individuals are very busy with many competing demands of their time. As a result, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it has been a challenge to recruit and retain the medical practitioners members of the Medical Review Committee needs to hear appeals in a timely manner. The bill will address this issue by updating membership criteria of the Medical Review Committee by 'remuing' specific medical specialties from the legislation.

Instead, the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure will be able to make policies around the appointments of members based on medical case needs. Addressing recruitment and retention issues with the Medical Review Committee will reduce wait times for citizens, which are important for these

decisions that affect their driving privileges and can have a big impact on their lives.

The second change made of this bill is allowing for online police reporting and electronic driving signatures when a driver is involved with a certain types of medical vehicle accidents or a hit and run. Currently, The Highway Traffic Act requires that drivers to be reported in person to a police detachment when they are involved in a collision that results in hospitalization or death, whether there is a lack of driver's licence or vehicle registration, intoxicants are involved, or if they experience a hit and run.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Manitoba government authorized temporary online police reporting for these incidents since the police detachments have been closed in-person reporting. This will—this bill will make changes to the police reporting requirements permanent, which will provide greater flexibility for citizens and all Manitobans.

Finally, the third change made by the bill is to allow Licence Suspension Appeal Board, instead of the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, to hear appeals by commercial vehicle operators when their safety fitness certificates have been suspended or cancelled. A safety fitness certificate is a document that allows operators of heavy commercial vehicles, like large trucks or large-capacity passenger vehicles, to operate on Manitoba roads. The Province has authority to suspend or cancel this certificate if vehicles are not being safely operated or maintained.

Since the suspending or cancelling of their certificate has significant impact on the livelihood of commercial vehicle operators, they have the right to appeal the decision. Having this Licence Suspension Appeal Board hearing these appeals makes sense, as the board has the appropriate expertise of service to the independent review body for these appeals, and they are supportive and—of hearings of these appeals and additions to the appeals, they already hear about driver's licence issues.

* (15:10)

These are all common sense changes that will improve the way that citizens interact with government and I am pleased to have the opportunity to move this legislation forward.

As final comment, I would like to thank all those who participated in the consultation of this bill and I look forward to the opportunity to hear from Manitobans when the bill is referred to the committee of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Questions

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the minister by any member in the following sequence: first question by the official opposition critic or designate; subsequent questions asked by critics or designates from other recognized opposition parties; subsequent questions asked by each independent member; remaining questions asked by any opposition members. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): The minister referred to a consultation process and we had a chance to talk a little bit about that during the bill briefing.

I guess I just wanted to know a little bit more information about who the minister consulted and will he table the information that was gathered through that consultation so that we can sort of get a better sense of exactly who he spoke to within industry, within police law enforcement, et cetera.

Hon. Doyle Pivniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): I want to thank the member for the question.

And, yes, we consulted with the—with MPI. We consulted with policing because, again, it's going to affect the amount of reporting when it comes to police reporting of accidents. We also talked to medical individuals.

And a lot of cases when it came—it comes to medical advisors when it comes to the medical appeal board, the Medical Review Committee, we always want to make sure that when we look at different scenarios that we also look at mental health as—some specialists in that field, too, to make sure that we can give back licences to individual Manitoba drivers.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. 'acuting'—Acting Deputy Speaker, my question to the minister is this: the number of people on this committee is at least five, but a quorum is three. And with a quorum of three you can have decisions being made by just two people if you have—and the third may disagree. And I'm concerned that you may have two people who, you know, are getting together and denying somebody the ability to get a licence or making a wrong decision because you've got a decision made by two people instead of a larger number.

Mr. Piwniuk: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), I believe, has misunderstood the situation here.

It's allowing of up to two medical doctors, but also there's going to be a panel of five. So we could also look at nurses who are with—when it comes to mental health, if that person can be on that panel to make the decision. It's not—it's just that we're not allowing as many doctors on the committee, and this is what this is all about—is to make sure that we have the right amount of people to be on the committee of five people to make sure the decisions are made and so making sure that it's safe to do so.

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): What is the rationale behind moving the medical reports and Medical Review Committee provision from The Highway Traffic Act to The Drivers and Vehicles Act?

Mr. Piwniuk: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question.

And what we're really doing with this bill is making sure that we're really cleaning it up so that we are actually moving the stuff from the—actually, The Highway Traffic Act to the highway drivers licencing act and that's where we want to make sure that it's an appropriate situation so that it can be addressed when it comes to making the right decisions, when it comes to these three areas of—where we want to improve efficiencies and also making sure that it's transparency, too.

Mr. Gerrard: I ask the minister, with relationship to section 18.5, which says quorum. It says a quorum of this Medical Review Committee is three members. That means you're going to have a quorum of three people, which means that two of those three are basically making a decision.

When the NDP were in government, there was an instance where there was a committee of three and it went to the Auditor General, and I think two of them were married or in some sort of a relationship. So I think you have to be very careful in having a committee where two people are making a decision, that you don't have two people who have got, you know, friends or relationship.

Mr. Piwniuk: Yes. Mr. Deputy Speaker, when it comes to the Medical Review Committee, we are looking at having a committee that's made up of five people, making sure that we get those five people there.

It's just that before, we actually had to have specialists and these specialists were listed. When I was reading my statement, my first second reading, and we want to make sure that we can get other people in the—when it comes to other—when it comes to other specialists—not specialists, but in the medical field that with—especially with mental health, there could be situations where, when it comes to individuals who are looking to getting their licence back, it could—because—reasons of mental health issues, and we could use people in from that area for their expertise, too.

Mr. Wiebe: With the safety fitness certificate appeals now being moved to the Licence Suspension Appeal Board, what additional funding is being provided to that board in order to ensure that they are able to adequately handle the increased number of cases that they will be adjudicating in any given year?

Mr. Piwniuk: I want to thank the member for this question then. And that is something that we will look in more detail when it comes to actually—when it—when we get the, you know, when—now that the minister is no longer actually looking at the—when it comes to the current—when it comes to commercial vehicles. When it comes to the tribunal, we make sure that we actually have the right people in place and making sure that there's a budget that we make sure that these appeal boards are looked at and making sure that they're equipped with the proper individuals.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Deputy Speaker, my question to the minister is this follow-up: The—one of the conditions or one of the areas where there's a review of licences or licences being taken away is seniors, where there's concerns about the health of the seniors. And it seems to me it would be important not only to have people who are looking at the health of the seniors, but somebody on the committee who would be an advocate for seniors.

Has the minister considered the possibility of having somebody who'd be an advocate for seniors, perhaps a senior himself or herself, on this committee?

Mr. Piwniuk: I want to thank the member for the question from River Heights. And that's exactly why this has been updated, because the fact is, for instance, we can't actually what—you know, instead of having all these specialists we can actually have somebody who is from the seniors advocate area, too, to be on this panel to make sure that they also are there to make, you know, when it comes to individuals who are seniors who want some, you know, wants to know that they're being listened to and be—actually be able

to work with this group of five people to make sure that they look at the opportunities for seniors.

Mr. Sandhu: Will the government commit to fully staff the Licence Suspension Appeal Board and ensure it conducts regular hearings?

Mr. Piwniuk: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the reason why we're doing this amendment to this bill here was basically to make sure that it gives an opportunity to do—make sure that—because people, when they're in the trucking industry or commercial industry or even drivers going to work and stuff like that, we want to make sure that these appeal boards are done in efficient matter so that these people can get back to their lives if they actually warrant that they can drive safely again and they've, you know, they—if there was impaired or something down the road, that they've had all their help and that they can get back to, you know, going back to work and making sure that they make a living for themselves.

* (15:20)

Mr. Gerrard: There's a situation sometimes which comes up with a person with a disability, whether it's a physical or a mental disability, let's say a physical disability, that they've got one hand or one leg or something like that, and you can have a car which is adapted to that.

Will you consider having somebody with a disability on the panel to make sure that the rights of people who—with disabilities are appropriately represented?

Mr. Piwniuk: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question. It was a very good question.

And yes, you know, this is why we're updating this—the Medical Review Committee, is to—allowing that, you know, as long as there's some doctors who are, let's say, general practitioners; but we also can get, like, say, people from mental health that can—that needs these decisions.

