

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

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The Honourable Myrna Driedger
Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
CURRY, Nic	Kildonan	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FLETCHER, Steven, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Clifford	Emerson	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	St. James	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLASSEN, Judy	Kewatinook	Lib.
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Burrows	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MAYER, Colleen	St. Vital	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew, Hon.	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REYES, Jon	St. Norbert	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	Ind.
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	St. Paul	PC
SELINGER, Greg	St. Boniface	NDP
SMITH, Andrew	Southdale	PC
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WHARTON, Jeff	Gimli	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian, Hon.	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
YAKIMOSKI, Blair	Transcona	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Point Douglas	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 6, 2017

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

House Business

Mr. Jim Maloway (Official Opposition House Leader): On House business, in accordance with rule 2.9, I'm tabling a list of the remaining bills that I am designating for completion in the fall sitting.

The remaining bills are: Bill 23, The Fisheries Amendment Act; Bill 24, The Red Tape Reduction and Government Efficiency Act, 2017; and Bill 27, The Elections Amendment Act.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with rule 2(9), the Official Opposition House Leader has tabled a list of the remaining bills being designated for completion in the fall sittings.

The remaining bills are: Bill 23, The Fisheries Amendment Act; Bill 24, The Red Tape Reduction and Government Efficiency Act, 2017; and Bill 27, The Elections Amendment Act.

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Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills?

COMMITTEE REPORTS

**Standing Committee on Social
and Economic Development**

Third Report

Mr. Dennis Smook (Chairperson): I wish to present the Third Report of the Standing Committee on—and—on Social and Economic Development.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT presents the following as its Third Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on April 5, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- *Bill (No. 10) – The Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur le Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology*
- *Bill (No. 12) – The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la pension de retraite des enseignants*

Committee Membership

- *Ms. Fontaine*
- *Mr. Isleifson*
- *Mr. Johnston (St. James)*
- *Mr. Kinew*
- *Ms. Klassen*
- *Ms. Lathlin*
- *Mr. Michaleski*
- *Hon. Mr. Schuler*
- *Mr. Smook (Chairperson)*
- *Hon. Mr. Wishart*
- *Mr. Wowchuk*

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

Bills Considered and Reported

- *Bill (No. 10) – The Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur le Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- *Bill (No. 12) – The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la pension de retraite des enseignants*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

Mr. Smook: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Standing Committee on Justice

First Report

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Chairperson): I wish to present the First Report of Standing Committee on Justice.

Clerk: Your Standing Committee on Justice presents—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on JUSTICE presents the following as its First Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on April 5, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. in Room 254 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 15)** – *The Department of Justice Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur le ministère de la Justice*
- **Bill (No. 17)** – *The Court Security Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la sécurité dans les tribunaux*

Committee Membership

- *Mr. Allum*
- *Mr. Bindle*
- *Hon. Mr. Cullen*
- *Mr. Curry*
- *Ms. Lamoureux*
- *Mr. Marcelino*
- *Mr. Pivniuk*
- *Mr. Reyes*
- *Hon. Mrs. Stefanson*
- *Mr. Swan*
- *Mr. Wharton*

Your Committee elected Mr. Pivniuk as the Chairperson.

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

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 15)** – *The Department of Justice Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur le ministère de la Justice*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 17)** – *The Court Security Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la sécurité dans les tribunaux*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

Mr. Pivniuk: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Thompson (Mr. Bindle), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Madam Speaker: I would like to draw the attention—oh, pardon me. That's the wrong one. Somebody moved my papers. I would like to indicate that, in accordance with—sorry.

I am pleased to table the report of the Auditor General on Management of MRI Services, dated April, 2017, in accordance with section 28(1) of The Auditor General Act.

Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Law Students Research-a-Thon for Refugees

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Madam Speaker, the plight of refugees making their way to Manitoba has touched the hearts of many. I am proud that students at Manitoba's law school decided to do something about it.

On February 4th, 50 law students from the University of Manitoba's Robson Hall law school participated in a 12-hour nationwide research-a-thon to support the fair treatment of refugees in Canada.

This event responded to the travel ban, imposed in the United States earlier this year, which unfairly targeted predominantly Muslim nations and resulted in many seeking a brighter future in Canada.

This group of bright and dedicated students joined hundreds of other law students across the country in an effort to stand up for people who are easily victimized and require protection from injustice. The students used their research skills, knowledge and legal education to assist the Canadian Council for Refugees to challenge the Canada-US Safe Third Country Agreement.

This response also mobilized more than 200 law professors to call on the federal government to suspend the agreement.

It's clear there's sound legal research and advice to back up these efforts. Our NDP caucus understands this, which is why we call for the suspension of the safe thirty-Safe Third Country Agreement with the US.

Canada has a long history of welcoming refugees and immigrants with a national identity built on the values of diversity, acceptance and tolerance. I'm proud that Manitoba's law students have carried on this tradition donating their time, their skills and their heart's energy.

Lawyers speak up and speak out for those unable to speak for themselves.

I want to honour these Robson Hall law students for their participation in this important event and for their dedication to making Manitoba an open and welcoming place for newcomers.

Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to include the names of the students who participated be included in the permanent legislative record of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to include the names in the—in Hansard? [*Agreed*]

Yassir Alnaji, Segen Andemariam, Jasmine Bissoon, Jodi Berry, Faye Brandson, Keith Chadwick, Krista Clendenning, Natalie Copps, Renato De Lorenzo, Allie Derwin, Stacey Dunn, Kajia Eidse-Rempel, Elsa Falkenberg, Brittney Fehr, Samantha Gergely, Jill Giesbrecht, Brittany Goodman, Darren Grunau, Michelle Harms, Rebecca Heller, Bobbi-Jo Henniger, Amanda Heslop, Ryan Hira, Amal Jabar, Ryan Kaita, Sreekumar Kodiyath, Alex Krush, Rebecca Kunzman, Carter Liebrecht, Danielle Magnifico, Melissa Mason, Basim Nehal, Riley Nolan, Danielle Otto, Maddie Pearlman, Amelia Peterson, Christian Pierce, Kobra Rahimi, Sharu Ratnajoathy, Tanin Refahi, Bryn Reiger, Cesar Jayson Rona, Arsh Sandhu, Justine Smith, Sam Thompson, Victoria Weir, Ben Wickstrom, Melanie Wire, Brendon Yarish, Oliver Zaman.

Martin Bergen

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sustainable Development): I'm honoured to rise in the House today to recognize the life of Martin Bergen, a lifelong philanthropist, entrepreneur, father and husband.

On March 17, 2017, our North Kildonan community lost a very special person. While Martin was unassuming in stature, he had a very large

and generous heart. Never forgetting his humble beginnings, he devoted much of his life to helping others, especially in his River East community, a place he so loved.

Following years as a prisoner of war during the Second World War, Martin realized his dream and joined his family in Winnipeg on Thanksgiving Day, 1953. Two years later, Martin met and married the woman of his dreams, Ruth Spletzer. They soon welcomed their only child, Miriam, who has now followed in her father's footsteps and continues to grow Edison Properties.

A man of humble beginnings, Martin knew anything could be accomplished through hard work, perseverance and stick-to-it-iveness. Martin dreamed big. I would say in technicolour, as evidenced by his most recognized accomplishment, Fort Garry Place. Designed after the European architecture Martin loved and known for its unique old-world charm, it includes a glass elevator and a two-level revolving rooftop restaurant that spins in two directions, Madam Speaker.

Martin had a get-it-done attitude, and his projects were often near completion before the permits had even been approved. He detested red tape and anything that halted progress.

Martin's proudest accomplishments were those that garnered the least attention. For example, when told of an organization struggling financially to procure a space for its rehabilitation centre, Martin immediately mobilized his workforce, and in no time, The Movement Centre had a new home. And thanks to Martin's generosity, the link connecting Bethania personal-care home to Concordia was constructed entirely at Martin's expense.

Madam Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join me in remembering Martin Bergen, a selfless and humble man who loved his community, his country and his family.

Thank you.

Rogers Hometown Hockey

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I rise today to bring this House a great story from my constituency.

On March 25th and 26th, the community of Portage la Prairie hosted Rogers Hometown Hockey, a family-friendly event that showcased our community's hockey spirit.

Celebrity Ron MacLean, well-known host of Coach's Corner on CBC's Hockey Night in Canada, and entertainer, Tara Slone, came to our community to host the event. NHL hockey alumni Laurie Boschman and Arron Asham were on location to sign autographs and meet with fans. Asham played his minor hockey in Portage la Prairie and credits many of his local coaches for their successful—for his successful NHL hockey career.

3 Canada flying—forces flying training school at Southport invited Ms. Slone to learn how to fly a helicopter with Captain Kim Wilton. She got a bird's-eye view of our spirited community as she flew over the city and Rogers Hometown Hockey event site.

The festival also saw a variety of performers perform on the stage, including great opportunity for the crowd to experience local talent. Fans also took Recreational Opportunities for—the-Kids' Battle of the Badges hockey game between the Portage fire department and the RCMP. Event-goers were also able to watch the Portage Terriers play the Steinbach Pistons in an MJHL playoff game at Stride Place where Ron MacLean, Tara Slone and Arron Asham were part of the ceremonial puck drop

The celebration wrapped up with the Rogers Hometown Hockey game and a broadcast of the Winnipeg Jets versus Vancouver Canucks live from the Stride Place parking lot. Portage was recognized on national stage with the broadcast of the NHL game. Throughout the evening, Mr. MacLean would comment on the Terriers game amongst the NHL hockey broadcast and highlighted the city even further.

* (13:40)

The organizing committee, led by David Sattler and the Portage Regional Recreation Authority and events team did an excellent job to make sure that the event was successful, placing a national spotlight on Portage la Prairie and surrounding region.

Join me in congratulating them for organizing this very successful event.

Health Minister's Meeting with Constituents

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): This coming Monday, the Minister of Health has graciously accepted my letter of invitation to meet with a few of my constituents. In hopes of having a productive meeting, we wanted to provide the minister with a

few more details so he would be able to come fully prepared.

Madam Speaker, it is becoming more apparent every day that there needs to be investments in health care.

Allow me to share a worrisome example. Imagine being a 60-year-old woman discharged from the ER at 2 o'clock in the morning. Because of your fixed income, it is uncertain whether or not you will be able to get the medications that you require to fill a prescription. You then take a taxi home, where you live alone, and your family was not notified.

Madam Speaker, this is happening and it's frightening, and what's even more frightening is that there's nothing being done to address it. When we look at the changes to health care, we need to look at ways in which we can improve our quality service.

My constituents have a great idea. They reference a discharge team, but whether it's a team or an improved protocol, it would ensure that patients are well enough and ready to be discharged. For example, a senior on fixed income should not be discharged unless they have the medications that are needed and there has been some attempt to contact a family or a friend, if the patient requests it. It would also ensure that caregivers, trained or not, are comfortable and confident moving forward.

In closing, I want the minister to know how much it means to my constituents and to myself that he will be coming down to my local McDonald's, and I will happily buy him a Big Mac.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Management of Provincial Finances

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): A boy I know recently went to Canadian Tire with his dad to pick up supplies for some important home repairs. As they wound their way through the store, they passed the bicycle section.

Now, this boy's been scrimping and saving to buy himself a new bike. The bike he has now wasn't working as well as it could, and it just wasn't quite the right size for his growing body. He'd managed to save up nearly 20 per cent of the cost of a new bike and was hoping his parents would be able to cover the difference.

So the boy turned to his father and asked: Dad, can we buy my new bike today?

Now, in years past the dad would have said, oh, yes, absolutely—even if the family couldn't really afford it, or worse, he'd promised his son the bike, but then break his word. That undisciplined approach to family finances had put the family in tough financial times. They'd missed a few hydro bill payments and, as a result, their credit rating suffered and their mortgage rate went up. Increased borrowing costs were eating away at the family budget.

But about a year ago, things changed. The family intervened. They needed the dad to change his ways and to get the family's finances back on track, to exercise restraint and only make promises he could keep.

The dad looked at his son and he knew that if they bought the bike today they wouldn't have enough money for the much-needed home repairs, or worse, for their food and hydro bills. So, with a heavy heart, he gave his answer: I'm sorry son, but we just can't afford it today.

The boy was understandably disappointed, but he didn't have a temper tantrum because he, too, had helped with the intervention a year ago. He was proud that his dad was doing the right thing now, even though it might cause disappointment in the short term.

And you know what? The same principles that guided this father in keeping his promises and managing his family finances well guide our government too, because keeping our promises and making difficult but necessary decisions shows real respect, not just for your family, but for all the people in Manitoba.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery, where we have with us today students from the Westgrove adult literary centre, accompanied by Norman Koe, Paul Brault and Larry Hamilton, and this centre is located in my constituency of Charleswood.

And on behalf of all honourable members here, we'd like to welcome you here to our Manitoba Legislature.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Health Infrastructure Spending Concern for Government Plan

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): We know many, many Manitobans are overwhelmingly opposed to the government's plan for cutting health infrastructure spending. We also know that the WRHA is due to release its plan for cuts tomorrow. One Winnipeg doctor and professor at the faculty of medicine described the government's plan as going back to the, quote, bad old days of cut, cut, cut until everyone gets frustrated and services get affected. Unquote.

Manitobans are hearing that their services will be reduced and that hospitals will be closed.

The government likes to brand their government with the slogan: Better Together. But will the Premier now admit that it should be: You're on your own?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, we have an exciting plan for investing in infrastructure the way Manitobans invest their own money. And they invest with a view not just to today and not just to conspicuous consumption, or conspicuous construction in the case of the previous government, but rather with a view to the long-term sustainability of their home and their small business, if that is the case, and that is what we've committed to doing.

We've committed to doing a consistent and regular investment with the maximum return on investment to Manitobans, not as the previous government did, year after year after year, overpromising and then underdelivering, Madam Speaker. They overspent in every single department without effect, but the one department of government that the previous NDP government did scrimp in, year after year after year, was Infrastructure.

We won't do that, Madam Speaker, because we understand it's the foundation of our future, and we're building it with better infrastructure investments.

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

MRI Services in Dauphin Future of Capital Project

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): During the election, the Premier expressed his concern about the Dauphin MRI. He went so far as to write a letter to the mayor of Dauphin expressing his concern. Now we see his government has delayed delivering the MRI and might decide to cancel it altogether, despite the facility being built already and the MRI purchased. We know that the Premier has already begun to break his promise to Manitobans about protecting health care in Manitoba.

