

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

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Tom Lindsey
Speaker*

Vol. LXXVIII No. 25 - 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, March 6, 2024

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AL TOMARE, Nello, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon.	Union Station	NDP
BALCAEN, Wayne	Brandon West	PC
BEREZA, Jeff	Portage la Prairie	PC
BLASHKO, Tyler	Lagimodière	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian, Hon.	Keewatinook	NDP
BYRAM, Jodie	Agassiz	PC
CABLE, Renée, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
CHEN, Jennifer	Fort Richmond	NDP
COOK, Kathleen	Roblin	PC
CROSS, Billie	Seine River	NDP
DELA CRUZ, Jelynn	Radisson	NDP
DEVGAN, JD	McPhillips	NDP
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
HIEBERT, Carrie	Morden-Winkler	PC
JACKSON, Grant	Spruce Woods	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake-Gimli	PC
KENNEDY, Nellie	Assiniboia	NDP
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
KING, Trevor	Lakeside	PC
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom, Hon.	Flin Flon	NDP
LOISELLE, Robert	St. Boniface	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya, Hon.	Notre Dame	NDP
MOROZ, Mike	River Heights	NDP
MOSES, Jamie, Hon.	St. Vital	NDP
MOYES, Mike	Riel	NDP
NARTH, Konrad	La Vérendrye	PC
NAYLOR, Lisa, Hon.	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
OXENHAM, Logan	Kirkfield Park	NDP
PANKRATZ, David	Waverley	NDP
PERCHOTTE, Richard	Selkirk	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
SALA, Adrien, Hon.	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHMIDT, Tracy, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
SCHOTT, Rachelle	Kildonan-River East	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SIMARD, Glen, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
SMITH, Bernadette, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STONE, Lauren	Midland	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt, Hon.	Concordia	NDP
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 6, 2024

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

We acknowledge that we are gathered on Treaty 1 territory and that Manitoba is located on the treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline and Nehethowuk nations. We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are ancestral lands of the Inuit. We respect the spirit and intent of treaties and treaty making and remain committed to working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in the spirit of truth, reconciliation and collaboration.

Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 7—The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the minister of transportation, infrastructure, that Bill 7, The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act, be now read a first time.

The Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration, seconded by the honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure (MLA Naylor), that Bill 7, The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act, be now read a first time.

MLA Marcelino: Honourable Speaker, I am pleased to introduce Bill 7, The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act. The purpose of this bill is to remove the prohibition of provincial

public-sector entities from utilizing project labour agreements that are useful to stabilize the workforce and wages, address safety, prevent work stoppages and reduce the risk of disruptions.

This bill will remove existing restrictions on requirements for contractors to employ unionized employees, and for employees to become a member of a union or pay union dues as a condition of obtaining work on an infrastructure project. Repealing the act would provide a means for achieving social objectives relating to matters such as employment equity, fair representation, local hiring, skill development and workplace safety and health. Contractors would also benefit, as project labour agreements establish a basis for the orderly and efficient completion of the project in accordance with the rules set forth in the agreement, thereby ensuring that the project is completed on budget and on time.

I am pleased to present this bill to the House for its consideration.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: Any other bills? [*interjection*] Sorry.

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

Is there any other introduction of bills?

COMMITTEE REPORTS

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts
First Report**

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Chairperson): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the first report for the standing committee of Public Accounts.

Deputy Clerk (Mr. Tim Abbott): Your Standing Committee on Public Accounts presents the following—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense.

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

Meetings

Your Committee met on January 10, 2024 at 2:30 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- *Election of the Chairperson*
- *Election of the Vice-Chairperson*

Committee Membership

- *Mr. BRAR*
- *MLA CHEN*
- *Ms. DELA CRUZ*
- *MLA DEVGAN*
- *MLA KENNEDY*
- *MLA KHAN*
- *MLA LAMOUREUX*
- *MLA MALOWAY*
- *Mr. PIWNIUK*
- *MLA SANDHU*
- *Mr. WHARTON*

Your Committee elected Mr. PIWNIUK as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected MLA MALOWAY as the Vice-Chairperson.

Mr. Piwniuk: Honourable Speaker, I move, second by the honourable member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Standing Committee on Public Accounts Second Report

Mr. Josh Guenter (Chairperson): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the second report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Deputy Clerk: Your Standing Committee on Public Accounts presents the following as its second report—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Public Accounts presents the following as its Second Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on February 16, 2024 at 12:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- *Election of the Chairperson*

Committee Membership

- *Mr. BRAR*
- *MLA CHEN*
- *Ms. DELA CRUZ*
- *MLA DEVGAN*

- *Mr. GUENTER*
- *MLA KENNEDY*
- *MLA KHAN*
- *MLA LAMOUREUX*
- *MLA MALOWAY (Vice-Chairperson)*
- *MLA SANDHU*
- *Mrs. STONE*

Your Committee elected Mr. GUENTER as the Chairperson.