But especially with it comes to disabilities and some of the actual people who are specialists in that area, that knows the safety of a vehicle and knows that the capabilities of the people with disabilities can actually drive safely and be on that panel is very important. That's why we're modernizing the whole—this whole appeal—medical appeal board.

Mr. Wiebe: So, I think I understand the minister's point about allowing more flexibility in which

medical experts are available for the Medical Review Committee.

But what exactly—what safeguards are in place within this legislation that actually safeguards the—having the correct or appropriate medical expertise available at each hearing?

Mr. Piwniuk: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question. And that's where we're moving forward, and especially when we go into the committee stages and stuff like that, we are going to get people that come and to represent.

And again, we've actually done a lot of research when it came to amending this bill and making sure that we are filling—to make sure that the public is still safe out there, that—making sure that this appeal board is going to be very focussed on making sure that that person has the abilities to go forward and be able to drive again, and get back to a kind of normalcy, if the person had suspended their licence.

We want to make sure that Manitobans are safe, and this is what the focus of this bill is all about is to modernize it, but also getting the right people on there that—again, it's a bigger scope, actually, when it comes to making these decisions.

Mr. Gerrard: To the minister, one could argue that where you're dealing with somebody with seizures—which sometimes comes up—and how well they're controlled, that you would need a neurologist. You can argue that one of the best peoples to assess might be somebody who's not a physician but somebody who's involved in training of drivers.

But clearly, to have the right expertise at the right time, you're going to have to be able to have flexibility in how the committee is constituted.

Will the government have the ability to tailor the composition of the committee to the needs or the situation of the individual who's being assessed?

Mr. Piwniuk: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to thank the member for the question, too. And again, that's a very good question, because the fact is, that is why this whole thing is—this bill is being updated.

Because, in fact, the amendment here was to make sure that each individual's case will be looked at and making sure that the—and, you know, this gives us a flexibility, because, again, when we looked at five different specialists, it was hard to get their schedules to make sure that they can come up and be there on that panel, and sometimes it would probably delay for

weeks and months, maybe, because to try to get the right composite from the—where it used to be.

But now, here's gives the flexibility that, like you say, there could be a person who is a senior advocate, there could be a person who is a mental health advocate. There could also be somebody who also is with—when it comes to medical like a neurologist, you know, making sure that this gives us—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Sandhu: What is the current appeal wait timeline like and how will this bill impact the wait times?

Mr. Piwniuk: Well, I don't really know the exact time—like the time frame, like when it came to these appeals, like the history of it. There is a long wait line because, a lot of times, especially when it comes to the medical appeal board, we had to get the right composite of people to be there and that's where delays were really high.

But we want to make sure that there's efficiencies that we can get, looking at these—all these different appeals and looking at making sure that with the right—with the flexibility, this allows us to make sure that we don't have long waiting lines. And this is what this whole bill is all about, is to make sure that we can get people back driving if it warrants them to drive again.

Mr. Gerrard: In this bill, it provides for a member to be appointed for a term of not more than three years and with no member serving more than 10 consecutive years. But how many members will the government have on this committee in total so that you actually have the ability to have the representation that you need under a diverse array of cases?

Mr. Piwniuk: Mr. Deputy Speaker, that was a very good question by the member from River Heights.

Like I said, we'll have a number of people so that we have extra—making sure that there's a list of individuals that we can actually call on when it comes to the appeal boards and, again, this allows us to give the opportunity to make sure that we have all these—a number of individuals so that we can make sure that there's no waiting list.

Because, again, when it comes to having waiting lists and people are not able to go to work or be able to have a standard of living, we want to make sure that this gives them that they're not waiting too long, because it really, at the end of the day, hurts our economy.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The floor is now open for debate.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to put a few words on the record with regards to Bill 15, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment and Highway Traffic Amendment Act.

As this is the minister's first bill, I will congratulate him on bringing it forward to this point in the process. I'm sure it's an exciting time for him, even if I would, you know, in all fairness, say this may not be the most exciting bill in terms of its impact. But I do know that it does have an impact on several areas that I would suggest are maybe more of a housekeeping or keeping up with the technology.

That being said, I think there are some concerns that, you know, we've heard from folks in industry and otherwise that I do want to suss out a little bit here this afternoon in terms of debate. And, you know, as we go through the process, hoping that, you know, at committee we do get some good input from the public as always we do when we get to the committee stage of the process.

So as we know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this bill amends The Drivers and Vehicles Act and The Highway Traffic Act in three respects: it—we—it amends or changes the medical reports and Medical Review Committee; it gives the authority to determine the composition of the Medical Review Committee and appoint members to the minister; and the minister is then, when appointing members, it is then their duty to ensure that there is sufficient range of medical expertise and experience within the committee to carry out those responsibilities.

We also know that this legislation amends the reporting of accidents under The Highway Traffic Act, which can now be made to police electronically rather than only in person.

And, finally, the safety fitness certificates appeals, which will now be appealed directly to the Licence Suspension Appeal Board with, hopefully, some ability to move things forward more quickly there.

So, first of all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it's important to talk a little bit about the process for the Medical Review Committee and the members—the particular members—that will now be on that committee.

As has been identified there are, you know, opportunities, I think, in this legislation to enhance the kind of expertise that the board is able to gather. I think it is important that we continue to evolve with our understanding of, you know, the medical expertise in terms of what the board might need and how individuals who have certain expertise can fit within that structure.

* (15:30)

I guess the concern is that, you know, it's all about getting it right. And, you know, the minister has talked about some issues or some concerns with recruitment. I'm sure that that is, you know, as is with many of the boards that we ask Manitobans in this province to step up and serve on, it is certainly always an issue for us to ensure that we get the right people on boards.

That being said, it is also important that we have some sort of structure. And to hear the minister say, well, you know, we'll get it right, you know, it doesn't give us much confidence. We would hope that there is more structure and more, you know, attention paid to exactly who sits on that board and what the composition of that board is. Regardless of the difficulties around recruitment, it is important that we have a basic structure that supports the kinds of cases that this particular board would need to investigate.

There are, you know, certainly always concerns and, you know, we've seen this over and over again from this government, more and more control is being, you know, centred within the minister's office or the Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) office. It is certainly a concern when I hear that, you know, don't worry we're going to get it right and, you know, the minister will have a little bit more flexibility. But we'll always be worry—you know, always be thinking about these other aspects.

You know, again, I look forward to hearing from the public. I think there's a lot that we learn about the concerns there and from the medical community. But, you know, again it—just, it's a concern when we hear from the minister that that specificity isn't in the bill and that we just have to wait and see what that will look like.

With regards to the second point, I did—I was hoping that I would get an opportunity to get to my

questions and I'm seeing that maybe the minister isn't paying quite as much attention now as I'd hoped he would be. Maybe I should have led with my question that I didn't get to in question period. Anyway. Maybe he'll go back and he'll read Hansard, I'm sure most members here read every single word of Hansard, and maybe he'll go back to the video.

But—and I'm sure I'll have another opportunity to ask. But the question that I would have is just, with regards to his consultation with police and with law enforcement, what we were really hoping to get a little bit more information on is exactly how many cases were actually filed electronically in this previous year.

Because this is an example of—and we've had a few bills now that have come before the Legislature, again where, you know, you have kind of all parties in agreement that through the pandemic we have actually seen some things operating more efficiently and this is, I would suggest, is one of those elements. You know, we've moved more online and we've moved—you know, some of the barriers that we saw in the past that, you know, almost seemed insurmountable in terms of, you know, electronic signatures and veracity of documents that are submitted and even the technology to be able to do all of that. A lot has changed in the last couple of years.

And so I think this is very much in line with where people expect, you know, in this case law enforcement to be, but regardless across the board people expect that they can submit documents with their signature and that's, you know, taken as, in the same way that it would be if it was just them in person in a police station.

So I think there's a lot that can be done there, and I think that is something that with—in collaboration with law enforcement, we've been reaching out to them as well just to make sure that this is in fact, you know, not just, you know, how they've been doing it but, you know, what have we learned over those two years. Is it not just, you know, something that we've been doing so we want to continue to do, but is there a way to enhance it. So I think that's an important element for the minister to consider, and I do hope that he, as I said, is able to get that information to us. I think it will be helpful for us to sort of understand exactly how we can do that.