Will he at least commit to the people of Dauphin and its surrounding region that he will follow through on his commitments and open the MRI later this month as it was previously intended to do?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, you know, we inherited a mighty big mess from the previous government; that was sure. And we knew a lot about it before we got into government, and we were prepared for it, we thought. But it was the things we inherited from the previous government we didn't know about and weren't told about that actually has caused us a lot of additional concern.

One of those things, Madam Speaker, was a thing called—what was it called?

An Honourable Member: FleetNet.

Mr. Pallister: FleetNet—FleetNet, which is our emergency communication system. That's what our nurses and ambulance attendants and firefighters and workers during emergencies use to stay in touch with each other, to protect each other for—maximize their ability to protect Manitobans.

Now, last year, the—to keep the system going, Madam Speaker, they had to buy parts for that system on eBay. The previous government was told eight years ago that it needed to be replaced but they did nothing about it, and we inherited a half a billion-dollar bill as a result. And so, sadly, some of the other projects we do want to do have been set aside for a time so that we can address the clean—and clean up the mess we were left by the previous administration in terms of FleetNet and many other things.

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

Ms. Marcelino: It's becoming clear that the Premier's campaign promises were made out of political expediency.

If this government's real plan for health care in Manitoba had been on the table in the last election, Manitobans would have had a real opportunity to decide if what the Premier was planning was the best for their families.

* (13:50)

Will the Premier admit to the people of Dauphin and the people all across this province that they shouldn't take him for his word?

Mr. Pallister: Well, Madam Speaker, I need no lessons from the members opposite in terms of promise breaking; they certainly excelled at that in their time in government and Manitobans are aware of that.

We ran and asked Manitobans for permission to try to fix the finances of our province after a decade of debt and to repair our services after a decade of decay and, Madam Speaker, that is what we are focused on doing. But there is nothing but shame in ignoring the emergency communications network that protects Manitobans, and protects the people at the front line—at the front line—who are protecting us, for eight years after you knew that you should have repaired it, and you did nothing about it. That's a half-a-billion-dollar bill we can't ignore.

This government will stand up for our front-line workers where the previous government misled them and all Manitobans with their over-promised and underdelivery strategy.

Health-Care Spending Services and Capital Projects

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): The Premier has said that he's ready to listen to families. Well, I hope he's heard the message loud and clear. Over 60 per cent of Manitobans disapprove of their decision to kill \$1 billion worth of health-care projects. We've heard about these projects before. I've been happy to bring them to the House, but it's worth repeating: a personal-care home in Lac du Bonnet, two personal-care homes in Winnipeg, St. Boniface QuickCare Clinic, primary clinic in The Pas, the list goes on and on, even CancerCare Manitoba, Madam Speaker.

The Premier says he won't shy away from this conversation, but it's been pretty one sided so far. Manitobans reject this.

Will he listen to Manitobans and stop the devastating cuts to health immediately?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, I think one of those most devastating things that Manitobans endured from the previous NDP government were they were made promises that they were never going to keep, made promises by the NDP to say we're going to do a bunch of things, but never put any money aside for it. In fact, when I came in to the office as the Health Minister, I asked where is all this money that the NDP was going to be using to—all these promises they made. And I was told, well, there was never any money put away—aside at all. In fact, we're already at our capital cap. We're at our limit for money that we can borrow for health-care projects. They had no explanation.

I wonder if the member can give an explanation, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Yesterday, I asked the minister directly which QuickCare clinics or which ACCESS centres that he's planning to cut. He wouldn't answer me, and after question period both him and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) dodged the media so they wouldn't have to answer the questions there either.

This minister has a responsibility to tell Manitoba families what the future of their health care will be, but instead he's ducking media and ignoring questions. He's already closed down the St. Boniface QuickCare Clinic out of nowhere.

Will he just come clean and tell Manitobans which primary health service he's going to cut next?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, I'm in the media, I think, almost every day. I certainly wouldn't consider it anything but being accessible.

But I did have the opportunity to hear the member opposite give his media scrum yesterday. He indicated—he said, well, the Peachey report, for instance, talks about changes, inefficiencies that can be found in health care and was commissioned by the former government. He said there's always efficiencies that can be found. As long as they're focused on patient care, we agree with him and we appreciate him endorsing the Peachey report, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I'm glad, Madam Speaker, that this minister is paying attention, because the most concerning thing for my neighbours in Concordia and for communities across this province—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: —is the threat of emergency room closures. Manitobans simply want assurances that they won't miss out on the services that they count on. A cut to an emergency room is a cut to service.

Now, I am concerned—and the minister is listening, so I want him to answer the question today. Will he hold true to his election promise to not cut services for Manitobans and not cut emergency rooms in this province?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, the former NDP government—led by the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), in the Cabinet was the member for Minto (Mr. Swan), others were in the government, including the member for Concordia—commissioned a report called the Peachey report on how to get efficiencies within the health-care system.

I read it when I came into government. It was the NDP government's report. In fact, yesterday, the member for Concordia went into the hall and said the Peachey report, for instance, talks about changes in efficiencies that can be found in health care and was commissioned by the former government, the NDP government. I appreciate the fact that he's endorsed that report, Madam Speaker. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Kelvin Active Living Centre Request for Funding Commitment

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): I urge the Premier to fund the new Kelvin gym and I really do hope that he changes his mind on that file.

In the meantime, it seems strange to try and blame students who choose to go to Kelvin for not having a new gym. Rather than come through with funding for the new gym, yesterday the Education Minister seemed to suggest Kelvin should instead turn away students, saying that one way to reduce crowding is to, quote, reduce school-of-choice students.

So will the Premier ask his minister to stop blaming students and instead fund the new Kelvin gym?

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I thank the member for the question.

It was very interesting to have a discussion regarding the Kelvin school project. We will be meeting with the parent group coming up shortly to discuss what might happen well into the future.

But in the meantime, perhaps the member would like to turn to his left-hand side and ask the member from Flin Flon which of the schools in Flin Flon should do without a roof so that that might be funded?

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

Mr. Kinew: You know, one of the things that makes Kelvin a destination for many students is the International Baccalaureate program, another is a dual-track French immersion program.

So these are for students who want advanced placement so that they can compete to become future doctors, lawyers and engineers, or there're students who want to be able to work in one of our province's official languages. Yet the minister seems to be suggesting that we should reduce the availability of these programs for students.

So will the minister now back away from those comments and instead fund the new Kelvin gym?

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the member's question, but our responsibility as a government and mine as a minister is make sure that every student in Manitoba has access to a good education. And that's what we're doing when we prioritized things like roofs and heating systems, and safety and security and access issues all across the province.

I would dearly like the member opposite—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wishart: —to explain to me why those are not his priorities as well.

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

Mr. Kinew: I know that it's possible to do both because the last government did both. They—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Kinew: They spent a million more dollars in each of the last year—three years on maintenance and they also constructed new schools.

But returning to the minister's comments about schools of choice yesterday, other programs that draw a small number of students to Kelvin are specialized programs with dedicated mental health supports and others that improve accessibility.

Now, I really am sure that the minister didn't mean to suggest that students who need specialized mental health supports or accessibility shouldn't have a new gym. I sincerely don't think that that's what he meant, but that is why he should correct the record on those comments and commit to funding the new Kelvin gym.

* (14:00)

Mr. Wishart: I'm sure the member didn't mean to say that they had done a wonderful job of investing in school infrastructure in the last 10 years, especially when they had been 10th out of 10 across Canada. If the previous government had done such a wonderful job of investing in infrastructure, the school gym project would have been completed long ago, because they've been working on this for more than 10 years.

Rent Assist Program Government Intention

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Earlier this year, the government put the Rent Assist program under review, and since then we've come to learn pretty quickly what under review really means. It means cuts.

Rent Assist is designed to keep life affordable for low-income, working Manitobans and Manitobans who need social assistance. Some of Manitoba's asylum seekers use Rent Assist to help them get settled while they start to save money.

Poverty advocates are grim about the future of this essential benefit.

Will the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) finally stand up for transparency, sharing with Manitobans what he plans to do with the Rent Assist program?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): We saw clearly what this previous government did when it talks about people in poverty, people that need help. We know that food banks spiked under this previous administration. We also know that the child poverty capital became our province as a part of it.

This government is one, in opposition, that pushed hard for that Rent Assist program. We think

it's important to support people that need needs, and that's exactly what this government will continue to do.

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

Ms. Fontaine: For many Manitobans, housing costs continue to rise and can eat 80 to 90 per cent of their monthly earnings, leaving almost nothing for food or other daily necessities. Low-income-earning Manitobans don't want to resort to EIA to pay their bills.

Rent Assist is a program designed to help bridge this gap and assist Manitobans as they transition into the workforce. Manitobans deserve to know what changes the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) or the Minister of Families has in store.

Will they change it so that it only covers those on social assistance, or will they lower the benefit amount?

Mr. Fielding: Our government will not be responding to fear mongering that's put forth by the opposition. Our government is one that will make—will ensure that the basic needs for our citizens are met. Our government is one that invested in things and left more money in the pockets of Manitobans in terms of the basic personal exemption. We have over 2,700 people off the tax rolls altogether.

Our government is invested in things like housing, which we think are important to ensure that people have affordable housing. That's a part of it. We'll continue at this, Madam Speaker, because we think it's fundamental to helping low-income Manitobans.

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

Ms. Fontaine: When the Minister of Finance was in opposition, he demanded that the government raise Rent Assist to 75 per cent of the median market rates, yet here he is, along with his partner, the Minister of Families, threatening to slash the program.

Obviously, the minister is singing a different tune now, one meant for his big business friends. And after they all took a 20 per cent raise for himself and everybody else, it's clear that he doesn't care about the challenges for low-income Manitobans that they face every single day.

So, Madam Speaker, let's actually practise some transparency today and tell Manitobans: Will the minister cut the program entirely?

Mr. Fielding: And here we go with a campaign of fear that's being brought forward by the previous administration.

When they were in office they didn't get the job done, Madam Speaker. They had to be pushed at the last minutes, the last days of their administration to make any moves in terms of the Rent Assist program.

One thing that is truthful, one thing that's—that is there—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fielding: —the thing that has impacted low-income Manitobans the most is the PST increase. We know what they did in the last election. They promised they weren't going to raise, and they went to the doors—and that's something that has impacted low-income Manitobans most than anything else.

This government is committed to helping the people most in need. That's why we've taken strong measures, and that's what we'll continue to do in the future.

Elections Amendment Act Photo Identification Concerns

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Madam Speaker, yesterday in question period during a question about her voter suppression bill, this Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson) was handed a speaking note by the Premier (Mr. Pallister). She then rose and told this House the lack of photo identification on many Manitobans, especially those in the inner city and the North, is nothing but an urban myth.

The government's had ample time to inform itself of the widespread challenges of obtaining and replacing photo identification, which anyone working in social service agencies, charities, churches, community organizations could tell them.

Will someone on the government side stand today and apologize for those comments to the many Manitobans who don't have photo identification?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Acting Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, the member knows full well that across Canada this is standard in terms of how voting takes place in ensuring that there is identification for casting a vote.

But it is strange that this member, of all members, would stand in this House, one who stood so strongly against a secret ballot—one of the key things within our democracy, the ability to vote in a secret way. And that member fought tooth and nail to prevent many Manitobans from having a secret ballot.

And now he says he's a friend of democracy. I don't think so, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Swan: Madam Speaker, Manitobans Lisa Forbes and Molly McCracken have responded to Bill 27. I quote: In the 2014 Winnipeg election, local leaders started Indigenous Rock the Vote to encourage indigenous people to participate in the election. This group ran ID clinics to help people access ID because the issue that came up most often during the Winnipeg election was access to proper voting ID. In addition, indigenous people are far more likely to not have a fixed address due to movement between reserves and rural communities to stay at the homes of relatives and friends in urban areas while they work, go to school or access health services.

Why does this government want to stop indigenous people from having the right to vote?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, the member spent many hours in this House trying to prevent Manitobans from having a secret ballot—the most basic thing within a democracy, a secret ballot.

Well, of course, then he changed his mind when he tried to overthrow his leader. And then he went to his convention and said to the NDP, actually, he was a great—in favour of a secret ballot at that point. But then a few months later he changed his mind again and came back to this House and said, no, he was against a secret ballot.

The member doesn't know where he stands when it comes to democracy. He should try to be consistent, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Swan: This government's refusal to take this issue seriously is insulting, not just to the people my colleagues and I represent, but many of the people that they represent, as well.

There is no need for a Stephen-Harper-style voter suppression law in Manitoba. The Chief Electoral Officer has made that clear.

Lisa Forbes has emailed the minister asking for a meeting. She's even offering to bring along front-line service providers to let the minister and this government know how hard it is for some people to get photo ID.

Will the Premier direct the minister to commit to meeting with her with a view of improving Bill 27?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, we're actually, with this bill, moving away from the system of voter suppression employed by the previous administration to the system of voter inclusion that has been adopted virtually across the country, is used in federal elections, is used in the city of Winnipeg and is used in virtually every other province.

So, Madam Speaker, when the member advises on democratic rights, he should remember that it was he who led a rebellion against a democratically elected leader of his own party—who achieved the largest majority in his party's history in the 2011 election—it was he who set aside the will of his own members.

So, Madam Speaker, how much respect does he really have for Manitobans when he would show so little respect for the members of his own party themselves?

Maternity Care Options Need for Midwifery Training

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): In the last six years, there has been a 583 per cent increase in babies being born at the Birth Centre here in Winnipeg. It is evident by this drastic year-after-year increase that Manitobans are turning to midwifery as a viable option when creating their birthing plans.

* (14:10)

My question for the minister responsible is: Would you share with the House what this government's intentions are with childbirth at community hospitals, tertiary hospitals and birthing centres?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, this government is fully in support of childbirth and will—we will continue to be involved—not involved in childbirth, but certainly in support of childbirth.

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

Ms. Lamoureux: The numbers don't lie, and they clearly tell us that women in Manitoba want options when creating a birthing plan, and the birth centres here in Manitoba should be one of these options.

Other regions in Canada, such as Ontario, recognizes the importance of midwives, and with midwifery being such an increasingly desirable choice for families here in Manitoba, I'm hoping that the minister is aware of this specific model of care and what it entails, and would he please share his opinion of what this model of care is with the House here today?

Mr. Goertzen: I've certainly appreciated meeting with many midwives across the province and the care that they provide. They've spoken to us as a government about the expansion of the care that they provide, more prescribing power, more power in terms of different procedures, Madam Speaker.

I've had those discussions with them about the expansion of their care, and I believe that they'll be pleased with the decisions that come from this government.