Mr. Guenter: Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for La Vérendrye (Mr. Narth), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs First Report

MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Chairperson): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the first report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs.

* (13:40)

Deputy Clerk: Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs presents the following as its first report.

Meetings—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense.

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

Meetings

Your Committee met on January 29, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- *Annual Report of the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023*

Committee Membership

- *Ms. DELA CRUZ*
- *Hon. Min. FONTAINE*
- *Mr. GOERTZEN*
- *MLA KENNEDY*
- *Ms. LATHLIN*
- *Mrs. STONE*

Your Committee elected Ms. DELA CRUZ as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected MLA KENNEDY as the Vice-Chairperson.

Substitutions received during committee proceedings:

- Mr. BLASHKO for Ms. LATHLIN
- Mrs. HIEBERT for Mr. GOERTZEN

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record:

- MLA LAMOUREUX

Officials Speaking on Record

- Sherry Gott, Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth
- Louise Lavallee, Elder

Reports Considered and Passed

Your Committee considered and passed the following report as presented:

- Annual Report of the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023

MLA Dela Cruz: Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Oxenham), that the report on the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

**Standing Committee on Crown Corporations
First Report**

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Chairperson): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the first report of the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations.

Deputy Clerk: Your Standing Committee on Crown Corporations—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense.

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

Meetings

Your Committee met on February 6, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- Annual Report of the Manitoba Centennial Centre Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023

Committee Membership

- Mr. BRAR
- MLA KHAN
- MLA MOROZ
- Mr. NARTH
- MLA PANKRATZ
- Hon. Mr. SIMARD

Your Committee elected Mr. BRAR as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected MLA PANKRATZ as the Vice-Chairperson.

Officials Speaking on Record

- Karl Loepp, Chair of the Board of Directors
- Robert Olson, President and Chief Executive Officer

Reports Considered and Passed

Your Committee considered and passed the following report as presented:

- Annual Report of the Manitoba Centennial Centre Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023

Mr. Brar: Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for River Heights (MLA Moroz), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

**Standing Committee on Crown Corporations
Second Report**

MLA Billie Cross (Chairperson): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the second report of the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations.

Deputy Clerk: Your Standing Committee—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Crown Corporations presents the following as its Second Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on February 13, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023

Committee Membership

- *MLA CROSS*
- *MLA DELA CRUZ*
- *MLA DEVGAN*
- *Mr. NARTH*
- *Hon. Mr. SIMARD*
- *Mr. WHARTON*

Your Committee elected MLA CROSS as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected MLA DELA CRUZ as the Vice-Chairperson.

Officials Speaking on Record

- *Gerry Sul, President and Chief Executive Officer*

Reports Considered and Passed

Your Committee considered and passed the following report as presented:

- *Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023*

MLA Cross: Honourable Speaker, I move, second by—seconded by the honourable member for St. Boniface (MLA Loiselle), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

**Standing Committee on Crown Corporations
Third Report**

Mr. Tyler Blashko (Chairperson): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the third report of the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations.

Deputy Clerk: Your Standing Committee on Crown Corporations—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Crown Corporations presents the following as its Third Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on February 22, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- *Annual Report of the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023*

Committee Membership

- *Mr. BLASHKO*
- *Mr. JACKSON*
- *MLA KHAN*
- *MLA MOROZ*
- *MLA MOYES*
- *Hon. Min. SALA*

Your Committee elected Mr. BLASHKO as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected MLA MOYES as the Vice-Chairperson.

Officials Speaking on Record

- *Hal Turner, Interim President and Chief Executive Officer*
- *Alastair Fogg, Vice-President and Chief Financial Officer*
- *Ben Graham, Chair of the Board*

Reports Considered and Passed

Your Committee considered and passed the following report as presented:

- *Annual Report of the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023*

Mr. Blashko: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Fort Richmond (MLA Chen), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

**Standing Committee on Crown Corporations
Fourth Report**

MLA Mike Moyes (Chairperson): Honourable Speaker, I wish to present the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations.

Deputy Clerk: Your Standing Committee—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Crown Corporations presents the following as its Fourth Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on February 27, 2024 at 9:30 a.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- *Annual Report of Efficiency Manitoba for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023*

Committee Membership

- *MLA LOISELLE*
- *MLA MALOWAY*
- *MLA MOYES*
- *Mr. NESBITT*
- *Mr. PIWNIUK*
- *Hon. Min. SCHMIDT*

Your Committee elected MLA MOYES as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected MLA LOISELLE as the Vice-Chairperson.