The other element to that though, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and it's not a small element—I think it's important that we understand that, for some Manitobans, that they don't have the access to technology. They may have, you know, disabilities that inhibit their

ability to use the technology in the same way that we all, sort of, you know, others take it—take for granted.

So what we want to see and we want to ensure is that, you know, that is in addition to the already-in-place system of in-person reporting and that sort of, you know, customer service, in-person ability is still in place. You know, even that, of course, has limitations. So if there's a ways that can do this better, I think it's important that we not just take for granted that, you know, we're going to do it as we've been doing it over the last couple years, but instead we actually enhance and we improve that.

So, as I said, people with visual disabilities, people with physical disabilities, folks with intellectual disabilities, you know, these are all serious barriers that, again, for most of us may not be front of mind, but for many Manitobans it's vitally important that they are included in legislation when we're revamping it and we are taking a serious look at it. So that's certainly one element of this bill that we also want to ensure that the minister is giving proper consideration.

And then finally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know that this bill, as I said, allows currently an operator can appeal a director's decision about this—their safety fitness certificate, and that's directly to the minister. This bill is changing the process. So with the amendments proposed in this bill, those appeals will now be heard by the Licence Suspension Appeal Board.

Now, I think this is an important change. I do think this is a move in the right direction.

The concern that I have, and again, we ask the questions, the member for The Maples (Mr. Sandhu) also asked this question: you know, what are we doing to properly fund the Licence Suspension Appeal Board? What are we doing to ensure they have the proper staffing that they need to hear the increased number of cases? And these aren't—this isn't a huge number of cases that, I believe, that, based on the information that the minister has given us, that they would have in addition to what they normally would process.

That being said, these can be, I believe, complex cases or cases that need proper consideration. So, once again, if you're downloading to the Licence Suspension Appeal Board, ensuring that they're properly staffed, that they have the funding that they need, that is going to be absolutely vital to make sure that this is done properly.

This is—you know, this has a huge impact, potentially, on commercial users, and so we have to

make sure that it's done efficiently. There are certainly cases where that appeal process is absolutely vital, and we know that industry is asking us to move this in a way that makes it more efficient and quicker to actually move through this process. So I want to ensure that we're working with the trucking industry. We're working with those folks who are impacted by this. We're ensuring that if we're going to download it onto the Licence Suspension Appeal Board that we properly fund them. We give them the training. We give them the staff that they need to ensure that that timing is as folks expect it to be.

You know, we know that the appeals process has been criticized in the past for not being quick enough, for not being efficient enough, but, again, this doesn't necessarily solve that problem. It could, but it doesn't necessarily do that unless there's proper funding in place. So that's one of the other concerns that we have.

So overall, Mr. Deputy Speaker—again, not to take anything away from the minister. Congratulations to him on his first bill. This may not be the, you know, the barnburner that, you know, he had hoped would be his first important piece of legislation. But it's also one that we also don't take for granted, or we don't take lightly I should say. It's not something that we, you know, are willing to just pass without any kind of debate or discussion. I think there's some of the important questions that need to be asked. I do hope that during the public consultations that we have, the public hearings that we have within this Legislature after second reading, those will be an important way that we can suss some of those out.

But I also hope, you know—and the first conversation that I had with the minister once he became minister was to say, you know, look, there's the political, there's the politics of this place and politics out on the doorstep. But when it comes to legislation like this, when it comes to other important matters within Manitoba, you know, I'm always happy to hear from him directly.

And so if there's additional information, as I asked earlier, I would appreciate that he did get it to me, and otherwise we're happy to work with him and continue to move this bill forward.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

* (15:40)

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): I know a lot of times when we stand in the House here and we look at bills and we debate, we have questions ourselves that we want answered, and we have the ability to reach

out and get those answers and it's nice to share some of those answers with our colleagues that sit around the table so that we all have an understanding.

And, again, it's a great bill to bring forward and to look at what is happening in the province of Manitoba. And we know that the government of Manitoba is committed to improving service delivery for the public. We know that this bill also amends legislation to improve service delivery to citizens accessing driver-related appeal services. And not only that, it also modernizes how reports are processed and how they're made following a collision—a motor vehicle collision.

So this bill, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, actually amends the drivers vehicle act and the vehicle act and The Highway Traffic Act to update and clarify requirements for the Medical Review Committee, modernize how the public reports motor vehicle collisions to the police, as I just mentioned, and also allows commercial vehicle operators to appeal to a licence-suspension appeal board.

So when we look at the details of a bill and sometimes—and I admit, we can all look at bills, and there's certain things in there, when we look at a bill and we ask ourselves, what does that really mean. How does that improve services to Manitobans?

Well, when we look at the—this bill in particular and the improvements it does to the Medical Review Committee and how that happens and how the Medical Review Committee can help 'expediate' claims that happen throughout the drivers vehicle act. So, again, the committee hears appeals from individuals who have had their driver's licence suspended or cancelled, or maybe it's even being refused by a medical professional on medical grounds by the Registrar of Motor Vehicles. So the MRC also hears appeals for the physically disabled parking permit program under The Highway Traffic Act. And I know that it's a great group to work with. I've had many opportunities in the past to work with the disabled parking permit program and the benefits that it has for motorists who utilize their services to allow them to continue life to the fullest that they can when it comes to mobilization throughout the community and getting from family to family, going out shopping and so forth.

We also know, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, that currently the MRC is required, in legislation, to appoint members that are practising medical specialists from the fields of neurology, cardiology and—pardon me, an optometrist or an

'ophthamotologist'. I think I need to go back to school and get some of those medical terms. And I read that right in front of me, and it's kind of embarrassing: 21 years in health care, and I look at this word and it just grabbed me, and I said, that's not a real world. So my apologies to those in that profession.

But medical practitioners with special specialties are still needed to evaluate in this program. Moving forward, the minister will be able to appoint MRC members by policy based on medical case needs, which is expected to improve service delivery and then do something we all want to see happen, and that's reduce wait times.

The bill itself also, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, will allow the Licence Suspension Appeal Board, instead of the minister of Manitoba transportation, infrastructure to hear appeals by commercial operators when their safety fitness certificate has been suspended or cancelled. The appeal application fee is there for members, should they wish to appeal, and I believe it's around \$130 that—if they want to appeal their suspension, they can certainly do that. And it's nice knowing that the appeals board—or the Licence Suspension Appeal Board—has the expertise necessary to hear these appeals in both a professional and in a timely manner. And this bill certainly helps drive that forward.

We also look at the LSAB, which, again, is the Licence Suspension Appeal Board, and we know that it provides an appeal process for relief in cases where exceptional hardship can be demonstrated and when the Registrar of Motor Vehicles or the courts have suspended, cancelled or disqualified a person's driver's licence. I am sure my colleagues around the House will have constituents coming to them and asking for assistance. I know I personally have had a couple that have come to me that we've been able to help.

Again, we may not be able to come to a conclusion for everybody, but we're certainly able to drive them in the right direction so they can get the assistance that they need.

So, we look at why and how the reporting to police is being modified—[interjection]—and I know my colleague here says I just used a—I guess it was a pun—when we drive them in the right direction, so I can go drive them over. But I used that word on purpose because I want to keep the focus on the bill, which is involving drivers, safer streets, safer commute rates—or routes, pardon me—for rural Manitobans.

So, under The Highway Traffic Act, the driver is required to report a collision or a hit-and-run incident to a police department. I know a lot of us, if you've had history with a motor vehicle accident, you pick up the phone, you call the police, they would come to the accident scene. That was the old days. Nowadays, they still have a criterion in place that if it's a serious accident they absolutely will attend. If it's a minor accident, they won't. And they certainly provide you information on how you can—to report that to the police. Come to the police station, fill out a report and that sort of thing. With this bill, reporting to the police, again, is being changed.

So, during the COVID pandemic, temporary authorization was provided, for example, to the Winnipeg Police Service to allow online reporting of vehicle collisions and driver approvals, as some police departments were closed to the public. So when we look at that, this bill will amend The Highway Traffic Act to permanently allow online police reporting and electronic driver signature to provide flexibility and improve services.

So there are a number of opportunities that we certainly have with this bill, I'm not going to go through it and read them, and everybody's read the explanation on it, the explanatory notes. And, again, when we look at, constantly, how can we improve the safety of our roads for all Manitobans, and with the support—and I thank the minister for bringing this bill forward because it is certainly one of those bills that will do just that.