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

Ms. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, my question is: What is their current model of care?

I was really impressed by a recent tour that I took of the Winnipeg Birth Centre. This is such a viable option for women, and the centre itself is busier now than ever before. There is a demand for midwives, and by cutting the midwifery program here in Manitoba, the birth centres face uncertainty.

My question is: Why is the government standing against midwives in training as well as the wishes of Manitoba women by limiting their birth-plan options by not providing the midwifery training needed to properly staff the centres?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, as indicated, we have looked positively upon the request by midwives for expanding their scope of practice. I think it makes a lot of sense in terms of provisions they've brought forward, in terms of the expansion of their role within the health-care system.

As it relates to the birthing centre, I am glad that the member was able to have a tour from the former

Health minister, Theresa Oswald. We wish her well in her new position, Madam Speaker.

There are still, of course, a great under-utilization of the birthing centre in terms of where it was originally planned to be at. That remains a concern, and we continue to look at options.

Provincial Nominee Program Elimination of Application Backlog

Mr. Jon Reyes (St. Norbert): Madam Speaker, immigrants play a vital role in Manitoba. Very proud to be the MLA for the great, diverse riding of St. Norbert, and there are many immigrant families who make a significant contribution to Manitoba's economy and overall well-being.

The Provincial Nominee Program, thanks to former MLA for River East, Bonnie Mitchelson, is a great avenue for individuals to come to Manitoba. However, due to NDP mismanagement, application backlogs have slowed down the process and prevented individuals from coming here. Earlier today, the hard-working minister, the Minister of Education and Training, announced how our government's efforts have eliminated the backlog of applications.

Could the hard-working minister inform the House about how our government has eliminated the MPNP backlog?

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I thank the member for the excellent question.

Mismanagement of the PNP program under the previous government had resulted in a backlog of 5,100 applications in April when we came into power, some dating as far back as 2013. We are pleased to confirm the backlog has been cleared.

As part of the renewal of the MPNP program all candidates who submit complete applications to the program will be processed in six months or less moving forward. Improved supports will help newcomers and their families build prosperous futures here in Manitoba. We are restoring the integrity of Manitoba's Provincial Nominee Program by ensuring processing times are respectful—

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

Agricultural Fields Waterway Buffer Zone

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Once this Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his minister are done weakening some hard-won protections for the safety of Manitoba's drinking water and the health of Lake Winnipeg, how large is the buffer zone going to be on agricultural fields where manure is applied compared to the waterways that might be right next to it?

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sustainable Development): Thank you to the member opposite.

Our government has some of the highest water quality testing in all of Canada. We will ensure that we continue to protect our water, our environment, our lakes and rivers. We are proud of our record. We will continue on our record.

And I would just like to ask the member opposite why—if he cares so much about water—why did he fail to bring forward his water management—surface water management report into legislation?

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order.

The honourable member for Wolseley, on a supplementary question.

Hog Industry Expansion Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, evidently the \$14,000-raise for the minister isn't getting us much just yet.

The reason I ask is that the minister's own document is very confusing. It names two different regulations which are going to be applied against one another. One of them, when you actually read the regs, calls for a 20-meter buffer; the other one calls for a 100-meter buffer—no indication what the buffer zone's actually going to be.

Here's a related question: If, as one of the Conservative MLA's this morning mused, that there will soon be a million more hogs in Manitoba, what's this minister going to do to offset the greenhouse gas emissions that result from that?

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sustainable Development): I would like to thank the—thank you, Madam Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member opposite.

It is unfortunate the members opposite didn't, in fact, pass legislation with regard to a surface water management act.

We, in fact, are working towards a new watershed-based approach on that to ensure that our waters are protected, including an ALUS program. And I don't know if the member opposite knows what the ALUS program involves, but it will ensure that we reduce flooding, improve our water quality and reduce nutrient loading into our lakes and streams.

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

Clean Environment Commission Request for Review of Bill 24

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): I think the only good news in that answer, Madam Speaker, is it's quite clear the minister is confused by her own actions, as are all the Manitobans who are wondering what's going to happen to their water, what's going to happen to their environment.

If the minister's learned anything so far, hopefully, it is that when she changes regulations in an omnibus bill, that's not a good thing and it can affect lots of different aspects that she needs to consider.

Will she do the right thing and defer all consideration of Bill 24 and her manure regulations to the Clean Environment Commission for a thorough, independent and scientific result to be brought to the table?

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sustainable Development): Thanks to the member opposite.

* (14:20)

One thing that Manitobans are sure of, that when the members opposite went to the door in the election and told them directly to their face that they would not increase taxes, and then actually came back a year later and increased the PST by 1 per cent, causing a \$2,400 increase to—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Cox: —their family, that's what Manitobans are sure of.

Library Services Funding Inclusion in Budget 2017

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Libraries are increasingly more than just storehouses of books; they're community hubs where people meet, host gatherings, plan social activities and improve their lives through educational programs.

Will the Minister for Sport, Culture and Heritage pledge today that funding for libraries in Manitoba will be protected in the next budget?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): I appreciate the question, the first question on culture and libraries in the province from my critic. So I welcome him to the portfolio of culture in the province of Manitoba, and I hope that this is a sign that the entire caucus is finally waking up to culture in the province of Manitoba.

And this gives me an opportunity to thank all the people that work in the public library system. And I know that I recently visited the libraries in northern Manitoba to see the wonderful community hubs that they have become, and I'm looking forward to the library review that my legislative assistant is conducting right now to enhance libraries.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Lindsey: Might've been the first question, certainly wasn't the first answer.

Madam Speaker, the government continues to drag out their cultural review—value-for-money. Libraries are already suffering. I know my own library in Flin Flon has had to reduce the days that they're open.

Will this Minister for Sport, Culture and Heritage inform the House how the budget is going to affect funding for much-needed arts and cultural programs and infrastructure, including libraries, in Manitoba?

Ms. Squires: I was very proud to announce last month that we are conducting the first cultural review in the province since 1992 and we are looking at ways to grow the creative economy so that we can continue to enjoy some of the culture assets that we have in the province and look for ways to grow that creative economy so that we can, you know, be a gem in our nation in terms of culture.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Lindsey: Our neighbours in Saskatchewan are reeling from cuts to public libraries that are going to hurt social and economic equality. Libraries provide the public with computer access so people can create resumés, so that they can actually apply for jobs. Front-line workers, like librarians and IT specialists, are there to help people. We're concerned.

Will this minister pledge today that next week's budget will shun the ill-advised route taken in Saskatchewan and protect front-line workers in libraries as well as affordable programs that they offer to the public?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, here's some things—here's some sources of funds we could've used for cultural and sport projects and meaningful investment in other areas: half a million dollars for severance pay, paid to former friends, which was covered up; \$10-million untendered contract for Tiger Dams for party pals and donors; a half a billion dollars invested in 50 miles of road constructed on the east side of Lake Winnipeg; and \$4.6 billion wasted on a bipole line to Saskatchewan and back for no good reason other than the NDP couldn't run a lemonade stand, Madam Speaker.

Freshwater Fish Act Provincial Benefits

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake): Madam Speaker, once again the NDP are playing politics with the lives of those in Manitoba. Our government is committed to ensuring the well-being of Manitobans. In order to do so we introduced the freshwater fish marketing act—amendment act to ensure that Manitobans have good, reliable jobs.

Madam Speaker, we would like to ensure that we are creating jobs rather than taking jobs away, like the previous NDP government.

Could the Minister of Sustainable Development please inform the House how the freshwater fish marketing amendment act would benefit the province of Manitoba?

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sustainable Development): Thanks to the member on this side of the House for that very important question.

It's too bad that the members opposite don't realize how important it is to give commercial fishermen the opportunity to put more money in their pockets, more money on the kitchen table for

Manitoba fishermen. They work hard for their money, and they deserve the opportunity to spend it in the manner that they want to.

It's about freedom, Madam Speaker. It's about providing them the opportunity to market their fish internationally or interprovincially and give them the opportunity to keep more money on the kitchen table.

I'm very proud of this motion—or this legislation that we're putting forward, and it's really disappointing that they don't stand on board with—stand together with us and stand behind Manitoba commercial fishermen.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

Point of Order

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Minto, on a point of order.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): On a point of order, today in question period I asked this government, including the Premier (Mr. Pallister), questions about ID requirements set out in a bill that's now before this House, and I asked some serious questions on behalf of indigenous people, on behalf of others in the inner city and North, other parts of this province, who do not have access to photo ID.

This Premier and the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson) stood in the House and said that the truth of people not having photo identification was an urban myth.

I asked about that today, and the Premier chose to get up on the third question. And the question I asked is, will this Premier direct the minister to commit with meeting with her, being someone who is very knowledgeable in this area, with the goal of improving Bill 27.

The Premier stood up and gave an answer, which was his typical personal attack on myself, but it entirely—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Swan: —it entirely missed any reference to anything that was being asked about. There was not a word about the bill which was before the House, not a word about photo identification and not a word about the question I asked, which was whether the Premier would direct the minister—*[interjection]* Madam Speaker, I don't know why members are heckling someone who's on a point of order about a

very important issue for indigenous people—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

I would ask the member to indicate what his specific point of order is, please.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Swan: Madam Speaker, this is question period. It is the chance for members of the opposition to ask questions on behalf of Manitobans. I appreciate there is wide latitude given to those on the government side answering questions. We are aware that there is a large degree of latitude, but the answer given by the Premier today did not even touch on the subject of the question. Again, not a word about the bill that was being asked about, not a word about photo identification, which was being asked about, and not a word about the meeting which an individual in Manitoba has asked to have with the minister.

The Premier has entirely refused to answer a question—again, I appreciate there's wide latitude—the Premier has gone well outside that, and I would ask the Speaker to call the Premier to order so we can improve the way question period works in this House.

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Government House Leader): Well, Madam Speaker, not a single rule cited in that diatribe, and, quite frankly, it's not a point of order. It is an attempt to extend question period because the member opposite failed to ask appropriate questions at the time that was given him. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

I have listened carefully to what the members have indicated, and I would indicate that a point of order should be about a breach of the rules or practice of the House. I do not feel that this was a point of order because the Speaker does not determine the quality or content of answers, so that is not viewed to be a point of order.

* (14:30)

PETITIONS

Taxi Industry Regulation

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

Signed by Weldetinsae Semere, Abrhet Raesu and Nahod Semere and many other fine Manitobans.

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

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 so—that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

This petition was signed by many Manitobans.

Thank you.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of

taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

This petition is signed by many Manitobans, Madam Speaker.

Kelvin High School Gymnasium and Wellness Centre

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Manitobans recognize how important it is to provide young people with quality learning spaces to succeed in school.

(2) Sport, recreation and the spaces to engage in them are critical to the health and welfare of all students.

(3) All forms of educational infrastructure, including gymnasiums and recreation centres in general, represent an incredible value-for-money investment, whereby the return is improved physical and psychological health and wellness.

(4) Kelvin High School is one of the largest high schools in the province, with over 1,200 students.

(5) Kelvin High School spent several years raising almost \$1.2 million towards the construction of a new gymnasium and wellness centre.

(6) Some Kelvin students currently have to pay to use outside facilities to obtain their mandatory physical education credit.

(7) The provincial government, in a regressive and short-sighted move, cancelled funding for the Kelvin gym and wellness centre for political reasons, despite the extensive community support, fundraising and engagement.

(8) It is wasteful and disrespectful to the dedicated efforts of students, staff and the community in general to simply lay their goals aside without consultation.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to recognize the need for excellent recreational facilities in all Manitoba schools, to reverse this regressive cut and to provide Kelvin High School with the necessary funding to complete a new gymnasium and wellness centre.

Signed by Lauren Bedard, Victoria Lopez, Nadih Hamidi and many other Manitobans.

Taxi Industry Regulation

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

* (14:40)

The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

There was—were no consultations with the industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

And this petition has been signed by many, many, many Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

Background to this petition is as follows:

First, the taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

Second, the taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

Third, regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

Fourth, the regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

Fifth, the provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

Sixth, there were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

Seventh, the introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

Eighth, the proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what had been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

Signed by Kashdeep Gill, Parminder Gill, Jasmeet Singh and many, many other Manitobans.

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure that there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

The—(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans,

many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

Signed by many, many Manitobans.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of the taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

The regulated taxi system has also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a complaint system.

The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

There are no consultations with the taxi industry prior to this introduction of this bill.

The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihoods of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate—sorry—the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

This petition is—was signed by many fine Manitobans.

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure that there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations that have been put in place made Winnipeg a 'leather'—leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures to—in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

There was no consultation with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of the bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihoods of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also brings the regulated framework at risk—puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues as—such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that had made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

* (14:50)

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

Signed, many concerned Manitobans.

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

Kelvin High School Gymnasium

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

During the last 20 years, a colossal community effort has been put into obtaining a new gymnasium for students at Kelvin High School.

The Kelvin High School gym has been on the Winnipeg School Division one's list of projects for approximately 10 years and it has slowly worked its way up to the No. 1 priority.

Exercise and sport are a vital part of school activities for students and these play an important role in developing skills including discipline, team-work, co-operation and communication.

The current Premier of Manitoba has said that children and grandchildren should not have to pay the price of his austerity budgeting.

The Kelvin High School gym is a desperately needed space for children and youth to get exercise.

The community has raised more than \$1 million to help pay for the gymnasium so it can be used as a community facility as well as a school facility.

Kelvin High School serves students from many areas of 'Winnipeg,' including central Winnipeg.

Children and youth should not have to pay for the financial problems of the Province.

Improving the physical and mental health of children through exercise and sport can keep children healthy and reduce health-care costs in the long term.

Having young people learn good habits like improving their physical and mental health through exercise can save a lot of money in future health expenditures by helping to keep Manitobans healthy.

This facility will enable members of the community to participate in physical exercise and sports activities in the evening, and since community members have raised money for this component, it will help to save health-care dollars.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse its decision and to provide the remainder of the funding needed to build the new Kelvin High School gymnasium as soon as possible.

Signed by Tod Christianson, Michelle Finley, Kevin Stewart and many others.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, this afternoon we would like to call Bill 29, Health Sector Bargaining Unit Review Act; Bill 25, The Cannabis Harm Prevention Act; and Bill 28, public sector sustainability act for debate and second reading.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced by the honourable Government House Leader that the House will consider second readings of Bill 29, 25 and 28 this afternoon.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 29—The Health Sector Bargaining Unit Review Act

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I move, seconded by the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage (Ms. Squires), that Bill 29, The Health Sector Bargaining Unit Review Act, be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

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 Health, seconded by the honourable member for sport—honourable Minister for Sport, Culture and Heritage, that Bill 29, The Health Sector Bargaining Unit Review 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 tables the message.