Substitutions received during committee proceedings:

- *MLA MOROZ for MLA MALOWAY*
- *MLA MALOWAY for MLA MOROZ*

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record:

- *MLA KHAN*

Officials Speaking on Record

- *Colleen Kuruluk, Chief Executive Officer*

Reports Considered and Passed

Your Committee considered and passed the following report as presented:

- *Annual Report of Efficiency Manitoba for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023*

MLA Moyes: Honourable Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Waverley (MLA Pankratz), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

**Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs
Second Report**

MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz (Chairperson): I wish to present the second report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs.

Deputy Clerk: Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs presents the following as its Second Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on March 4, 2024 at 1:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*

Committee Membership

- *MLA DELA CRUZ (Chairperson)*
- *Hon. Min. FONTAINE*
- *Mrs. HIEBERT*
- *MLA KENNEDY (Vice-Chairperson)*
- *Ms. LATHLIN*
- *Mrs. STONE*

Substitutions received during committee proceedings:

- *Mr. BLASHKO for Ms. LATHLIN*
- *Ms. LATHLIN for Mr. BLASHKO*

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record:

- *MLA LAMOUREUX*
- *Mrs. COOK*

Motions

Your Committee agreed to the following motion:

- *THAT, as per Section 40 of The Advocate for Children and Youth Act, the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs conduct a comprehensive review of the Act as follows:*

(a) the Committee will firstly call the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth as a witness to provide her recommendations and answer questions.

(b) the Committee will secondly hear public presentations on the Act. Any member of the public may register, and registrations will be accepted for 10 days after the Committee Report of this meeting is presented to the House. Public presentations will be up to 10 minutes long, followed by up to five minutes for questions and answers with MLAs.

(c) written submissions to the Committee from members of the public will be accepted until the Committee has completed hearing public presentations.

(d) after the Standing Committee has completed steps (a) through (c), a Committee Report will be presented to the House that contains all recommendations from the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, a list of all public presenters, and all written submissions received.

MLA Dela Cruz: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Oxenham), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

**Standing Committee on Crown Corporations
Fifth Report**

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Chairperson): I wish to present the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations.

Deputy Clerk: Your Standing Committee on Crown–

An Honourable Member: Dispense

The Speaker: Dispense.

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

Meetings

Your Committee met on March 5, 2024 at 9:00 a.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- *Annual Report of the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023*

Committee Membership

- *Mr. BRAR*
- *MLA MALOWAY*
- *Mr. OXENHAM*
- *Mr. PERCHOTTE*
- *Mr. PIWNIUK*
- *Hon. Mr. WIEBE*

Your Committee elected Mr. BRAR as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected MLA MOROZ as the Vice-Chairperson.

Substitutions received during committee proceedings:

- *MLA MOROZ for MLA MALOWAY*

Officials Speaking on Record

- *Satvir Jatana, President and Chief Executive Officer*
- *Ryan Kolaski, Vice-President and Chief Financial Officer*
- *Carmen Nedohin, Chair of the Board*

Reports Considered and Passed

Your Committee considered and passed the following report as presented:

- *Annual Report of the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023*

Mr. Brar: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Oxenham), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker: Any other committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: Tabling of reports—and I have some to table.

In accordance with section 42 of The Ombudsman Act; subsection 58.1 of The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act; subsection 37.1 of The Personal Health Information Act; and subsection 26.1 of The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act, I'm tabling the Ombudsman Annual Report for the period April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023.

Further, I'm tabling the—in accordance with section 19 of The Legislative Building Centennial Restoration and Preservation Act, I'm pleased to table a long-term restoration and preservation plan, which includes the current annual implementation plans for fiscal years '23-24 to 2029-2030.

Introduction of Guests

If there are no other reports, I would like to draw everyone's attention to the Speaker's gallery, where we have joining us today, first, Glen McDonald, who has recently joined the Speaker's Office as executive assistant to the Speaker.

Also joining us today is Pat Malynyk, who has been with the Assembly for 38 years. She was with the Clerk's office until she transferred to the Speaker's Office at the beginning of the 43rd Session of the Legislature. She was a valuable member of the Clerk's office, and their loss is certainly the Speaker's Office gain. Pat is the key to the Speaker's Office running smoothly and efficiently.

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you both to the Chamber today.

* (13:50)

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

The Speaker: The honourable Minister of Agriculture—and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes has been given.

Invasion of Ukraine-2nd Anniversary

Hon. Ron Kostyshyn (Minister of Agriculture): Honourable Speaker, I rise today to observe the second anniversary of the invasion of Ukraine.

In late February of 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. This act has been internationally condemned. This war has traumatized the Ukrainian people, 'devasted' infrastructure and upended stability of the region. Through this hardship, Ukrainian military leaders and civilians have demonstrated resistance and perseverance. It is my hope that they will be rewarded with the return of peace in their country.