With that, I thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): It's my honour to put a few words on the record regarding Bill 15, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment and Highway Traffic Amendment Act.

This bill amends The Drivers and Vehicles Act and The Highway Traffic Act in three respects: (1) is medical reports and medical review committee. In addition, the minister is given the authority to determine composition of the medical review committee and appoint members. When appointing members, the minister must ensure there is a sufficient means of medical expertise and experience for the committee to carry out its responsibility; (2) police force: police force under The Highway Traffic Act no longer have to be made in person at the detachment what can be filed electronically instead; (3) safety fitness certificates appeals: commercial operators of regulated vehicles require a safety fitness certificate under The

Highway Traffic Act. Currently, an operator can appeal a director's decision about their safety fitness certificate to the minister. These appeals are now heard by the Licence Suspension Appeal Board.

Again, I think there was a couple of questions: What is—was the wait time for appeals process time currently? How will this expediate the appeals process?

* (15:50)

Just want to highlight. A constituent of mine moved from BC, went back to BC, then moved to Winnipeg again and then back to BC. I think he moved five times within a year, and his licence was suspended. And so he appealed to the Licence Suspension Appeal Board. It wasn't easy for him to convince, first the MPI, then the suspension appeal board, that yes, he is back in Winnipeg permanently. This took him almost six, seven months.

And the question was again, like, how many people were on suspension—Licence Suspension Appeal Board? So it took, even to get a response, almost four months. And even—the person had a kid born in Winnipeg, and also bought his own house, and still it was hard for him to get the licence, and especially go to this Licence Suspension Appeal Board.

So when we are talking about having how many people on the board and make sure it's a timely—these appeals processed in a timely manner.

We understand that this bill amends The Drivers and Vehicle Act and The Highway Traffic Act in three respects. Through the Highway Traffic Act, medical 'practicener' report to the Registrar of Motor Vehicles when a person's physical health impedes their ability to safely drive a vehicle. Within the same legislation exists a provision about the medical review committee which is also being moved to The Drivers and Vehicle Act.

Member from River Heights raised very good questions there: Who's going to be on this committee, to make sure they have proper people—are on this committee. And the member from River Heights highlights that—who needs to be on there. And I think it's a good idea those experts to be on this appeal committee.

And again, depends. There was another thing where they said you can have only three members hearing the appeal instead of five. And this is common, I have to say, when you're hearing appeals, even

though you can have five members to hear the appeal, most of the time it is only three members coming.

I was at highway motor traffic and vehicle board and there were more than five people from the board, but most of the time there were only three people were called to—for the hearing. So, hopefully, there are expertise needed, we have more people attending these appeal suspension hearings.

The pandemic showed us all the importance of being able to stay connected and conduct work from home through our electronic devices. We understand that this bill continues practices that we were set in during the pandemic, giving Manitobans an option to submit police reports electronically.

I was just actually looking at the stats, actually, after the pandemic how many people really want to go back to work and how many people want to work from home. And there are around 58 per cent of the respondents said they rather switch the job so they can work from home instead of going back to work. So that's the stats there, so.

We also understand that government wishes to make permanent provision around online reporting of minor highway traffic incidents. We see the value of technology for these types of things. Used correctly, this can mean a more convenient way to do this and it could reduce demand on police service for minor reporting.

However, we do need to make sure these changes are widely accessible as possible. For example, for those with disabilities—again, a person with a disability, does he have to go to the police station to make a report, or is it the online processes going to be easier, accessible to people with a disability? This is—the move to online reporting can make it more difficult for certain people, especially those with visual, physical or intellectual disabilities, from accessing services and goods that should be widely available.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is important that the government respect the provisions of the accessibility for Manitoba act. It is important for any change to online ensuring—online reporting ensure that it does not take away the ability of Manitobans to report a minor highway traffic incident, as this is an important act of The Highway Traffic Act.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this bill amends The Highway Traffic Act. We have heard announcement after announcement, but then again, when it's come to time to spend the money, the money is not there.

Announcements are not enough. The money needs to be spent on—into the highways.

Another thing I—I'm hearing the sense I got elected is, stay tuned, stay tuned. And I don't know what that means, stay tuned. Like, haven't heard anything after that. So, stay tuned—nothing more than that. I'm hearing this for—since 2019, so—and so, you know, this PC government has repeatedly underspent millions of dollars from the annual budgeted highway spending.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my constituency in The Maples, we have been waiting for almost—I don't know—some people told me, like, it's in the papers for almost 30, 40 years, the Chief Peguis Trail—this expansion to be completed. And that won't be done until at least, if I look at the City of Winnipeg site, 2041. And the provincial government have to come to the table to spend money on the highways.

And also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from Lagimodiere to Henderson Highway, Chief Peguis 'expension'—expansion was completed by the NDP government, and it got stuck there. We haven't had anything happening after 2016. And after we look at also CentrePort Canada Way from the Perimeter all the way to 90, this is also only completed under the NDP government.

And we are still waiting and I raised a couple of questions on this and, again, the answer was, stay tuned. So I'm staying tuned. Hopefully, in the budget there is something for my constituents, for The Maples—and not only my constituents, it's constituents from the McPhillips and constituents from Kildonan-River East and the constituents for the Tyndall Park.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are seeing these cuts everywhere. Like, government is not spending any money on any of the highways. And in briefing notes, eastern region Infrastructure staff blames, I quote, every diminishing staff allocation and resources, unquote, and for missed steps in process for highway project. So it's important to spend money on highways so we are all safe while driving on the highway.

* (16:00)

In 2018, Canada's Parliamentary Budget Officer showed that Manitoba's per capital spending on capital has dropped on the lowest of any province west of Nova Scotia.

So, again, announcements are good. That's—we are announcing to do something. But when we look at it, not spending any money—underspending the

money, I have to say, is the problem. So, even, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Tom Brodbeck says that Tories have, I quote, cut too deep—[interjection] Yes. Cut—[interjection]—yes, and—end quote—and given their track record of underspending, I quote, raise serious questions about the credibility, unquote, of recent infrastructure announcement.

Again, announcement, announcement, announcement, right? So, other than announcements, stay tuned. Those are the two things we are hearing in this House.

And also, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and I'm going to end the speech pretty soon, but before I do that, I want to make sure I put this on the record—that it was five years ago today, and the government announced to close Seven Oaks ER and close—cut ICU beds in the Winnipeg—north Winnipeg.

And also, they closed CancerCare outpatient service during the pandemic and closed blood work 'laboratories' in my area. And there are seniors who are waiting, like, two hours, three hours, standing outside be it plus 35 or minus 35 temperatures.

So with this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm sure I'll—there's probably other people who want to say something on the record.

Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I have a few comments on this Bill 15 dealing with drivers and vehicles highway traffic act. And much of this bill deals with the composition and the actions of the review done by the medical review committee.

And this is clearly an important committee who oversees looking at whether a person can have a driver's licence or not to operate a vehicle, and this medical review committee will hear, basically, appeals, either under the section 19, which deals with after medical or optometric assessment; clause 23, after impaired driver assessment; and, under subsection 124.6(3), dealing with physically disabled person's parking permit.

So, I have some concerns about the nature of the committee as it's constituted. I raised one of these concerns in question period. That is: that if you have a committee which has only a required quorum of three individuals, that you could get two individuals working together to make decisions under the circumstances. And if these two individuals were friends or relatives, then you might get a bias in the decisions, which wouldn't necessarily be fair to the individual

who is making the appeal. I think what is critical is that good decisions are made and those decisions are made fairly.

We have discussed in the question period the possible inclusion of people, including a senior, who would be important in representing or advocating for seniors; a driving instructor who would have a lot of experience instructing drivers and knowing whether somebody is safe or not; a neurologist who might be important in assessing whether seizures were under control; someone with a disability, because there are often very critical needs for somebody with a disability to be able to drive carefully, and we need to make sure that that's being assessed fairly; and one might add somebody who is an addictions specialist, because of the nature in some circumstances of individuals who've been driving when impaired.