Mr. Goertzen: This is a new act enabling bargaining unit restructuring in the health sector in the province of Manitoba.

The structure of our health system is complex. While important, of course, to all Manitobans in terms of their health and their well-being, it is still very much a complex and difficult system at times to navigate. There are more than 182 bargaining units and more than 182 collective agreements. In addition to those 182 bargaining units and 182 collective agreements, there are 50 separate employers.

By comparison, Madam Speaker, Manitoba is a significant outlier when it comes to the complexity of its organizational and bargaining unit structures relative to other provinces in Canada. Let me give you some examples.

In British Columbia, there are five bargaining units and five collective agreements—five bargaining units and five collective agreements in comparison to Manitobans—Manitoba's 182 bargaining units and 182 agreements. And as members know, British Columbia is a province with a significantly higher population than Manitoba.

More comparatively, in terms of population, if one were to look at the province to our immediate west in Saskatchewan, in Saskatchewan there are in their health-care sector 14 bargaining units and six collective agreements. Again, for emphasis, Manitoba has 182 bargaining units and agreements; Saskatchewan, a province with a slightly less population, has 14 bargaining units and six collective agreements.

Sustainability of health services requires the streamlining of processes and the optimization of resources. Certainly, I know from talking to many in the health-care system, they have often expressed frustration—those who are working within the system—that it can sometimes be complex, difficult to navigate and hard for them as employers and—I'm sorry—as employees as a result of the many different structures that exist within our health-care system, and ultimately that is not good for patient care.

And I want to emphasize and I want to stress for the House that this bill is—above all else—is about patient care. How do we ensure that those who are in the hospitals and other facilities in Manitoba are getting the highest quality patient care, which comes from a labour force which is both highly skilled as they are highly engaged, but able to use those skills and that engagement together through a system which is not—is overly complex as it is today, Madam Speaker? Enabling better care for patients, clients and residents across the patient journey and between facilities and communities is absolutely important.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

This bill, when it is fully engaged, will enable greater flexibility in scheduling to allow staffing to meet patient needs while respecting the needs of employees for reasonable schedules, and that is something that those who are managing our health-care systems in hospitals and other facilities say it is

very difficult to ensure that you have the flexibility to ensure that the right care providers are there at the right time and in the right place when you're engaging 182 bargaining units with 182 collective agreements, compared to some provinces that have no more than five.

It will also—even though the primary and the overarching consideration for this bill is patient care—it will also reduce administrative costs related to the complexity of the bargaining structure. The bill will also enable a reduction in the number of bargaining units by creating an employer organization within the health regions and defining the bargaining units to be established in each health region and province-wide health employer.

And there's been some great degree of work in the drafting and the preparation of this bill and in consultation, Mr. Acting Speaker—Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of ensuring that those classifications are the right classifications, and there's been comparisons to other provinces to make sure that they are as well aligned as possibly can be aligned.

* (15:00)

But, of course, we recognize that this is a change to the system as it exists today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so we need to enable unionized employees to vote to pick their union that is going to be representing them. As we change the number of bargaining units, we need to ensure that, as they choose which union is going to be representing them, that that is done by a vote. And I'm pleased to say that this bill specifically talks about a secret ballot for that vote.

Now, I know that this has been the matter of some debate in this House on another bill, a labour bill, but we very much believe that when union members are making important decisions such as who is going to represent them as a union, that they have the ability to do so on a secret ballot so they can ensure that their privacy is protected and they don't feel any pressure—outside pressure.

Now, members opposite might say that that pressure doesn't exist, that it never exists. Well, I'm sure that in some situations, it doesn't, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I also know that, in other situations, it might. And the provision of the secret ballot for allowing those, as we reorganize the bargaining units, to have that assurance, a protection of their vote, I think is critical.

It'll also enable consistency through the appointment of an employer bargaining

representative to each of the employer's organizations and province-wide health employer. It'll enable the appointment of a commissioner to oversee the bargaining unit restructuring process. We thought that this was an important part of the provision, and we've looked at other jurisdictions in terms how they've done it when they've gone through similar—the similar process. And having a commissioner involved in the reorganization is important because you'll have someone who is specifically a dedicated, we believe, specifically knowledgeable.

Now, there's been no thought in terms of who the commissioner will be at this point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I'm sure, whether it's myself or a future Health minister will ensure that there is the right person with the right skills who can dedicate the time necessary as the commissioner to ensure that this process happens as well as it possibly can.

It'll set out the role, the responsibilities and the jurisdiction of the commissioner in carrying out their very important duties. And we thought it was so important, that this process is so important and so critical to improving patient care, that there should be that dedicated individual to ensure that this process happens.

Now, some might ask, is—are there certain time frames for the commissioner to be appointed or to finish his or her work. There are not specific time frames set out in the bill, and I want to emphasize that there have been a number of discussions with the unions so it impact and affected by this bill in terms of how things should proceed, different ways of doing things. Those discussions and negotiations will continue. And it seemed prudent not to put deadlines within a bill because it might affect those—or taint the discussions and negotiations that are happening. And we want to ensure that the discussions with unions continue to happen in a way that can be positive, that can be productive and hopefully produce a good outcome, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It'll also enable negotiation of a revised collective agreement following the selection of the bargaining agent by the employees.

The bill will come into effect on proclamation to allow for the ongoing consultation with unions representing employees in the health system. We could have set a date within the bill in terms of when it becomes effective, but, again, with a similar rationale, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we were reluctant to put in hard dates or sometimes artificial dates within

the bill either for the appointment of the commissioner or the resolution of their work or the enactment of the bill, because we truly want to continue the ongoing consultations with unions representing these employees.

There have been several discussions. Several consultations have already taken place. It would be my expectation that many more would—will potentially take place, and so we are trying to prevent that.

So, Madam—or, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in summary, I want to emphasize—and at the risk of overemphasizing, but I don't know if one can overemphasize—that this bill is fully about patient safety, that it is entirely about patient care, ensuring that patients get the best care in our health-care system, whether that is in hospitals or otherwise, making sure that a very complex health system as it exists today in Manitoba becomes more in line with almost every province in Canada. In fact, if you were to take the bargaining units of all the provinces to the west of us, combined them and multiply them by three, I think they'd still be half of what we have here in the province of Manitoba. That is how far out of sync, how far out of line we are as a province of Manitoba when it comes to this.

Much of the reorganization, in terms of bargaining units, took place previously in the rural regional health authorities prior to 1999, and so many of the bargaining units exist within the City of Winnipeg, the 182 bargaining units. It was always the intention for the legislation, in 2000, to continue that process of reorganization of the units, but the previous government didn't take it.

So we look forward to continuing that process, which should have continued then, because we do believe that it would improve patient care, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Questions

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A question period up to 15 minutes will be held.

Questions may be addressed to the minister by any member of the following sequence: first question by the official opposition critic or designate; subsequent questions asked by each independent member; remaining questions asked by the opposition members; and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering if the minister has a target in mind for the number of bargaining units that his government hopes to achieve through this legislation.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I thank the—my friend from Concordia for the question. It's a good question. This bill, as it currently stands, would reduce it to just under 50, I believe, and so we would still have significantly more bargaining units than other provinces would have to the west of us, and that is because we have five regional health authorities. So, even though you might have a certain category of workers, it is multiplied by the five regional health authorities and also those stand-alone entities that fall within the Department of Health, such as Diagnostic Services of Manitoba or CancerCare.

So this bill will bring it to slightly under 50, which would still be significantly higher than other jurisdictions. But we would like to be lower than that.

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

Mr. Wiebe: If there were opportunities for this minister to come in lower or exceed that target and come in with a lesser number of bargaining units, would he take the opportunity to pursue those opportunities?

Mr. Goertzen: Thank the member for Concordia for that question. We would like to see the number lower than it currently is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, even with this bill. Less than 50 is much better than it is now, but it is not where other provinces are in western Canada. But we need to find the mechanism to do that in a way that made sense. Perhaps the member was talking about the regions and whether the discussion is to reduce the number of regions. That that might be one way to do it, but I believe that there might be other ways to do it. Essentially, what you need is a common employer, one employer that could then deal with each of those separate units.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My question to the minister deals with when you're amalgamating or bringing together bargaining units to form a new bargaining unit, it would seem to me that if one has many more members than the other one that you're trying to bring together, that the one with the larger number of members will likely be the new bargaining unit and the dominant player.

So how do you make this a more co-operative exercise than you're planning at the moment?

Mr. Goertzen: The member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) raises not an insignificant point. It is a challenge, obviously, when there are so many bargaining units. There are unions that are representing, in some cases, a very small number of employees. That's what brings up part of the inefficiencies within the system.

* (15:10)

The commissioner will lay out the more definite processes for moving to the smaller number of bargaining units, Mr. Deputy Chair, but, certainly, through a secret ballot vote, you will see members being able to select which union they would like. And I wouldn't want to suggest that everybody who's in with a current union will necessarily vote for that same union, I wouldn't know that, and—

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

Mr. Wiebe: How will the minister ensure that the flexibility that he talks about doesn't negatively impact workers, for instance, at groups like CancerCare, Diagnostic Services of Manitoba who operate not just in one location, but, of course, across the province.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, and my hope would be for those employees that they would see a benefit. In fact, I think that there are many employees who will find the flexibility with being under one particular bargaining unit freeing because they will be able to work perhaps in different facilities more easily, certainly at different places within the same facility. I think in many ways they are looking forward to that flexibility. It certainly works in other provinces and we see no reason why it wouldn't work in Manitoba.

Mr. Wiebe: So just to be clear, Mr. Speaker, as I said, these groups work across the province, and so by my reading of this legislation and bringing together those bargaining units under one collective agreement would mean that a worker who may work in Winnipeg may be called out to Brandon or to Steinbach to work at that facility. How would the minister ensure that there wasn't a downloading of responsibility to these individual workers?

Mr. Goertzen: Well I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the same challenge exists in other provinces where workers who work on a province-wide system and are often called to places outside of where their

normal bargaining unit is located are able to provide agreements between those jurisdictions and to make sure that that work can happen in a seamless way. I would expect that the same sort of processes would happen in Manitoba.

Mr. Wiebe: The minister in his opening comments made reference to the challenges in rural areas, in some of the amalgamations of collective agreements, in that circumstance where some of the smaller organizations, the smaller facilities, you know, still operate outside of the collective agreements because of challenges in their particular small organizations. I'm wondering if he's done any outreach or consultation with some of the ones that are now going to be asked to be part of a larger collective agreement.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for the question.

There has been significant consultation with the unions that represent the workers across Manitoba. Again, to a large extent, not fully though, but to a large extent this process has happened in rural Manitoba and happened a couple of decades ago. It didn't continue on in the same fashion that it was expected to within the city of Winnipeg. So this is a predominantly, but not exclusively, an issue within the city of Winnipeg. But there have been extensive consultations with the unions representing the employees, and there'll be continued consultations is my expectation.

Mr. Wiebe: So I'm not sure if I understood the minister correctly, so maybe I'll just ask the question. Is he then saying that there is a possibility that there are some small groups right now that would not fall under this legislation and perhaps be allowed to operate without joining in? You know, is there a drop-dead date that they would need to join? That's my question.

Mr. Goertzen: We have not, Mr. Deputy Speaker, put in specific, hard deadlines in terms of when each of the different units would have to come to a vote to determine who their representatives would be for the union. We thought that that would probably be not helpful in terms of the consultations. My understanding is there's been good consultations to date. I've heard some public comment from union leaders that bargaining units is something that they're willing to engage in. I think they have engaged in that. So we've not put in a firm date because we'd like those consultations to continue.

Mr. Wiebe: Can the minister share with the House how the commissioner will be chosen to undertake this—implementing this legislation?

Mr. Goertzen: My understanding is that the commissioner would be an appointment of the Executive Council, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. We have not undertaken any thought or search at this point about who that consultant might be. I have no preconceived notions. I have no names in my mind in terms of an individual. I think the consultations that are happening with the unions at this point are helpful and engaging and will continue, but I believe it will be the purview of the Lieutenant Governor-in-Council to make the appointment whenever that time will come.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, once the minister does have somebody in his mind, I'm wondering, would he at that point be comfortable sharing it with stakeholders, with our labour friends and having some consultation as to the acceptability of that individual?

Mr. Goertzen: While I think it's a fair question that the member is asking, it just isn't one at this point that we've engaged on specifically. Obviously, we want to work in co-operation as much as we can with the unions that are impacted by this restructuring. I've been pleased that they've indicated that they recognize that the great number of bargaining units can cause problems and can cause some concerns, and they've been willing to come to the table and have consultations. So that is important, but it's a little premature to perhaps speak about how a commissioner might be selected or how that name might be vetted.

Mr. Gerrard: Just wonder if the minister would elaborate a little bit on the time frame for accomplishing this. I mean, I presume the minister has some sort of objective and some sort of vision of when he needs this to happen by.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Chair, we've not—or Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've not put a time frame within. There's a number of different reasons. We didn't know which bills the government would be holding over to the fall, so that's one thing I understand today—*[interjection]*—sorry, the opposition. You know, I—sometimes you revert back to form, you know. I—we didn't know how many bills the opposition would be holding over and which bills those would be. So that now we have that that certainly helps to inform some thought. But, really, the issue is more about how the consultations continue to proceed with the unions.

We want to ensure that that proceeds for as long as they are productive to happen.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, the minister has recently started to talk a little bit more about patient care, something we've been emphasizing on this side of the House. And, certainly, when we see legislation like this, you know, there's a lot of concern about the uncertainty that this brings. I wanted to know if the minister would comment on how this uncertainty that he's proposing into the system might impact the workers who are delivering that patient care right now.

Mr. Goertzen: I don't want to diminish at all what the member is saying. I recognize that any time there is change anywhere is—whether that's in a school or in a Legislature, in an election or in a health-care system, disruption can sometimes cause uncertainty. And, certainly, it would be my goal to minimize that uncertainty to the greatest extent possible, Mr. Deputy Chair, but I don't think that avoiding change because of potential disruption makes a lot of sense. One thing I think Manitobans do agree is that there needs to be change within the health-care system. They recognize that the system isn't working. I see those letters every day. And they recognize that simply pouring more money into the system isn't the solution.

So is there disruption? I don't doubt that there is and, certainly, I appreciate the member raising it. We'll try to minimize—

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

Is there any other questions?

* (15:20)

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So we'll move on to debate of the bill.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I appreciate the opportunity to stand today, and I appreciate the fact that the minister is willing to agree and to appreciate the amount of disruption that the change that he proposes so far has caused and this bill is certainly a big part of that uncertainty. And we certainly appreciate the opportunity, now that it's finally come before this House, that we can fully debate it, we can start to discuss it and, hopefully, get more of a sense exactly what the government hopes to accomplish by doing this.

And, certainly, as I said, it's the uncertainty among civil servants who have been first told that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) would, you know, he would negotiate with workers from the Legislature here rather than at the bargaining table, that he would legislate changes to their right to collectively organize themselves in the health-care sector without any consultation whatsoever, and that's what creates the fear and confusion amongst those who are delivering our front-line services. And I can tell you, as somebody who spends a lot of time talking to those front-line workers, hearing from them directly, some of them are close friends of mine, some of them are in my family, and I can hear the frustration and the uncertainty that they are experiencing in their day-to-day lives. And I put that on the record, and I know I'm not the first to do so in the House, Mr. Speaker, because it is having an effect on the ability of those front-line workers to provide the services that Manitobans say they want.

So not only are there changes and cuts coming from this government that are fundamentally damaging our health-care system, but, on top of that, coupled with that, it's a level of uncertainty that then affects those people who are trying to deliver the services and doing their honest best, I think, to deliver those services. They are then impacted and not able to perform up to the standards that they would like to and that we hope and expect them to. So it's a double whammy that workers in this province are feeling and, ultimately, that patients in our health-care system will suffer because of, and this is the concern that has been brought to my attention and I'm happy to bring to this House.

Now, that being said, I do appreciate, as I said, that we do have an opportunity to debate it here in the House, and I do take the minister at his word that he's doing his best behind the scenes, although, you know, this exact process isn't laid out in this legislation, but that he is doing his best to reach out to labour and working with them to develop some sort of negotiated path forward where those who are actually impacted will have some certainty given to them. And, again, I'm not privy to any of those discussions and negotiations, but I will share with the House that, informally, I know I've had conversations with the minister, with other officials, and I do hope that that is, in fact, the case and that it will continue in earnest and that workers will really have a seat at the table. We will continue to be vigilant with regards to that.

But, when we have legislation, Mr. Speaker, that comes before the House and workers have no information before it does, that's where the concern really comes, and so we're happy to have this debate, to have some of this information finally out in the open. I expect that there will be a robust debate, again some of it with health officials behind closed doors, but I know that there will be also an opportunity in a more public way to have presentations here at the Legislature, as we always do in our second reading. And, again, that will be an opportunity, I think, for us to really make sure that this bill is understood, not just here in this House, by—but by the front-line workers that it will affect.

So we know, Mr. Speaker, this bill, of course, deals with the bargaining units, the collective bargaining in Manitoba's health sector, and it establishes a fixed number of bargaining units for each health region and for each province-wide health employer, such as CancerCare and DSM or Diagnostic Services of Manitoba.

I was happy in my opening—or sorry, in my questions of the minister to highlight, I think, something that he knows very well, and that is some of the challenges that exist with those two particular—the last two particular employers, which is CancerCare Manitoba and DSM, which operate, of course, across the province. They are not in one particular location, and oftentimes I know, again, just from talking with employees there—sometimes feel like they—their voice isn't heard in the—in negotiation and in the larger discussions that happen. And so I do hope that the minister takes special care to appreciate the particular circumstances that those groups are facing.

We know, of course, Mr. Speaker, that a commissioner will be appointed to determine the composition of these bargaining units, and this is what we think is fundamentally key in this legislation is having a commissioner who is open to, certainly, to new ideas and new ways of moving forward, making sure that everybody has a seat at the table, everybody has a voice, everybody has an opportunity to express their concerns and truly listens to those workers who are on the front lines and actually delivering these services that are so very, very, important to Manitobans.

We know that if a bargaining unit consists of employees represented by more than one union, the commissioner will conduct the representation vote, as the minister had pointed out earlier, for the

purposes of selecting a single bargaining agent. And so, again, this is where the role of the commissioner is so very key, that there's somebody that can be impartial, be fair and really be looking at patient care first and foremost and making sure that that's the most valuable and most important thing, going forward.

We know, again, that once a bargaining unit is selected, the bill provides that the collective agreement governing the most employees in the bargaining unit to which that agent is a party will become the basis for negotiating a new collective agreement and that will, of course, govern all employees in the union—sorry, in the unit.

The bill also establishes an employers' organization for each health region for the sole purpose of collective bargaining. It requires the minister to appoint one or more representatives to bargain on behalf of those organizations and on behalf of the province-wide health employers, and the commissioner will have the authority to make decisions necessary to implement the new bargaining framework.

You know, as I said, Mr. Speaker, this is one area we are going to be paying particular attention to, and that is the process by which the minister will choose the commissioner, the commissioner that is ultimately chosen, and that their work is done in a fair way, considering all the needs of labour and all the concerns that labour has.

And one of the things that I was able to ask in my opening questions, Mr. Speaker, was to ask about the impact on some of the smaller organizations within the collective agreements, and this is a key point I think that we need to focus on because we've actually seen this process before as an NDP government who went ahead and reduced the number of RHAs in the early 2000s, again at—in the early 2010s—was—we reduced them again, and during those processes there was an actual reduction in the number of bargaining units that are in the health-care sector in rural areas.

So we know the challenges that they face, and we know that even though that process happened again, you know, in one case, more than a decade ago and another, a number of years ago, there are still some small groups and organizations, employers, that don't fall under this legislation. And so, when I've been out and speaking to some of these smaller groups, some of the personal-care homes and others, what they've told me is that there are

particular challenges that they will face if the collective agreement was to be applied across their entity and not within—not recognizing some of the challenges that they face, having, you know, certain locations and working conditions that their employees face.

* (15:30)

So it's important to understand that while we could under—we could see maybe how some within the regional health authorities, some bargaining units, could find very easy matches for the work that they do, when it comes to smaller organizations, it's a different challenge.

And, again, the minister would know this because it's been done before, but what we're hoping is that the consultation process now will be robust in that those smaller organizations will be paid special attention to, so that we don't kind of get halfway to the finish line or three quarters of the way to the finish line but never actually get over the finish line because of stragglers.

And that's not going to be helpful for anyone. I think there's a lot of benefit in working ahead of time and through the process, understanding the specific needs of those organizations, and then trying to work with them to make sure that their concerns are taken at face value.

You'll know, Mr. Speaker, of course, that this caucus, first and foremost, we care about health care. We value the public nature of our health-care system, and we appreciate the universality and accessibility that's prescribed in the Canada Health Act. And this is—we are dedicated, first and foremost, to those front-line workers who work hard every single day to provide those services, and we believe that all Manitobans have a right to fair wages, the right to bargain in good faith and to have their bargaining units respected.

And I put that on the record, Mr. Speaker, simply because—and where I began in my speech was to say that the uncertainty that this government has introduced into the system has been wholly disruptive. It's been disrespectful to workers—*[interjection]*

I hear the member—some of my colleagues—and I think that might be unparliamentary language, so I won't mention the chaos that's created by certain individuals in the Legislature and in the government, but we appreciate that that chaos has real-world implications. It has real implications on the services

that Manitobans are receiving, and that needs to be addressed. It needs to be changed.

This government needs to give certainty to those workers to let them know that they're valued, and the best way to do that, I believe, Mr. Speaker, is to respect their right to collective bargaining, to pay them good wages to do the work that they do and to ensure that they have job security in performing those services and those duties that they've been asked to perform.

We stand with those workers, Mr. Speaker. We'll do that day in and day out as a caucus. We appreciate the workers of Manitoba. We appreciate the workers in our health-care system, and we will stand with them as we—as they navigate this bill and this legislation. We will be there, as my colleague from Tyndall Park says, shoulder to shoulder, every step of the way.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I have a few comments with respect to this bill.

In general, we believe that there needs to be some streamlining of bargaining, and certainly a comparison of the situation here in Manitoba with Saskatchewan and BC and other provinces is consistent with changes that are needed here.

I am concerned about a number of issues: One, that the approach that the minister has taken to date is a central, top-down approach, somewhat heavy-handed approach rather than a more collegial approach, talking with people and unions and workers and getting their input in terms of how to proceed.

I think that there needs to be a level of trust built, and I think it's really important that the workers and unions have a substantive input into the final result.

Second, I am concerned that the process as described by the minister will favour larger unions over smaller unions rather than trying to build a co-operative effort among unions to work together. And this is a approach which has the potential to be not only quite divisive in certain ways, but the concern would also be that people who are in smaller specialized unions may not be as well represented in the years ahead as a result of the changes that the minister is making.

Mr. Speaker, Liberals want to listen very carefully to the presentations by many, many people

who are stakeholders, who are concerned about these changes. We want to listen and urge people to come forward to the committee stage to make presentations so that many voices can be heard and listened to before this bill proceeds to third reading.

So thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Official Opposition House Leader): I move, seconded by the member for Logan (Ms. Marcelino), that debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

**Bill 25—The Cannabis Harm Prevention Act
(Various Acts Amended)**

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, we'll move on to the next bill, which would be Bill 25.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Health, that Bill 25, The Cannabis Harm Prevention Act (Various Acts Amended); Loi sur la réduction des méfaits du cannabis (modification de diverses dispositions législatives), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Stefanson: It's an honour to stand in the House today and speak on second reading of The Cannabis Harm Prevention Act and Various Acts Amended. This is a very important piece of legislation that has to do with safety and health of particularly our young people with respect to the federal legislation that will be coming down or be introduced in Ottawa—we anticipate some time next is what we've been told and we've read in the media about the cannabis bill federally. So we believe that various measures should be put in place to ensure that when that legislation does pass that there are safety measures put in place and that the health and safety of all Manitobans, particularly our young people, is taken into consideration.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government has adopted a public health approach which regard—with regard to federal legalization of cannabis. The federal government has signalled its intention to introduce legislation next week. The Cannabis Harm Prevention Act is a critical interim step to minimize the harm related to drug-impaired driving and ensure measures are in place to protect children and youth from the exposure to cannabis.

Our government would like to take the opportunity today to thank experts in public health and addictions, licensed medical marijuana producers, the law enforcement community and others who participated in our broad consultation process. Their feedback has been invaluable, and we look forward to their advice as we continue to prepare for the legalization of cannabis.

We would like to recognize our team of public servants who comprise our interdepartmental working group. We have been working together for months to continue to work across government to prepare for the legalization of cannabis. We appreciate their focus and dedication to this file.

I would also like to thank our caucus subcommittee and its chair, the MLA for St. James, and the many other caucus colleagues who sit on that committee. I want to thank them for all of the work that they have done. The insight provided through the leadership of the MLA for St. James and through his group will continue and is instrumental as part of this process. And I want to thank them very much for all the work that they've done.

* (15:40)

The Cannabis Harm Prevention Act is a first step in the broader work our team is undertaking to prepare for federal legalization of cannabis. The legislation acts on the issues we raised last August with the federal task force on cannabis legalization and regulation and in our written submission provided to the task force in Ottawa.

In November 2016, our government committed in the Throne Speech to develop a legislative and regulatory framework that will protect children and youth from exposure to cannabis and its use, minimize harm to users and address the dangers of drug-impaired driving. This legislation keeps this commitment made to Manitoba families.

We have heard from the law enforcement community regarding their support for the tools in this legislation to address impaired driving, and we thank them for their guidance and service. Michelle Gawronsky, president of the MGEU, has said, and I quote: We are very pleased the government is talking about the legalization of marijuana and taking steps to ensure public safety is kept in the highest regard. The legislation is focussed on ensuring Manitobans are not allowed to smoke marijuana in public places, indoors, or in vehicles, as well it addresses the issue

of driving while high. These are fundamental matters of public safety. End quote.

Andrew Murie, chief executive officer of Mothers Against Drunk Driving Canada, has provided a letter of support that reads, and I quote: I am writing today on behalf of MADD Canada and our Manitoba chapter and community leader volunteers and members to express our strong support for Bill 25, The Cannabis Harm Prevention Act. We thank you and the government of Manitoba for taking action to reduce the risks posed by drug driving—drug drivers in advance of forthcoming federal legislation to legalize marijuana. The measures proposed in Bill 25 include the 24-hour licence suspension for drivers believed to be under the influence of drugs, the possibility of additional sanctions for drivers in the graduated licensing program, and laws regarding carrying and consuming cannabis in a vehicle will aid law enforcement and taking drug drivers off the roads, and will reinforce the message that driving under the influence of cannabis is dangerous and unacceptable. We commend your government for this proactive approach to ensuring drug driving measures are in place before the federal government legalizes the recreational use of marijuana. End quote.

So we want to thank them for their support and the many, many other Manitobans who we have spoken to in the consultation process up until now. And it's important to mention at this time that all of the consultation process hasn't taken place to date; this is going to be an ongoing process. We wanted to take a proactive approach at this time because we felt it was in the best interest of public health and safety for all Manitobans, and that's why we brought this legislation forward and we've done some consultation to date. But this is by no means the end of the consultation that will take place in this process.

So I want to thank all of those people who have been involved to date within this process and for their support and guidance to date.

The Cannabis Harm Prevention Act amends The Child Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking Act, The Mental Health Act, The Public Schools Act, to close loopholes that may be created as a result of legalization. These are important amendments needed to sustain vital protections for youth and the most vulnerable in our society.

The amendment to The Child Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking Act ensures the legalization continues to apply to individuals who

use cannabis as a tool to exploit or traffic another person. Amendment to The Mental Health Act confirms residential patients who are not allowed to receive illicit drugs will continue to be prohibited from obtaining cannabis. An amendment to The Public Schools Act clarifies that students using, possessing, or being under the influence of cannabis while at school could still face disciplinary consequences, even if the federal government legalizes cannabis.

And I want to just digress for a moment and say that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I came from a funeral this afternoon where I had many, many people come up to me and say how happy they are that we are bringing forward this legislation. I had a teacher who came forward who teaches high school in our community, and she said that parents and teachers are very concerned about the legalization of marijuana, in particular how it affects young people in our society. And their message today was: What can we do to stand behind you to protect our children in our schools, our children in our province, because what you're doing now by bringing forward this legislation is ensuring that there's safety, ensuring their health and ensuring that they are given the proper tools that they need to understand the consequences of drug-impaired driving?