So how is this going to work? The minister has indicated that they will change the composition of the committee to fit the particular needs of the person who is presenting the appeal, that the flexibility which is allowed will make sure that there can be people present who will adequately reflect the need and the expertise to make a good and fair decision.

I'm not entirely clear how this flexibility will work, because normally, members of committees are appointed not just for one day on a committee, but for a three-year term on the committee. You would probably need quite a sizeable number of people on the committee so that you could choose to have the people who—with the relevant expertise for each particular appeal. That would be possible, but we're not clear, certainly, in the Legislature today if that's exactly how it's going to work or whether, in fact, there's going to be just the appointment of, say, five people for, yes, different term lengths. But clearly, five people wouldn't necessarily be enough to have the range of expertise that you might need to adjust and to evaluate individual—a variety of individual circumstances.

I know that this has been an area where people in the past have sometimes been—felt that they weren't treated very fairly, so I think it's really important that we treat people both fairly and wisely. We don't want people who are not fit to drive driving, but we don't want to take away the ability to drive from somebody who can drive adequately for their circumstance.

I remember not very long ago, for example, having an individual come to me who was used to—in fact, drives solely in a rural area. And the conditions in that rural area are very different from the conditions

in Winnipeg. And he felt that he was being unjustly and unfairly assessed by only being allowed to do the test in Winnipeg, in an urban environment which was quite different from the conditions where he would actually be driving the vehicle, which was in a rural area without a lot of traffic for the most part.

So these are things which I mention because they have been brought up to me—that the importance of treating people fairly as well as treating people wisely. And so I make these comments so the minister is aware and this will be on the record, and I look forward to presentations at the committee stage to hear from others who may have experiences that they want to include or send in.

It's certainly true that, you know, when you take somebody's licence away, that you impair their ability to work, you impair their ability to go to a grocery store, particularly if they're in a rural area. It's a little tough to go, you know, several miles in a rural area, and we have to be cognizant of that, but at the same time we have to be wise and safe in the decisions that we made. And for some people, it may not be so much a problem if they've got a friend who can pick them up, but for others who are more isolated it may be much more difficult.

* (16:10)

These are issues which I bring up because they are real issues that people are dealing with every day and we are dealing with real circumstances and real decisions that have to be made both wisely and fairly.

So, with those few words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'll sit down and await for other comments and await for the committee presentations.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): Are there any further speakers to Bill 15?

Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The question before the House is second reading of Bill 15, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment and Highway Traffic Amendment Act.

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

Bill 13—The Social Services Appeal Board Amendment Act

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The next bill to be discussed is Bill 13, The Social Services Appeal Board Amendment Act.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 13, The Social Services Appeal Board Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Commission d'appel des services sociaux, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Ms. Squires: The Social Services Appeal Board Act provides Manitobans with a fair, impartial and informal appeal process for decisions relating to various social services and programs, including employment and income assistance and Rent Assist, 55-plus benefits and Manitoban prenatal benefits, eligibility for community living disability services, residential-care licensing, adoption agency licensing and child-care licensing and child-care subsidies.

The proposed amendments will enable the board to hear and decide appeals in a more effective and timely manner, and to allow the board to focus its resources on appeals relating to critical benefits and access to services that are necessary to the well-being of vulnerable Manitobans.

One change is to allow simple appeals to be heard by a single-member panel, and to expedite simple appeals by hearing them in writing. Currently, simple appeal—simple written appeals must be heard by a full three-member panel with all the parties present at an oral hearing. Using the single-member panel and holding hearings in writing for simple appeals will make better use of the resources available to the board.

The amendments include new provisions to allow the board to dismiss an appeal in certain circumstances. At this time, the board may cancel appeals only if the appellant resolves the issue with the Department of Families before a hearing, or the appellant does not confirm their attendance or fails to show up for a hearing. Bill 13 provides the board with the additional ability to dismiss appeals that fall outside its jurisdiction or if the appeal was not filed within the applicable time limit.

The bill will also allow the board to dismiss certain types of appeals, including those that have no reasonable prospect for success for the appellant, and

appeals that are frivolous in nature such as those involving very small dollar amounts or where an appellant systemically challenges the denial of benefits to which they are clearly not entitled.

The amendments will also allow the board to dismiss appeals that are clearly vexatious in nature, such as the filing of multiple appeals with the intention of tying up the system. As with single-member panels and hearings in writing, dismissing these types of appeals will result in freeing up more of the board's resources for more substantive and complex hearings.

The board will need to develop clear policies in order to implement these amendments and make them available to the public. The proposed amendments also increase the timelines for certain procedures for the board to ensure that appellants receive their information in advance of a hearing and board hearings are held within a reasonable time.

Some of the challenges the board faced in meeting timelines became particularly evident during the pandemic, such as Canada Post delays in getting hearing information packages to appellants within legislated time frames after the board receives a notice of an appeal. Therefore, the amendments to The Social Services Appeal Board Act will extend the time between a notice of appeal to the board and the hearing to 35 days. The time between the board's written notice of a hearing to the appellant and the date of the hearing will be extended to seven days. Finally, the time between a filing for reconsideration of a board's decision and the board's response will be increased 30 days.

I am pleased to be introducing these amendments to support the social services appeal board to hear and decide on appeals in a more effective and timely manner. This ensures that vulnerable Manitobans continue to have access to fair, impartial and efficient appeals processes.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Questions

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the minister by any member in the following sequence: first question by the official opposition critic or designate; subsequent questions asked by the critics or designates from other recognized opposition parties; subsequent questions asked by each independent member; remaining questions asked by any opposition members; and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Can the minister tell us what safeguards will be put in place to ensure that legitimate appeals do not get dismissed as frivolous or vexatious?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): That's a very important question, because we need to make sure that all Manitobans know that they are entitled to a fair, efficient appeal process.

The board will develop written policies that they will have to put in writing and make them available on the website and make them available to all appellants. They will also have to apply—provide the appellants with all written notices when a decision is made to dismiss an appeal.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Well, I have a concern with having a 'simple'—single member of the board hear an appeal.

It would seem to me that it would be fairer, at least, to have more than one person, and I ask the minister why she has reduced the requirement down to a single member to hear appeals?

Ms. Squires: Again, another good question to ensure that we do maintain a comprehensive, efficient and fair appeals process.

Single-member panels will be reserved for appeals that involve questions that are fundamentally simple and straightforward in nature and that can be heard either in writing or by a single-member panel. This will be clearly communicated in writing with the policy outlined on the website and information provided to the appellant.

Appeals that involve more complex issues that require multiple perspectives or—will be—continue to be heard by full three-member panels.

And again, these policies will be available to all members of the public in writing.

Mrs. Smith: How will the board define a frivolous or vexatious appeal? Will it be the one single person, or is it going to be the three-person panel, and how are they going to define that?

Ms. Squires: So, very similar to amendments that are currently enacted in the Manitoba Human Rights Code that give the commission the power to dismiss frivolous and vexatious appeals without an investigation, the Social Services Appeal Board will outline the policy that will be in place for dismissing appeals that are vexatious in nature.

And to give the member opposite just an idea of what some of those vexatious appeals might be—and I'd like to point out that there are very few right now, there's only about six to 12 appeals per year that are deemed frivolous in nature—but these are ones that are characterized of issues involving small amounts—fewer than \$10 in nature, as well as appeals that are made with the distinct—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The honourable minister's time has expired. *[interjection]*

Independent members only get one question.

Mrs. Smith: The act extends the board's time to make a decision but doesn't extend the procedural deadline for applicants to appeal. Why not?

* (16:20)

And I did raise this concern in the briefing, but I haven't heard the minister say that it would be extended.

Ms. Squires: With regards to the appellant, the current act provides the 30-day limit to file a notice of appeal unless there is a different time limit specified by the legislation for that particular program.

We recognize that filing an appeal is relatively straightforward process for the appellant, and the 30-day timeline was sufficient for actually filing an appeal.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The honourable member for River Heights, my apologies. I should have known better, as well, that you do get more than one question.

Mr. Gerrard: I note in section 15.1 the appeal board can dismiss an appeal or part of an appeal at any time before the start of the hearing.

I'm just a little bit concerned—is that the board has pretty broad powers in terms of dismissing an appeal and it can be done right up until the time of the hearing, at the last minute.

Ms. Squires: I'm always pleased to take a question from the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), and I'm very pleased that he's being afforded more time.

Before the board would be able to dismiss an appeal, the appellant would have the opportunity to make a written submission to the board justifying or requesting the appeal to be heard, and outlying their information and reasoning for why they feel that the appeal is justified.

If the board does dismiss it, the board must provide written confirmation to the appellant and make it transparent as to which policies they're following in regards to dismissing the appeal.

Mrs. Smith: Bill 72, The Disability Support Act, was passed last year. In the briefing, we heard that over 13,000 people will ultimately no longer receive disability benefits.

Does the minister intend for the inevitable appeals that are coming to be ruled frivolous or vexatious?

Ms. Squires: Bill 72, of course, is not the matter that we're discussing here today.

But since the member put incorrect information on the record, I would like to state that we are creating a new disability income support program that will benefit the more than 22,000 Manitobans currently on EIA to help them go into a separate income strain, the disability income support act, which will streamline processes and enhance benefits for their use. And we look forward to rolling that program out this year to enhance the lives of all people with disabilities in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I—talk to the minister.

My question to the minister is this: I'm dealing at the moment with an appeal under another program, not under the—this particular program. But what has happened in that other program is that the appeal was brought forward, was dismissed, and then the individual brought back the appeal a month later in just the same way and the appeal is now being considered again.

Will—that doesn't seem very fair, and I'm just wondering, you know, what will happen in that sort of circumstance under this Social Services Appeal Board?

Ms. Squires: I thank the member for bringing up this specific case and, as always, my door is open if there is a specific case that he would like to have reviewed on behalf of his constituent. My office is always open.

I'm not familiar with this particular case, and if I heard the member correctly, I understand that it wasn't an appeal that was being made before the Social Services Appeal Board.

As I said before, all of their written decisions and all of their policies that would guide their decision-making process will be written and will be available

for the public to ensure full transparency of all decisions that are being made on behalf of Manitobans.

Mrs. Smith: In the briefing, the minister had told us that about 700 applicants come before the board. She just told us that six to 10 of them are frivolous.

Why would we take the voices away from those six to 10 people and allow one person to make that decision when, you know, we need transparency and people need to be heard, and something that maybe seem frivolous or vexatious may not be to that person.

The minister talked about, maybe it's \$6, maybe it's \$10; but for someone on EIA, that's like two meals if it's \$6, four meals—or four days of meals if it's \$10.

So, why take their voice away?

Ms. Squires: We are ensuring the preservation and the sustainability of a fair and efficient appeal process. That is what this bill does.

But the member brought up the hardships that people on EIA experience, and that is certainly why our government is undergoing transformation. That is why we dedicated \$2 million in an enhanced EIA transformation fund, and that is why programs such as the one that I announced yesterday, which would provide single parents opportunities for employment and training as well as child care—that was a \$2.6-million investment where single moms can go and have their child taken care of while they're taking life-skills courses or other training initiatives so that they can achieve a better destiny.

We know that life is hard for many people on EIA, and there's a lot of 'extenuating' circumstances, and our commitment as a department and as a government is to meet people where they're at.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Gerrard: To the minister: one of the areas where this Social Services Appeal Board would act is in relationship to appeals related to employment and income assistance. One of the concerns I have is that people who are on EIA are disproportionately people who have a learning disability in one form or another and that just providing this information in a written form, for many, is not good enough, that they need help in dealing with these sorts of issues. And I'm just ready to sort of ask the minister what will be done under those sorts of circumstances.

Ms. Squires: That is a great question, and I certainly appreciate the member bringing that to our attention.

And one of the things that we try to do, particularly on the Social Services Appeal Board, is to provide a client-centric service so that clients with a range of abilities are able to attend a hearing and to receive information that they need to know in a format that is accessible to them, and we will continue to do that.

If a appeal is deemed to be going towards a one-member panel or to be in writing, and the appellant doesn't wish to have it proceed in that manner—perhaps because if they have a disability that would prohibit them from grasping all the knowledge in a written hearing and that they would prefer a fulsome hearing—they can put that in writing, and that request would be considered by the Social Services Appeal Board.

Mrs. Smith: The minister and department indicated that the workload has increased in recent years. Rather than making procedural changes, would the minister commit to increasing these supports so that every single person that wants to come in front of this board is heard?

Ms. Squires: Our board has high standards and are committed to ensuring that all members of the public receive a fair, efficient and transparent hearing. We are committed to maintaining the three-member panels for people who have very complex appeals that need multiple perspectives, and we are ensuring that that process will be maintained and sustained for all members of the public. And that is what we believe the intent of this bill will be—to will do, is preserve that appeal process and maintain the integrity of the appeal process now and well into the future.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. To the minister: I have found in the people that I've worked with that some of the opportunities under the Employment and Income Assistance Program are not communicated as widely or as well as they might be. I was—found out recently that somebody who was on EIA was completely unaware that they could earn \$100 a month by volunteering. And they were very pleased to learn this, but for some reason, this had never been adequately communicated to them. And it—the government for maintaining that volunteer benefit for those who couldn't volunteer during the COVID pandemic—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The honourable member's time has expired.

Ms. Squires: I'd be more than happy to speak at broad length with the member and his constituents on the transformation that we're making on—in EIA, and I completely agree with the member opposite that client

services needs to be enhanced and improved, and that is why our government has taken multiple steps in the past few years. Particularly throughout the pandemic, we learned that it's very beneficial to be putting some more services available online as well as putting EIA workers in community.

Those are some of the things that we did during the pandemic that found to be of tremendous benefit. It's getting the information to the people who need it the most where they're at instead of making them, perhaps, go to a government office, and just making things easier and more simple for them.

* (16:30)

So that is some work that we've started and we want to build upon it.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The minister's time has expired.

Mrs. Smith: I brought forward, you know, some casework, Bertrand Murdoch, who was given an ultimatum by this government: either take CPP because you turned 60—they actually filled out the paperwork for him and told him he needed to come down to the office to fill that paperwork out and if he didn't, he was going to be cut off.

His benefits have still not been reinstated. Would that case be deemed as frivolous or vexatious? And why hasn't his benefits been reinstated?

Ms. Squires: Of course, it's always challenging to discuss casework on the floor of the Legislature. Those are specific and oftentimes private matters that are best discussed in my office and within my department, and, of course, I'm more than pleased to respond to the member to her query on behalf of her constituent.

And—what I can say is that we are enhancing the service, the client service, that our EIA department and the Department of Families is providing to all Manitobans so that we can ensure that they are getting the access to information that they require and getting the most benefit—beneficial information to them when they need it the most.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): Time for questions has expired.

Debate

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): The floor is now open for debate.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): This bill amends The Social Services Appeal Board Act. The

following changes are made to the procedures before the board: an appeal may be heard by a single member of the board; an appeal may be heard in writing or by telephone or other electronic means; the board may dismiss an appeal in certain circumstances, including when the appeal is trivial, not made in good faith or is vexatious; certain procedure deadlines are extended.

The purpose of the Social Services Appeal Board, Deputy Speaker, is to hear Manitobans, to give them a fair, impartial and informal appeal process of decisions relating to a variety of social services and programs.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

I brought one case to the floor, you know, several times, Bertrand Murdoch. He is not the only one. There are several other, you know, people who have recently been cut off of disability EIA because of the Stadler case. This government knows that if they're on EIA disability, they can't force them to take CPP. So many Manitobans are being cut off disability at 60 so that they can be forced to take CPP. They're given an ultimatum. If they don't take it, then they're cut off of their EIA benefits. There's several Manitobans.

This, you know, this Bill 13 would probably deem that as frivolous. They would probably deem that as, well, they're giving them the—they're giving them a choice: either they sign it and lose their benefits or sign it and keep your benefits. Well, to most Manitobans, when they turn 65 they're going to get less money. They're not going to have the same benefits as they do when they're on EIA because they can access medical. When you turn 65 you don't have access to medical; you can't get a prescription and go to the pharmacy and receive it. You now have to start paying for it.

So this government is putting Manitobans further into poverty. They talk about, you know, they're making life more affordable. Well, they've increased hydro by 30 per cent. So many, you know, Manitobans that are living in social housing—I've had so many calls for people who can't find housing, that are homeless, that are living in shelters. And what's the, you know, members opposite solution to that? Well, let's open some more emergency beds. That's their solution. That's not putting people in permanent homes.