I think, in many ways, what the message was today, in particular from the teacher, is that many of these students don't realize that the consequences—that it's wrong to get behind a wheel high. You know, they recognize, because of the public awareness campaign that they've seen throughout the province for many, many years, they recognize that drunk driving is unacceptable and it's—and how dangerous it is. But, in many ways, those young people do not understand the harm that can happen as a result of driving high. And so I think it's incumbent upon all of us to work together as a community, to work together with the opposition, to all members of this House, to teachers, to parents and community activists, we need to work together to ensure the safety and health of our young people.

The Cannabis Harm Prevention Act ensures existing restrictions on smoking and vaping apply consistently when the same activity involves cannabis. Similar measures have been adopted in Ontario and New Brunswick.

The federal government has introduced legislation in the Senate that aligns vaping restrictions with those that apply to smoking. The legislation

takes a broad approach to defining vaping product and, on preliminary review, appears to capture cannabis. The federal legislation has a number of goals, including ensuring vaping would be subject to the same prohibitions as smoking in federally regulated workplaces. These common-sense restrictions, including The Cannabis Harm Prevention Act, are an important part of our government's commitment to ensure measures are in place to protect children and youth from exposure to cannabis.

The Cannabis Harm Prevention Act provides for significant changes to The Highway Traffic Act and related legislation to ensure police agencies are better equipped to deal with drug-impaired drivers. This legislation recognizes that impairment is not impacted by distinctions of legal or illegal, recreation or prescription. For those who use cannabis and then choose to get behind the wheel, the result is the same: driver impairment.

In 2012, there were 2,546 road-crash deaths in Canada. Six hundred and fourteen deaths, or 24.1 per cent, occurred in crashes involving drivers with a positive drug reading. Cannabis was the drug most frequently found. Four hundred and seven deaths, or 16 per cent, occurred in crashes involving drivers with positive readings for both alcohol and drugs. But behind these numbers are real people, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and real families who are grieving the loss of a father, a daughter, a mother, a son, and these are the people that we need to protect in our society.

Manitoba Public Insurance found one in 10 Manitoba drivers who participated in voluntary roadside surveys conducted last fall tested positive for drugs, cannabis being the most prevalent of all of those. Breath and saliva samples collected voluntarily from 1,230 drivers last fall indicated that 124 drivers, or 10 per cent, tested positive for some form of drug. More than half, or 53 per cent, of those drivers with drugs present in their system tested positive for cannabis.

The Cannabis Harm Prevention Act would allow for an administrative 24-hour driver's licence suspension if a police officer has reasonable grounds to believe the driver is under the influence of a drug and unable to safely operate a motor vehicle.

* (15:50)

The legislation requires the Registrar of Motor Vehicles to determine if graduated licensed drivers who receive a 24-hour suspension should face further

consequences. The bill creates an offence for consuming marijuana in a vehicle that is on a highway.

The legislation requires cannabis to be stored in a secure compartment, for example, the vehicle's trunk or hatch, so that it is inaccessible to people in the vehicle. These common sense restrictions follow the same long established requirements around the transportation of open liquor in our vehicles, and we believe that it's the right approach here as well.

The proposed restrictions on transportation of cannabis are consistent with how cannabis products are currently transported through the mail by licensed producers of medical cannabis to their clients across the country.

Often we find disagreement, Mr. Deputy Speaker, between our side of the House and the members opposite as we debate issues of public safety and—sorry, of public policy. This is not only to be expected, but is to be embraced as part of our democratic society. There are times, however, when we need to show unity to confront challenges—challenging issues of our time.

Cannabis use among Canadian youth is already among the highest in the world. The Canadian Medical Association submission to the federal Task Force on Cannabis Legalization and Regulation reads, and I quote: Marijuana use is linked to several adverse health outcomes, including addiction, cardiovascular and pulmonary effects; example—chronic bronchitis, mental illness, and other problems including cognitive impairment and reduced educational attainment. There seems to be an increased risk of chronic psychosis disorders including schizophrenia in persons with a predisposition to such disorders. The use of high potency products, higher frequency of use, and early initiation are predictors of worse health outcomes.

The lifetime risk of dependence to marijuana is estimated at about 9 per cent, increasing to almost 17 per cent in those who initiate use in adolescence. In 2012 about 1.3 per cent of people aged 15 and over met the criteria for marijuana abuse and dependence—double that of any other drugs due to the high prevalence of marijuana use.

Another area of great concern is that of impairment in the operation of vehicles as well as the performing of work in an unsafe manner. There is an

increased risk of motor vehicle collisions up to six hours after use, depending on method of use, dose, and tolerance. End quote.

Despite these findings by medical experts, the Canadian youth perceptions on Canada—or, sorry, on cannabis study conducted by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse found that young people think marijuana is neither addictive nor harmful. Some youth self-prescribe marijuana. Many young people believe marijuana is less impairing than alcohol when it comes to driving, and that certainly goes to what I heard, when I was at the funeral this afternoon, from many parents and the one teacher that I had the opportunity to speak with, and I want to thank them for their input and I've encouraged them to reach out to others in the community to provide input back to us in our government.

Legalization of recreational cannabis is coming. We must work together to take reasonable and responsible steps to prepare. It is my sincere hope that all members will join us in ensuring measures are in place to protect children and youth from exposure to cannabis. Equally, I hope all members will join us in implementing reasoned and responsible interim steps to address drug-impaired driving.

For those who choose to use cannabis recreationally or for medical purposes, endorsement of this legislation would be a powerful statement of their support for responsible use of cannabis on the eve of legalization.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with those few words, I welcome any questions that members opposite have with respect to this very important bill that outlines the importance of health and safety for Manitobans.

Thank you very much.

Questions

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A question period up to 15 minutes will be held.

Questions may be addressed to the minister by any members of the following sequence: first question by the official opposition critic or designate; subsequent questions asked by each independent member; remaining questions asked by the opposition members; and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I'm—of course, the New Democrats have been calling on this minister and this government to do the background work and to

prepare for the prospect of legalization of cannabis by the federal government. But the bill has not yet been introduced and the minister, in her comments just now, has acknowledged that some consultation has occurred but there is more consultation yet to come, and indeed the consultation will be an ongoing process.

She also indicated, when she introduced the bill, this is the first bill of its kind in Canada. Why are we proceeding now with a bill before we know what is going to be contained in federal legislation, which the minister says may be coming as early as next week?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): The reason why we're introducing this is to get ahead of issues like public health and safety to protect all Manitobans and, in particular, our youth. And we know that legislation, federally, will be introduced as early as next week. What we don't know is all the particular contents within that bill, so there are certain areas with respect to production and distribution and so on that we are not speaking about today.

But we felt that it was very important, in the instance where the legalization came about without having those checks and balances in place, we need to make sure that those checks and balances are in place for the health and safety of all Manitobans.

Mr. Swan: Well, thank you. I'd just like to pursue that a bit more.

Yes, we understand that there's a lot of work that needs to be done to prepare. Does the minister really believe that this bill is going to work its way through Parliament, including a trip to the Senate, that quickly, and does the minister believe that the federal government will not be providing a reasonable amount of time for provinces and territories to prepare for the formal legalization of cannabis?

Mrs. Stefanson: I want to thank the member for the question and, certainly, it is a good one in timing. But I think, as he knows—I mean, he has been in the position that I'm in as having been the Justice minister before. It's sometimes difficult to predict what the federal government is going to do in terms of timing.

They have indicated—we know what they have indicated to us. They have indicated that they will be introducing legislation to legalize marijuana next week. They have talked about some timing in terms of when that legalization will take place. Of course,

we were not given that indication of a particular time frame until after this legislation was introduced.

We believe, first and foremost, in the safety and health of all Manitobans. That's exactly what this bill does and we hope that members opposite will support us in that.

Mr. Swan: I was pleased to hear the minister's comments that it's her belief that this should be treated as a public health issue, and New Democrats certainly support that view. But, if that is the case, can the minister explain why she wouldn't have taken the time to consult with people who rely upon medical cannabis for their own physical and mental well-being before introducing this bill?

Mrs. Stefanson: I want to thank the member for the question. And, in fact, we have met with the College of Physicians and Surgeons; we've met with CancerCare Manitoba; we've met with many groups, organizations; we've met with producers of medical marijuana. We've had extensive discussions across the country with respect to this, and I think it's very important here to understand that this is about safety and health of Manitobans—in particular, about safety.

And, when we're talking about impaired driving, in particular, it doesn't matter, in our opinion, whether or not it's medical marijuana or marijuana. If someone is impaired and then gets 'betwined'—behind the wheel and they drive, it's simply wrong and we need to protect Manitobans. That's what this legislation does.

Mr. Swan: Well, I understand what the minister is saying. But the fact of the matter is that there is no provision, in anywhere in this legislation, not just The Drivers and Vehicles Act that the member is—the minister's talking about, there is no provision at all for the use—the responsible use of medical cannabis, including cannabis which is not smoked but is rendered down to an oil or other product.

* (16:00)

Is this minister agreeable to having an open dialogue and perhaps working to improve Bill 25 to improve the health of Manitobans in a way that will not impair the safety of Manitobans?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I think the member should know full well that, of course, medical marijuana laws are regulated federally with respect to those issues, but certainly we are willing and open to talk to anyone who wants to talk to us about the importance of health and safety issues for Manitoba

and when it comes to impaired-driving issues, when it comes to this upcoming bill that we are expecting next week from the federal government in legalization of marijuana.

We have spoken to many groups, organizations in Manitoba and across the country. We believe that safety and health concerns of Manitobans and Canadians are paramount. That's exactly what this legislation does. We hope that members opposite will support us.

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

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): The minister, I presume, will step up testing for marijuana. I wonder if the minister can talk about that, but also it would seem to me that there should also be, if that's going to happen, a step-up of testing for cocaine and opioids, and I just wondered why these are not covered at the same time and what the minister's plans are.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I want to thank the member for the question.

It's something, of course, we've been asking, and I know that law enforcement groups, the RCMP—we've spoken with a number of groups, organizations—are working across the country to see—and, indeed, in other countries as well—to see what they do in terms of the testing, the roadside testing. That has not been developed as of yet in terms of the level of impairment, and that's why we just believe that in this legislation we needed to give the tools to the police officers, the ability to remove people—the licence from people for 24 hours if they believe that they're impaired because it's—the safety of Manitobans is paramount.

But I want to thank the member for his question. It's a very important one, and it's ongoing research that will take place.

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

Mr. Swan: Yes, well, we will look forward to a discussion of this bill at committee, and, again, I would ask the minister if she's prepared to, again, listen carefully to what users of medical cannabis have to say. An example of that is the provision which says that medical cannabis cannot be transported in the cab of a vehicle. When we get to committee, I expect the minister will hear from parents who actually require medical cannabis

products to deal with seizures that children may have, and I've been told that it's actually going to be dangerous for them to have to stop the car and run around and open their trunk in order to get a cannabis product out to assist their child.

Again, is the minister prepared to consider reasonable amendments which will improve the health without—

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

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, absolutely. We are certainly open to any Manitoban; that's why we're very proud of the committee process in Manitoba where Manitobans can come forward and express their views and opinions on certain things. And the member opposite knows full well we have learned many things from many people over the years, or certainly I have, at committee, and sometimes they bring some perspectives that are different and we learn things from those people. And I respect those opinions and so on, but first and foremost we need to ensure the safety of Manitobans and the health of Manitobans. So I look forward to the discussion at committee, and, certainly, we're open to speaking with and hearing from all Manitobans with respect to health and safety issues around the legalization of cannabis.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister's time is up.

Mr. Swan: Yes, we certainly support measures to deal with impaired driving, and I want to pursue something the member for River Heights was asking just a few minutes ago. Right now, when it comes to alcohol, we have a certain number, both under the Criminal Code but also under provincial legislation, 0.08 and 0.05, respectively.

Can the minister speak about any kind of objective measure that she believes could be in place with respect to the level of active ingredients in cannabis that would impair public safety, because that is going to be important to determine what is an appropriate level of safety for Manitobans?

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the member for the question. It is a good one.

I am by no means an expert when it comes to cannabis, and I think what we need to do is rely on the experts out there that know a lot more than we do about levels of toxicity within various drugs, including in cannabis, and so we will be—we will continue, as we have said. This is by no means the

be-all and end-all of legislation in Manitoba. This is the start of a long dialogue that we will have with experts across this country and around the world to—with respect to the issues that the member opposite is talking about. And we certainly are open too. If he has any of his own suggestions, as well, with respect to that, then we're open to those suggestions—

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

Mr. Swan: Well, we speak with experts—I mean, is the minister suggesting that Manitoba will consult its own experts on determining what an appropriate level of impairment would be, or is the Manitoba government simply going to adopt whatever happens to be in the federal legislation this minister believes is coming forward in the near future?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, we'll wait to see what the federal legislation says, but it's our understanding right now that there is—they have not developed that tool that they can use at the roadside to establish the toxicity in a person with respect to drug impairment.

So we will continue to work with people all across the country, around the world, any experts. It's not just local to Manitoba; this is across the country. We will be having those discussions at our FPT meetings; that's the federal-provincial-territorial meetings coming up. But I—but this will be an ongoing dialogue with my counterparts across the country and around the world.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that, and we appreciate that it is going to be an ongoing dialogue, and certainly, the controls that have been put in place to prevent alcohol-impaired driving did not spring overnight, and it's appreciated there's going to be some movement along the way.

That gets back to the question that I posed though. If we don't yet know what the federal legislation is going to be, aren't we going to be potentially back as soon as this fall to amend this piece of legislation, depending on what may or may not be contained in the federal law?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think, first and foremost, what we do know right now—and we can only control what we do know—what we do know is that the federal government is going to be introducing legislation next week that will be legalizing marijuana.

What we don't have—and we had encouraged the federal government not to introduce such legislation until there was some sort of a measurement in place

in terms of to be able to detect the toxicity level of those, particularly in the areas of impaired driving. That, as I understand, is not happening yet from what we have heard from the RCMP and others who are working on this. And so that will probably not be in the legislation. And that's why, even more so we need to pass this legislation to ensure the safety and health of Manitobans.

Mr. Swan: Well, if it is so important, then why would this bill not contain any rules or any direction on how cannabis will be sold and regulated in the province of Manitoba?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, we're waiting for—there was, of course, the task force that came forward. But we know that the federal government has been somewhat, you know, they've been negative in certain components of that—of the task force report. And so we really, at this stage, have no idea what will end up in the legislation that will be tabled next week. So with respect to distribution, production, so on, I'm sure there'll probably be some parameters in there. It would be, you know, it would be premature, perhaps, to look at those areas. Certainly, we did not feel that it's ever premature to put checks and balances in place to ensure the safety and health of Manitobans. That's exactly what this bill does.