And when Bill 13, you know, if it passes, someone can't go to an appeal board because they would probably deem that as frivolous. I just recently had someone call me that called EIA because they lost

their job and they couldn't qualify for EI because they had some mental health issues. They went to EIA. EIA basically have no emergency benefits. This person was going to be evicted, and what did EIA say to them? Well, you have to apply at the first of the month. Well, this person—oh, and they also gave them a list of shelters. So when this person called me, they were in tears. They were, like, you know, I'm 19 years old. I don't want to go live in a shelter. I don't know, you know, the first thing about navigating any of these systems.

This bill is going to make it harder for those folks to appeal those decisions, to go in front of this board and have their appeal—or have their case heard. And even if they do get in front of these boards, this might be heard by one person. and this person might deem this from one perspective that this is not a case that, you know, warrants me even listening to it and just dismisses it. Or they might go in front of this board and one person might hear it and deem it that, you know, it's not appealable, that they have to accept whatever decision was made. And that's not fair.

We've heard that there's only 700 cases that came before the appeal board last year. That's less than three cases a day that come before that appeal board, and I'm sure the appeal board has a certain amount of time that they allow for each case to be heard. And if you allot, let's say an hour, that's only three hours a day and maybe you have a half hour, you know, to discuss, make a decision. So, still, that's only four and a half hours a day. That's not giving, you know, Manitobans the voice that they need.

Manitobans should have an opportunity to go and have their cases heard. The minister told us that there's only six to 10 cases that come before the appeal board that are deemed frivolous or vexatious.

You know, when I think about that, I think about those voices not being heard and this appeal board being able to say, well, you know what? Their voices don't matter. That \$6 to \$10 is, you know, irrelevant. You know, we have a Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) that forgets to file \$31 million in real estate.

Well, I have constituents that, you know, are living on less than \$1 a day. They're living in shelters, that are living in encampments, that can't get, you know, a place to have a shower and are trying to access EIA and this bill, basically, is going to take their voice away and this minister thinks that that's okay? To silence Manitobans and to simply dismiss it as, well, it's only \$6 to \$10, you know, it's irrelevant.

But to them it may be irrelevant, maybe to that one person they might decide that that's irrelevant and I'm not even going to hear that case so I'm just going to dismiss it because that's a little amount of money compared to them. But to that person that's a lot of money.

And during, you know, the pandemic, many people came to me. Their EIA benefits were clawed back from this government because they took EI—they took CERB, what brought them up, actually, to a living income. Twenty-four thousand dollars, that's all they were making with CERB plus what they were getting from EIA—not even that, I should say, not even \$24,000. So still living under the poverty line. And what did this government do? They clawed back benefits from those folks.

So if one of those folks wanted to go in front of this appeal board and wanted to appeal because they were getting \$6 deducted a month from their benefits, they might see that as frivolous. But to that person—like I said, \$6 is two days of meals for that person. They receive \$87 a month to live on. Can you imagine? That's not living in dignity. You know, \$587 they receive for housing.

This government is—has been selling off social housing. There's social housing that is boarded up. Someone that gets kicked out of social housing that is on EIA might want to go in front of that appeal board. But because, you know, something happened, maybe somebody—and we've heard of this, somebody came into their home and took over their house. We've heard of gangs coming in and doing that to families. A lot of social housing has become unsafe because this government has chosen to take out the security guards that used to be in those places to ensure that there was safety.

They might want to go in front of that appeal board and appeal that decision. But, again, you know, one person might be able to decide, well, you know, you had someone that was, let's say, drinking in your apartment and you were making a lot of noise or someone was selling drugs out of your apartment—and it wasn't even you. It was somebody else who came in and took over your apartment and you had no control over that—and you get evicted.

* (16:40)

Or you're a single parent and, all of a sudden, your children are apprehended for some reason and you find yourself, you know, in a three-bedroom and now the government says, well, we need that three-

bedroom because you no longer have your children—and they evict them.

Are they going to be able to go in front of that appeal board? I think under Bill 13, they're probably not going to be able to. That's probably going to be deemed as frivolous because they've already, you know, made their case that this has happened and you've been evicted, and they'll uphold the decision—and then someone will be homeless.

Is that fair? That's not fair. That person should be able to go in front of a three-person panel, have three people decide so that one person isn't the only one deciding. Or not even getting their cases heard at all.

I've had several of my constituents—I have two large social-housing buildings in my constituency. Both are riddled with cockroaches, bed bugs. They have water damage. They've called, you know, social housing and government so many times, and the housing—you know, to get some services, to get them fixed, you know, to get someone to come in and fumigate.

They come in and fumigate every month. Sometimes people are disabled, I've had this as well. They can't continue to keep pushing their furniture into the middle of their apartment. And if they don't do that, they get a warning and then they get evicted.

Well, if I have mobility issues and I can't move a couch that's 100 pounds, or even 50 pounds, then what happens? I have to accept that decision because the government's made that—the housing authority has said that, you know, because of your mobility or because you can't move that.

Bill 13 will take the voice of that person away.

You know, there's so many Manitobans that come before this appeal board. And it's—like I said, it's not a lot, but this government has told us in the briefing that it has increased. If it's increased, why aren't we increasing the amount of staff? Why aren't we putting back some of the cuts that this government has instilled that have actually forced Manitobans to come in front of this appeal board?

So I—when I'm talking about, you know, people that are on EIA, I often hear that if they don't make an appointment, they miss a phone call—and some of them live in a shelter so they don't always have access. This is putting a barrier in front of them.

And Bill 13 might say to that person that, you know what, because you're homeless and you don't have access to a phone, or you don't have access to

electronics, that you don't matter, that your voice doesn't matter, that we're not even going to hear your appeal. And that's not okay.

You know, we're a government that, you know, is—that was elected by the people, that was elected to do the right thing for Manitobans. And this bill is not doing the right thing for Manitobans. This bill is all about, you know, putting money before people. We should be investing in people.

I've had, you know, folks from my constituency—lots of poverty in my constituency—folks that want to go back to school, that have tried going back to Adult Learning Centres, have been told that they can't, that they have to go to OFE.

And when they go to OFE, they're, you know, given some computer skills, they're—you know, a resume's built for them, they're expected to search for their own job when they don't have, you know, very little skills. And they might want to go in front of this appeal board and say, like, I need to go and upgrade. I need to go back to school. I need to learn how to write.

And I know the member from—*[interjection]*—the—no, River Heights—the member from River Heights brought up that some people, you know, are illiterate. They can't read. And this board is going to send them a decision in paper—like, where do they get the supports that they need to actually understand what is being sent to them, or even understand the changes that this minister is proposing in these bills.

Because a lot of people who, you know, are on EIA are trying to access and get themselves out of poverty, and this government continues to put barriers in place. So, if they want to go back to get upgraded, they won't allow them to.

That's not okay, because the ultimate goal is to get people out of poverty and we know that education is the way to get people out of poverty and we should be supporting them. And when someone is told no, they should be able to go in front of this appeal board. But again, you know, this government might say, well, that's not our policy and, you know, it's written in black and white, we're not even going to hear your case; this is a program that you can access.

And often, you know, the government supports short-term programs that just get you, you know, entry-level jobs. And often people—we call it the welfare wall. They go, you know, right back into the system because they get into that job and they're not supported; they're not given the proper skills to be able

to do that job, and then what happens? It creates this cycle for families.

So I might be on EIA, then my children see that I'm on EIA, so then they become EIA recipients. We need to stop that. And the only way to stop that is to put programs and services and, you know, provide places for people to have voice, not take voice away. And that's what this government continues to, you know, do to Manitobans. They want to silence.

And then when we ask the minister about what is a definition of frivolous or vexatious, the minister couldn't give examples. Like, I would like to know concrete things that—how it's going to be defined, because for me and for many Manitobans, the definition that they think, you know, is frivolous or vexatious might not be to the average Manitoban, you know, especially someone who's struggling. And we know that a lot of people who were middle class, there's no middle class anymore. Either you're up here or you're down here. So many people are struggling and trying to access, again, you know, housing.

Daycare is another one. You know, many—this government announced money for daycares, and, you know, the money hasn't even been spent, and people tried to access daycare. They've doubled the amount that you have to pay daily for daycare. So if I'm a single person, I have one child, and I'm making minimum wage, I might make \$900–\$960 but then, deductions. I might take home, let's say, \$800. My daycare fees are over \$200. And then I've got to pay rent, and then I've got to feed my kid, and then I've got to get to work and back. Like, I might as well not work. I might as well be on EIA. And that's the kind of system that this government is proposing.

So Bill 13 would limit voice. So if someone went in front of that appeal board and said, well, I've been declined subsidy, and they're only making \$960, someone might say, well, they need to figure it out. Maybe they just shouldn't work. You know, or they should find a better job.

Well, it's not that easy. Many of us know that: that good jobs are hard to find, and if you don't have the skills—even a high school diploma doesn't get you a job these days; maybe at McDonald's. But even a—if you have a degree, even your degree sometimes doesn't get you a job. And if you do get a job, you know, it's not a really high-paying job. And if you have more than one child, and you're, you know, declined subsidy, this bill might say that, well, you know, the government's spoken, or the subsidy office

has said that you're not eligible, and this is frivolous, so we're going to, you know, not listen to it.

I want to talk about, you know, some of the changes that this government has made that have been really regressive. You know, they've been in government since 2016, and they've increased amounts of rent that people pay in social housing. They've decreased the amount that people are getting on Rent Assist. So under our NDP government, we had it at 25 per cent of your income. This government came in; they increased it to 27 per cent. They've now increased it to 30 per cent. And Manitobans are wondering: when is this government going to stop increasing and making life less affordable in this province?

Since they've been in government, 30 per cent increase in hydro. And, you know, it's—people are struggling. And, again, you know, they might go in front of this appeal board, and Bill 13 will take away their voice in being able to access, you know, Manitoba Housing, social services, EIA, disability services. And I talked about—and I'm going to keep talking about Bertrand McKay [*phonetic*]-Murdoch in this House. And there's many Bertrand Murdochs in this House.

And this minister can say that, you know, the member is welcome to come into my office and talk to me. Well, we've been writing letters since December. You know, it's now April. The minister knows about this case, and still it's—hasn't been resolved.

* (16:50)

And now the—Bertrand has been kicked off of EIA for three months and he's going to be kicked out of his residence. He's going to be homeless. And he has disabilities. This is a man who was in residential school, that has PTSD. He has diabetes, he has mobility issues. He had a letter from his doctor that said that he is disabled, that he cannot work.

But under these new definitions that this government passed under Bill 72, it makes clear definition that you can—you have to be totally disabled to qualify for disability. And he can't go in front of this board because now this government has said that under these new provisions you do not qualify for disability; therefore, you have to take regular benefits and you have to be forced to take CPP. And he can't even go and appeal that.

And that's, you know, the member, the minister can ignore that all she wants, but that's one case and

there's so many others. And I said, 13,000 people have been kicked off of disability. There's going to be a lot of appeals that are coming to this board. And Bill 13 will limit those voices because they might say, well, you know, the parameters around disability have now been changed, the policy's different and you don't qualify, even though you have a letter from your doctor that says clearly that you don't—that you can't work, that you have a disability that prohibits you from working. But, you know, this minister seems to think that we need less people hearing these appeals.

So I'm going to give time for other people to get up and speak. But I just want to say lastly that, you know, this minister would lead us to believe that these are just minor changes. They're not minor changes. They're minor—they're changes that are going to impact Manitobans' voice. It's wrong. It's regressive. And this minister should be ashamed for bringing that forward, and we will not be supporting it.

Miigwech.

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): I'm grateful for the opportunity to address this House again on this bill now, on Bill 13. And before I get into remarks about the bill, I just—I also want to just highlight how pleased I am with the minister and the work that she's done. I've seen her in the last few days and the commentary that she's making and the fact that she herself has gone through a lot of these systems, that she's experienced this, you know, having to navigate this as a single mom and go through EIA and need the kind of assistance that now she's administering.

I think it's truly inspirational. I think it's a wonderful testament to what Manitoba can do to take people who, you know, of their—of themselves might not think they have a lot and then to give them the opportunity and a pathway that allows them to achieve the kind of success that we've seen from this minister is just amazing. And I'm so very pleased with it and with her and with this bill.

And I think this bill is a good bill. I would disagree with the assertions that the members opposite have started to make, at least. I think what you're—what we're looking for here is to ensure that when we have these programs that they're achieving their intended effect and that they're not being abused, they're not being manipulated, but that they're getting help to the people who need the help and that when there is matters of dispute and matters of appeal that there's a process for people to follow. And that's clear in this bill that that process is there. What we're doing

in this bill is we're going to make that process a little bit more efficient.

And I also just want to express appreciation, I think, for the people—the—I believe there's 15 appointed members who serve on the board. I really appreciate what they do. I think, you know, when we're—when we serve here in this House, we sometimes think that we're government, but the reality is that government is a whole lot more than just what's happening in this Chamber or even what's happening in this legislative precinct and the building here and the ministers' offices. It's what happens with these boards. It's what happens with our agencies and commissions. It's what happens in our civil service and the work that they do.

And, just very grateful for the work that is being done, and grateful for the opportunity that this bill provides for making sure that that work is done a little bit more efficiently, a little bit more fairly and in a way that also values the participation of the members of the board and the people who are on that board.

I think that's important to remember, that those folks, too, they want to feel valued, and they also want to feel like they're contributing. And I can imagine if they're spending 'inordinance' amount of time on vexatious or frivolous complaints, they won't feel very valued there, right?

And I know the member opposite was wondering, you know, what a definition of vexatious and frivolous is. Some of my colleagues here were joking, you know, about some of the points of privilege brought forward by the members opposite, some of them might fit that bill.

But, in all seriousness, I think it's evident to the members of the board. They know what issues are before them, and I believe that they're going to be very well served by this legislation.

So, members opposite seem to want to continue to debate. They certainly ended their words earlier than they needed to, but if they want to get back up, I suppose they could perhaps ask for leave to continue to speak to the bill. But, in the meantime, I'm happy to be the one with the floor and the one who's able to speak to this bill.

Now, the fundamental principle of this bill is that appeals don't necessarily need to be heard by a three-member panel. And allowing the board to hear simple appeals just with a single member of the board—these are people who have gained experience, too, by working on that board for some time—that they'll be

able to make those decisions, they'll be able to do those appeals in writing as well.

All these things are going to make—it's going to expedite the work of the board. It's going to expedite the hearing process. It's going to free up the board resources to hear the more 'substantive' and complex appeals, the ones that really do need to be adjudicated by a three-member panel.

That's what this bill accomplishes, or will accomplish once we can get it passed. And I hope that we can, you know, change the minds of the members opposite, that they'll, indeed, support this bill and that we'll be able to move forward with it.

And just wrap up once again with my thanks and my appreciation for the minister for bringing this bill forward and for what she brings to the role. It's truly inspiring.

Thank you.

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): I'm really happy to put some words on the record in regard to this bill.

It's really important that we discuss the issues here. There are many Manitobans that are facing issues when it comes to EIA and this appeals board. And, you know, the changes that are outlined in this bill to limit the number of people on the appeal board from three down to one will clearly limit the opinions and the verdict that might come out, and the decisions by this appeal board.

And I think the strategy of making changes to this board go from, let's actually give people an honest shake when it comes to listening to and hearing their

appeal, to, let's blame the victim for bringing forward frivolous things and vexatious things to this appeal board. That is too much of a burden on the appeal board.

Well, let's remember that these are people, often on EIA; people who have had a hard time; people who are looking at the government to get a little bit of service, have had an issue, and are now trying to appeal that. And we're going to put it back on them and say that they're the problem, and say that they're the ones who are really damaging the system and let's limit their ability to appeal?

No. This is the wrong way. This is the wrong approach.

We should not be victim-blaming the people who are coming to the appeal board. We should be taking this opportunity to hear them out, to expand the number of people on the appeal board so we can hear them and give them their honest due.

If it's too much for the appeal board to hear these people in a timely fashion, then give them more time and put more people on the appeal board to hear them out, to understand their claims, to find the way that our system should work better to help them out. And therefore, the appeal board can be an advocacy group to make our system better.

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

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 7, 2022

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