Mr. Swan: Well, we certainly will—we'll stand with this minister on provisions that do enhance the safety and security of Manitobans. But I'm just, again, I—maybe it's just a different theme, but I just don't understand why the minister believes what's contained in this bill is not premature, yet other important provisions regarding the sale and distribution, which is another very, very big question and very important for public safety, would be premature. And I just wonder if the minister could try to reconcile that for me before we enter into debate on the bill.

*(16:10)

Mrs. Stefanson: I want to thank my honourable friend for the question. And, of course, nothing is premature to introduce in Manitoba that has to do with the health and safety of Manitobans, in particular, our young people. And I saw that more and more today, just this afternoon, in visiting with parents, visiting with teachers, having done the consultation process in our province and spoken with people across the country and some of my counterparts across the country in what they're hearing. And what they're hearing, as well, is that,

you know, public safety and health is first and foremost what we need to do to ensure that.

So we wanted to take a proactive approach for Manitobans, and that's exactly what we've done to ensure the public's health and safety of all Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The time for question period has expired.

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for debate.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): This is an important conversation to have, and I expect, as the minister says, and I'll take her at the—her word, that this is the first legislation of its kind in Canada. I think all of us as legislators who'll be speaking to this bill need to think about this carefully, and we need to make sure that if this bill is to go forward that it is the best possible piece of law available given some of the challenges that we have in debating this bill before we even know what the federal government is going to do.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

When it comes to cannabis I think that every member of this Legislature has, and is entitled to have, their own opinion on the wisdom or the lack of wisdom, the choices that the federal government's going to make, and I think I can agree with the Minister of Justice that it really wouldn't matter what the Minister of Justice or the opposition Justice critic had to say, the federal government is going to go ahead and do what they intend to do.

There was a promise by the Trudeau government that they would move to legalize marijuana, and I do appreciate, and I—frankly, I have some sympathy for the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson) as we now wait to see what the government is going to do and how best for Manitoba to respond to it. And we, on the one hand, hear from the minister that it is absolutely necessary to move forward with this bill, yet we also hear from the minister that it's not necessary to consider other important pieces that would have to be in place before the legalization of marijuana can happen in a safe way in the province of Manitoba.

So I believe that although there are many provisions of this bill that are very good and very strong and I expect would be the right laws for Manitoba, there are some other provisions that we think can be improved, and there are some other

factors and some other things that need to be taken into account before the bill is passed.

Now, maybe there will be more clarity after the federal government introduces its legislation, but even that bill can be changed through the committee process or through amendments within the House of Commons. We know that when bills go to the Senate, sometimes they never come back. And I don't know what will happen in the Senate. We know the Senate has been able for years and years to hold up other good legislation, for example, providing transgender rights, gender identity rights to a people; that bill has descended once again into the Senate and we're not sure when or if it's ever going to return.

So I am hopeful that there will be provided by the federal government reasonable terms. I think it would be reasonable for the federal government to give provinces and territories time to make sure that they are able to put the necessary protections in place, the allowances in place, and have reasonable provisions for the sale and distribution within each province. And provinces may make different choices. I don't know what this minister and this government has in mind, but we want to make sure that whatever is done is done with certainly an eye on safety and security, but also on the idea that if, indeed, the government moves to legalize cannabis that it should be, I suppose, equally accessible to Canadians who want to purchase it across the country, those Canadians who are over the age of 18, may I add.

If the Liberal government moves in the way that I believe we expect they're going to, cannabis is going to be treated very much like alcohol and like tobacco, which are other substances which are controlled which can have an impact on safety, which can have an impact on health, and I think it's fair to say that cannabis would be one of those categories. Of course, what is different about cannabis than the others, is that, first of all, with respect to tobacco, which has, aside from obviously important ceremonial and important spiritual importances, tobacco doesn't have any redeeming health qualities that we know of.

On the other hand, we have heard from, we are hearing from and we are going to continue to hear from Manitobans and Canadians who will, I believe, be telling members of this Legislature, in very clear and perhaps in very emotional and very difficult language, that medical cannabis is important to them. It's important to them for their physical health and

their mental health. And, although I agree with the minister that we want to make sure that their access to medical cannabis does not create any concerns as to safety, at the same time, we want to make sure that restrictions being placed on cannabis do not prevent those people from access to medicine which may be very important to themselves or to their families.

And that is the balance that the minister has to deal with. And, to this point, the bill is not balanced. The bill does not take into account the needs of those who require medical cannabis for themselves or for their families. I don't think that's enough to stop the bill from moving ahead, but I think it is going to be very important for the minister to listen. And we'll hear from a lot of people at committee, and I'm hopeful that the minister will listen to their suggestions and their ideas. And I'm sure that this bill can be improved and it can be improved in a way that will not impair safety but also make sure that the health benefits for certain Manitobans can be fully preserved, and they will not be prevented from using cannabis in a safe and appropriate way.

Now, we know that the current system has not worked especially well. And, in terms of medical marijuana, I'm certain the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson) has been briefed on some of the difficulties that the federal government has had in a proper, intelligent, effective management of medical cannabis. And, in many times, what has happened is that the medical cannabis system has resulted in frustrations and difficulties for those who require medical cannabis, and it has, unfortunately, also been a back door for people to move ahead with the illegal distribution and the illegal use of cannabis. With this new law that we anticipate from the federal government, that management will be reduced, and it will then fall upon the Province to do more to deal with it. And that's why this bill is so truly important.

So we know that there are many individuals who feel very strongly about this issue one way or the other. And we have a very democratic committee system. We will have Manitobans coming down, giving their views on this, and I think that can be a very positive thing if the government is prepared to listen.

The second major area I do want to speak about is road safety. And I do agree with the Minister of Justice that there is a real question of road safety, and I would agree with her if she was to say that having another legal intoxicant requires measures by the federal government and by the provincial

government to make sure that the legalization of cannabis is not going to put people at risk. And that is fair.

One of the challenges that I think the minister has acknowledged, that I've asked about, is that right now we do not have a very clear picture of exactly where the question of safety arises. And perhaps that's because governments have been very reluctant, over the years, to actually fund research and actually get an answer to the question of whether a trace of cannabis in somebody's system should prevent them from driving if it's the day after they may have used cannabis, if it's three days after they've used cannabis or if it's three weeks after they've used cannabis. And, as the Minister of Justice has said, and she's been very honest about this, she's not an expert in the field; she's not a doctor. I'm not an expert in the field, and I'm not a doctor. I think we want to make sure that we do use the best available information to decide where that line should be.

And the bill contains some provisions which, by and large, enhance safety but which could wind up being a problem for some Manitobans. And, right now, this bill would not have any quantification of what level of the active ingredients in cannabis in someone's system would make them unsafe to drive. And I agree with MADD Canada, I agree with law enforcement, I agree with others that we want to make sure people are driving safely.

* (16:20)

At the same time, I would not want to see a trace amount of cannabis wind up being the reason why someone loses their licence. And that is what could happen under this bill as it's currently drafted. The bill would provide that if somebody is, in the view of the—of a peace officer, impaired by cannabis, they lose their licence for 24 hours. They could also lose their licence for a longer period of time if they are charged with being impaired.

If someone is clearly driving in an unsafe manner, absolutely. We would—we stand with this one hundred per cent. If it is somebody who tests positive for a very small amount of the active ingredients of cannabis, that becomes a problem.

And the bill itself will say that if somebody is under the graduated licensing system, which means that they are a new driver—in fact, for the first five years of driving—many of those are young people. Many of those are people over the age of 18 who receive their driver's licences, many new Canadians,

many others who are only getting their driver's licence. Not only can they get a 24-hour suspension for a trace amount of cannabis, but they can actually have their licence privileges suspended by the registrar, which is actually a very, very big sanction for someone who may be attending university, somebody who may be out in the workforce.

I don't think the minister intends, and I don't think anybody in this Legislature wants, someone who tests positive for a very trace amount of the active ingredients in cannabis to wind up losing their licence and perhaps either lose their educational opportunity or lose their job.

And I respect very much the research that's done by MADD Canada, and I have read their recent publications. They are a leader on this. And, Madam Speaker, I'm sure you've had the opportunity to see the work that MADD Canada does. Andrew Murie, the individual who is named by the minister, is a very, very effective advocate, somebody who, certainly, I put trust in and who I know is going to be a part of not just what we do in Manitoba, what we're going to do federally.

And they did a paper, actually just over a year ago, about the need for new measures to detect drug-impaired drivers being greater. I agree completely. The problem is that right now, we don't seem to have an adequate, effective measure of testing people roadside to know whether they are or they are not a threat to public safety.

And, if the minister wants to say to the federal government that is a reason to give a longer amount of time so this can be properly studied, I think I would support that. If the federal government is going to come forward in their bill with some more quantifiable measures that would justify someone losing their licence or otherwise having sanctions, we will welcome that. We don't know today in this Legislature exactly what those measures will be.

And I think we can all agree in this House that the use of cannabis can make someone unsafe to drive. I think the evidence is also there, although not very clear, that someone who tests positive for only a trace amount, who may not have used cannabis for a long period of time, even though they may still register as having some in their bloodstream, that does not make them unsafe to drive.

And it's why it's more difficult than simply measuring for alcohol, because, again, over time, we've developed very good measures to test alcohol:

first, roadside, by blowing into a breathalyzer; and secondly, by then giving a blood sample, which then provides a snapshot of the level of alcohol in the person's blood.

That does not exist right now, as far as I know, when it comes to testing for cannabis, and that is a challenge. It is a challenge for safety, and I appreciate the position the minister is in. It is the bigger challenge for the federal government who's going to have to fully explain what it is that they are doing to make sure that the best possible laws come forward.

And I know the minister talked about the work that Manitoba Public Insurance had done, and in that report that was released a couple of months ago, they said that one in 10 drivers who'd voluntarily submitted to tests had tested positive for drugs. Again, we don't know what that means. I don't think that means that one in 10 Manitobans were impaired and unsafe to drive.

We do know that one in 10 Manitobans that were tested had some trace of drugs, most of those being cannabis, in their system. Does that mean that they should have their licences taken away or have other sanctions? I don't think so. Does it mean that we do need good, objective measures and strong laws? Well, of course it does—of course it does.

So we are going to learn a lot more about what is a difficult issue, and, again, individual members of this House can have their own views on whether the federal government is moving in the right direction or the wrong direction, and that's entirely reasonable.

I look forward to hear what other members have to say about this. I appreciate the work the member for St. James (Mr. Johnston) did on the task force. I haven't seen any report or anything else from that. Perhaps he or the minister would be prepared to share that with me before the bill goes to committee.

It sounds like, from what the minister is saying, there is still a lot of work to do, and it sounds like she acknowledges there needs to be more consultation. She's told us that consultation needs to be an ongoing process, which is not necessarily a great fit for the way bills move through the Legislature because if we are to pass the bill on to committee and then pass the bill on from committee to return to this House, we won't necessarily know where that consultation is going.

So we'll have to take it at the minister's word that she's going to listen to people. I've heard from folks

who say that she has not been prepared to listen to this point, but we can certainly, hopefully, move ahead and get something better.

So, in conclusion, Madam Speaker, I agree that it is very important for the Province to move ahead. We believe, as New Democrats, that part of the discussion has to be the way in which the sale and the distribution of cannabis happens as well. We believe that we already have a publicly owned Crown corporation, Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries, which already has experience in dealing with a substance which is legal but which is controlled.

We've heard evidence and discussions from people who say that the Liquor Mart is not the place to sell or to buy cannabis, which may very well be the case, but the government has a real opportunity to use expertise that already exists in Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries to deal with another legal yet controlled substance. And I encourage the government, I encourage the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson), I encourage the Minister responsible for Crown Services, to take this seriously and, hopefully, come up with a public system which would give people confidence in the distribution and the sale, which may allow the government to earn revenue which will cover what we know will be some additional costs which the Minister of Justice was talking about just today, to try to come up with the best possible system.

So there is more work to do on this bill before it goes to committee. I believe we need to know more about the consultation. We need to hear more about what the results of the task force committee was all about, but we will look forward to making sure that this bill is in place before any federal legislation is in place that would actually legalize cannabis.

So, with those words, I think we're just starting on the path. This is a challenging issue. I have some understanding of the minister's challenges. We will be very prepared to work to make sure we have the best possible laws as our job as the official opposition. We want to make sure safety is preserved but also that we don't go too far in the other direction.

So I thank you, Madam Speaker, for a chance to speak with this important bill.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, a few comments on this legislation.

First of all, I'd like to compliment the minister for trying to be ahead of the game here and to bring

forward some legislation. I think that is positive. On the other hand, I think that we have quite a journey to go with this. I think there are a lot of details which will need to be adjusted or changed as we hear more from people and as we learn the details of the specific federal legislation.

So I think that the—let me lay out some of the concerns that we would have. One is that since the federal bill is coming very soon we clearly need to see that bill before we actually pass this legislation into law. It may require significant change. It may be that it will have to go back and be reintroduced as a new bill, but I think that it is, notwithstanding the fact that we have something on the table which we can discuss, which is good, I think that we need to be ready to make sure that we have a bill which is the best it can be.

* (16:30)

Second, we're concerned over whether this is going to adequately reflect the needs and views of those who are using marijuana for medical purposes. I think this is a really critical issue, and I think it's going to be very important that we're hearing from individuals who use marijuana for medical purposes at the committee stage. And so we can get their views and their concerns or not, as it may be, with this legislation so that we make sure that it works not just as—being very careful about who is driving in our province, but it also works from the point of view in ensuring that people who need cannabis for medical purposes are also well served by this legislation.

In terms of roadside diagnostic—or testing, my understanding is that the testing actually may be moving along and be ready in the not-too-distant future. But that's something that we will have to see and is considerably more accurate than some of the testing which is being used in the United States and found to be very questionable. And so, if that is the case, then we are going to be better positioned. But I think it's also really important that whatever happens in terms of testing for cannabis that we are also being very vigilant with regard to opioids and cocaine and other drugs which may result in impaired driving.

And so that there is a more comprehensive look, I believe, that's essential to have in terms of factors which can impair driving and how we should be dealing with these, and what is the best way to be doing that.

There is, I think, an important opportunity at the committee stage to hear from many different groups.

This legislation deals with the situation in schools, and I certainly want to—and in public places, and I think that it's very important that we have input from students in terms of how this legislation is going to work and what their views are on this legislation.

So I will look forward to public discussion at committee stage. But I do believe that we need to proceed cautiously and that we should not hold the committee meeting, quite frankly, until we have actually got the federal bill on the table as well, because I think that will impact considerably the views presented at committee stage.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Official Opposition House Leader): I move, seconded by the member for Logan (Ms. Marcelino), that debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 28—The Public Services Sustainability Act

Madam Speaker: We will now move, as indicated earlier, to Bill 28, The Public Services Sustainability Act.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson), that Bill 28, The Public Services Sustainability Act; Loi sur la viabilité des services publics, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of the House.

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 Finance, seconded by the honourable Minister of Justice, that Bill 28, The Public Services Sustainability 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 was tabled.

Mr. Friesen: It is my pleasure to put a few comments on the record in respect of Bill 28, which is a new legislation that would ensure that the government's public sector compensation does not exceed the ability of Manitobans to sustain services to its citizens.

Madam Speaker, we have made clear to all Manitobans that we are faced with some historic challenges at this time in our province. The growth in public expenditures has continued to outpace

growth in revenues; this cannot be sustained. We said earlier today that on this path it is inevitable that Manitoba would arrive at a \$1.7-billion deficit by the year 2019-2020 if this trend was not addressed. Our government has inherited serious financial challenges and unsustainable growth in expenditures. It is clear that status quo approaches are not working and that ignoring the problem for years put Manitoba on a path to record deficits that threatened our Province's ability to sustain public services for Manitobans.

I think back to just over a year ago and the previous government indicating that they would bring a budget that would result in a deficit of just over \$400 million, and in their first-quarter report last year, they revised it to just over \$500 million, and in their third-quarter report they finally revised it to over \$600 million, and in the Public Accounts, of course, their deficit for their—that final year was recorded at over \$800 million, almost \$850 million, arguably, a record deficit for the province of Manitoba with the possible exception of the year of the flood, depending on how you did the accounting. It is clear that year over year, the government continued to spend more than it took in. The government did not hit its revenue—or its expenditure targets and it outspent its planned budget each and every year that it was in power.

Madam Speaker, we have to acknowledge that public—civil service compensation is a significant expenditure for the government of Manitoba. Manitoba public sector has an estimated total payroll—pay and benefits—of just under \$10 billion: \$9.6 billion with approximately \$1.1 billion related to core government departments and approximately \$8.5 billion allocated to the broader public sector.

In order to balance the budget, which is the intent of this government, there has to be greater certainty; there must be greater sustainability surrounding employee compensation. The means of establishing this certainty is to set out expectations in legislation.

Madam Speaker, we must make clear why it matters. It matters because if we do not hit our targets, if we do not aim toward balance and then drive results that will put this province in balance, we will continue to be a jurisdiction in which there are higher taxes—and we are already one of the highest tax jurisdictions in all of Canada, the highest tax jurisdiction west of Quebec. There will continue to be credit downgrades resulting in millions and

millions of dollars more to service our annual borrowing requirements, sending money out of the province to moneylenders from Toronto and New York, and we will continue to have the same failing and unrepaired front-line services, the services that Manitobans depend on and expect and deserve.

So, Madam Speaker, this is the path of sustainability. Our opponents would try to suggest that this is a path towards something that would be mean-spirited; it could not be further from the truth. This is how we maintain front-line services. This is how we invest in our front-line services. This is how we make those services sustainable, not just for today but for tomorrow, for our children, for our children's children. The purpose of this bill is to reflect the fiscal reality of the situation the new government has inherited.

* (16:40)

The purpose of this bill is to set out the principles of responsible fiscal management and the need to protect the sustainability of front-line services.

The purpose of this bill is to support meaningful collective bargaining within this fiscal context, and the purpose of this bill is to create a framework for future increases to public sector compensation and medical fees and to authorize a portion of savings that are achieved, sustainability savings identified through that collective bargaining process to fund possible additional increases in compensation.

This legislation is fair. This legislation is balanced. This legislation is moderate. This legislation is time limited and proceeds on a basis of rolling agreement terminations. In other words, it respects the principles of collective bargaining. It respects the place of the mediator and of conciliator and other features of the bargaining process. It respects the need for public service compensation to be part of the conversation that we are drawing all Manitobans into.

It is not enough to suggest somehow that government should concern itself only with efficiencies and work on the edges. It's not a reasonable path, and we believe that we have brought a reasonable bill that reasonable-Manitobans are reasonable people, and they will, we believe, perceive it that way as we continue to have this dialogue and conversation.

So we welcome this debate. We welcome the opportunity to indicate to Manitobans that the bill

sets out defined limits on compensation. Think of it as thresholds or parameters for awards, limits on compensation increases and increases to medical fees and other payments during a four-year rolling sustainability period as follows: year 1, zero per cent; year 2, zero per cent; year 3, 0.75; and year 4, 1.0 per cent.

The scope of this bill would apply to core government departments, the broader public sector, Crown corporations, universities, colleges, school divisions, health organizations.

The bill confirms the government's commitment to the right of collective bargaining and the right to strike.

Audio system failure

Madam Speaker: Does the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) want to see if it's working?

Yes, just go ahead. I think it might be working.

Mr. Friesen: The collective agreement expired on March the 31st, 2016; the four-year sustainability period would begin retroactively to April 1st, 2016.

Arbitrators are expected to comply with maximum increases in compensation set out during the bill—during the four-year sustainability period. If an arbitration award exceeds the maximum increases in compensation, it is deemed to have no effect, and the legislated limits would be substituted.

The bill also recognizes also potential—other potential sustainability options. Through collective bargaining, sustainability savings options can still be negotiated between the union and the employer. A portion of those sustainability savings identified through that process may be used to fund possible additional increases in compensation.

The savings from these options must be ongoing. Sole discretion for approval of such options would be determined by the Treasury Board. Treasury Board will perform the duties in relation to this act to ensure compliance.

Madam Speaker, on November the 21st, 2016, the Speech from the Throne announced that this legislation would be introduced following consultation and dialogue in order to ensure that public sector compensation does not exceed the ability of Manitobans to sustain services. Consultation has been going on. Consultation will continue to go on with labour representatives. Labour representatives have committed to work with the government on a

plan to achieve a balanced budget. They disagree that legislation is necessary; however, in this fiscal environment, it will take a number of tough measures to return to balance.

In essence, Madam Speaker, this measure hits the reset button when it comes to compensation for the public sector in this province. It says that we have a serious challenge in front of us as a province. We have demonstrated, we will continue to demonstrate next week when we deliver the budget, that we will make progress on behalf of Manitobans, that we will move forth towards our goal, that we plan to hit our targets, that we expect to be judged and measured by Manitobans on our ability to hit our targets, but that, clearly, public sector compensation must be part of this equation.

If we are to return to balance, we have to address public sector compensation. This bill will help to control increases in compensation expenditures during this critical time. Compensation limits will ensure public services are sustained for the citizens of Manitoba without the need to increase taxes, without the need to increase new fees.

Madam Speaker, thank you for your consideration of this bill. I look forward to the debate.

Questions

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

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Could the Finance Minister please tell the House—there are a hundred—I estimate 120,000 public servants. Can he tell the House how many he consulted before he put this bill before the House?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): As I mentioned in my remarks, Madam Speaker, we continue to meet with labour officials. We began those meetings very shortly after taking office. One of my first meetings was actually with the president of MGEU. We have—we will continue to have those meetings. We committed to a series of meetings, and my officials even have the next one scheduled, I

believe, for a week or two from now. So our dialogue with labour has been ongoing from the very start. And this by no means indicates any change from that direction.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): The implementation of this bill over—is over quite a number of years, and one of the things, for example, that could happen is that you've got some collective—well, some employer—employees who will come under this legislation only starting April 2019, which means that it will go 'til about 2022.

What will happen if in 2022 you've got inflation at 10 per cent? They will be significantly disadvantaged compared with their counterparts who are now completed the process in which their wage increases were limited.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for his question.

We considered carefully the paths that we could take with this legislation. The member suggests that people would be impacted if there—if this only comes into effect with these rolling-start periods later on, and he's correct.

I would suggest to that member that members of the civil service and their compensation would be much more significantly affected if the decision were to proceed on a different basis to open contracts. That member will note that this bill respects negotiated contracts and does not seek to open them, unlike the approach of other jurisdictions across Canada.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): This bill sets out to control the wages of quite a large selection of people in the province of Manitoba. Perhaps the minister could explain to me why judges have been excluded specifically from having their compensation controlled.

* (16:50)

Mr. Friesen: That member will know that judges are excluded from this compensation, so also are members of the Legislative Assembly because their compensation is selected or adjudicated by a commissioner. That's why members of this Legislature have chosen to lead by example and to actually give back an anticipated COLA increase. That member were—will also understand that courts, court of appeals and Supreme Court have made decisions in the past in respect of wages for judges, and those decisions stand. And we felt those decisions had to be respected.

Mr. Allum: The title of the bill is The Public Services Sustainability Act, which, I would contend, is a contradiction in terms, almost an oxymoron. I wonder if the Finance Minister could explain for the House just what he means by sustainability in this context.

Mr. Friesen: In 2016-17, the budgeted deficit of the Manitoba government was \$911 million; the expenditure growth over the last number of years is simply unsustainable. Over a period from 2008-09, to 2015-16 the actual expenditures exceeded revenue in seven of eight years, and if left unchecked, it would lead to \$1.7-billion deficit. This legislation ensures that there is a path forward that is sustainable for us all to respect and be able to deliver front-line services, not just now but into the future.

Mr. Lindsey: Could the minister explain how he believes limiting, restricting compensation for front-line workers in this province will help attract quality workers, nurses that we're short, and doctors that we're short, how exactly limiting their chance to earn a better standard of living than somewhere else, how will this will attract people to this province?

Mr. Friesen: Well, let's be clear that part of our overall strategy as a government will be to grow the economy and that will serve to attract people to this jurisdiction. The Minister of Education's good work on repairing our MPNP system and driving down wait times will work to attract people to our province, addressing head-on the failed policies of the NDP when it came to attracting and retaining doctors in rural communities will help to attract people here because those policies didn't work. But on this measure, the member must understand that the period of time that we've set out is a four-year rolling period, I think is a reasonable one that our front-line workers will see as reasonable, especially in relation to approaches taken in Saskatchewan which are much more dramatic.

Mr. Allum: The section 12 of the bill outlines the maximum per cent increase for compensation. In year one, zero; in year two, zero; in year three, 0.75; year four, 1.0. Could the minister tell us if he negotiated this with labour unions or did he just make these numbers up?

Mr. Friesen: The bill sets out a four-year sustainability period in which there would be limited—think of it as a cap on maximum award possible. So the numbers in section 12 are exactly as the member has presented them. The member, though, should also bear in mind that in years three

and four through the ongoing dialogue between labour and employers, there is opportunity to identify sustainability savings and then to take those and apportion them so that a part of the achieved savings that are real and quantified can flow back into additional compensation awards.

Mr. Lindsey: I'm struggling how to put this in words because the minister clearly doesn't really understand the negotiating process. Can he explain how he believes that hitting someone with a sledgehammer first and telling them that you're going to get zero, you're going to get zero, now sit down and talk to us? Can he explain to me how he thinks that's going to work?

Mr. Friesen: Last week the government of Saskatchewan delivered their provincial budget and I noted that in the provincial budget for the province of Saskatchewan it included features like opening up contracts; it included wage rollbacks of 3.5 per cent for the civil service. We have chosen a different path. I don't accept the terms that the minister has said; I believe that Manitobans will see this for what it is. It is time limited, it is moderate, and it is incremental and it is fair.

Mr. Allum: Following along from my friend from Flin Flon's question, it seems to be that the minister's taken the approach where he will shoot first and then ask questions later. Labour movements made it exceptionally clear that they're not satisfied with the degree of consultation yet. Can he tell us—can he give assurances that there will be sufficient consultation going forward?

Mr. Friesen: We will continue to be in dialogue with labour union leaders as we have. And we've made very clear that this is a path forward that respects the collective bargaining process. It does not seek to run roughshod over the work of a mediator, a conciliator or any kind of an arbitrator's work to bring awards. It simply sets parameters. It simply says how has this been working out for us as a province if we're driving towards a \$1-billion deficit and every year we have less money that can go into front-line services.

I note for those members that the growth in this year alone of debt service costs, as reported in this third quarter, is \$64 million. That's money that cannot go for compensation or front-line services.

Mr. Lindsey: I'm thinking that the minister makes the excuse that, well, somebody else made the rule that he should get a raise, and he's willing to accept

that and—but now he wants to make the rule that says somebody else can't get a raise. Can he explain the difference in those two concepts of why he's entitled and working people in this province are not entitled to negotiate a raise for themselves?

Mr. Friesen: The member puts false information on the record. I take this opportunity to address it.

In the 2008 balanced budget legislation, under section 6(3), it makes very clear that in the year of transition from an old government to a new, in that first year, it makes clear that the incoming government is not responsible of the failure of the outgoing government. It would essentially be saying, attach the penalty of the old government to the new.

However, they also gave themselves a \$1-million raise by failing to take the legislated and required reductions when they failed to hit their targets and were supposed to take a 40 per cent penalty. They changed the rules, broke the law and gave themselves a raise.

Mr. Allum: Legislation like this has come forward in other jurisdictions in this country and has been ruled unconstitutional. But it's more than that; it's an illegal law. Does the Finance Minister have an illegal opinion that he might want to share with the House on this particular piece of legislation?

Mr. Friesen: I note for the member from Fort Garry-Riverview that there were—going back to British Columbia negotiations, there was a concern expressed around dialogue. I would say that our approach is very different in this province. We've continued to be in dialogue with labour. We came in

with a clean slate. We made very clear that we had not made up our minds, and we invited labour into discussions with us to talk about what should the path to sustainability looking forward look like.

We have confidence that we have a made-in-Manitoba solution here that is moderate, fair, balanced and will get results for all Manitobans.

Mr. Lindsey: Again, it's—fair and balanced for all Manitobans seems to leave some ministers sitting a little more fair and a little more balanced than what working people will be.

So I guess my question is, does the minister really believe that by limiting working people's ability to negotiate is really constitutional and legally acceptable in this province, or does he believe that because they have a majority that they can overrule what's constitutionally acceptable?

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for the question.

The member is asking a question about accountability, and I would refer him to another piece of legislation that we've brought, and that is The Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, there will be two minutes remaining in this question period.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 6, 2017

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