Our several generations of Ukrainian Manitobans have built a strong-rooted network that extends into all parts of our province. Today, one in seven Manitobans, including myself, have Ukrainian heritage, which is why this anniversary weighs heavily on my heart.

Honourable Speaker, we are privileged that our province is place of a refugee for those Ukrainians who have been displaced by the war. Manitoba's recent Ukrainian newcomers have received support from our large and 'welking' Ukrainian communities. Individuals, organizations, churches mobilized a wide range of resources soon after the invasion.

Manitobans have demonstrated a history of 'genosy' in times of need, and it was the warmth of my heart to see all the backgrounds come together to support the welcome of those families.

If you are from Manitoba, there is a good chance that you have had a Ukrainian connection or you know someone who does. Honourable Speaker, as a citizen of the global community, we recognize the war that demonstrates the fragility of democracy, and that is why—also a testament of power to the beliefs and values.

I hope Manitobans will continue to search out and support community organizations that are working with the Ukrainian newcomers. Until this war is over, and in the years that follow, the people of Manitoba will stand alongside new friends and neighbours as we rebuild their lives.

In observation of the second anniversary, I encourage Manitobans to remember the people of Ukraine. And for the Ukrainian citizens who have

come to our province, and we will continue to offer our support to demonstrate our commitment to the values of independence and the protection of human rights.

Honourable Speaker, on this solemn occasion, I would ask of all those present to join me in a moment of silence and reflection and remembrance for the people of Ukraine.

Slava Ukraini. [*Glory to Ukraine.*] And I ask for the people in the gallery that have attended to this function have their names added to this mission statement—ministerial statement, please.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Honourable Speaker, the world will never forget the shocking day of February 24, 2022, when Russia illegally invaded Ukraine, which ultimately triggered a bloody war that is still ongoing.

Now, two years later, the world is still calling for peace. Millions of Ukrainian refugees have had to flee from their homes and Manitoba has welcomed them with open arms. As the home to the second largest Ukrainian diaspora in the world, Canada—and Manitoba—has stood in solidarity with Ukrainians and have pledged to do everything that we can to support them.

Russia's illegal war on Ukraine is a slap in the face to democracy and human rights, and Manitobans are once again urging the Russian government to stop its attacks. We as Canadians must stand up for the values that we believe in by pushing back against aggressors, just like we did during the First and Second World Wars. Otherwise, where will this end? Many have already died or been critically wounded on both sides, and only more devastation will occur if this war continues.

While in government, our PC team provided historic help for Ukrainians seeking refuge from the war with Russia. This included over \$800,000 in direct humanitarian aid for the war effort, the creation of the Ukrainian Refugee Task Force and expansion of availability of emergency service, like housing, employment search help, health and mental health-care and education and social assistance.

I want to thank all the charitable organizations, businesses, civil servants and all other Manitobans who have stepped up to support Ukrainians throughout this time. Your efforts are commendable, but the

war is not yet over, so we must continue to help Ukraine as much as we're able to.

I hope this Legislature and all its members here will support our Canadian efforts to help restore Ukraine and keep it free and independent.

Slava Ukraini. *[Glory to Ukraine.]*

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Honourable Speaker, I seek leave to respond to the minister's statement.

The Speaker: Does the member have leave? *[Agreed]*

MLA Lamoureux: It's been two years since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Russia has made nuclear threats, been accused of war crimes, crimes against humanity and waging war in violation of international law. We have lost over 30,000 civilians and the invasion is the largest attack on a European country since World War II.

Honourable Speaker, the apparent war crimes include torture, summary executions, sexual violence, enforced disappearances and looting of cultural property. Russian forces continue to appear to be aimed at terrorizing civilians and making their life unsustainable, which is a war crime.

Just this morning, Honourable Speaker, a deadly explosion in Odessa from the attack occurred not far from where President Zelensky was meeting with Greek prime minister.

In Ukraine, 3.7 million people are internally displaced and 6.5 million have fled to other countries, many arriving here in Manitoba due to the support of our federal and provincial governments and many hard-working dedicated agencies. But as of today, 14.6 million people still need humanitarian assistance.

We need to remain united in condemning Russia and its crimes of aggression against Ukrainian people.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The honourable Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Kostyshyn) requested leave for a moment of silence. Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

A moment of silence was observed.

The Speaker: Further to that, the honourable Minister of Agriculture requested leave to include the names of those present in the gallery to be included in Hansard.

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Maryka Chabluk, Joanne Lewandoski, Susan Zuk

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Before we move on to the next ministerial statement, I want to take a moment to recognize some students that are in the gallery.

We have with us seated in the public gallery, from Fairholme school, 20 grade 9 students under the direction of Evelyn Maendel. The group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Lakeside (Mr. King).

* * *

The Speaker: Further ministerial statements.

Honourable Government House Leader, the Minister of Families—and the required 90 minutes has been received.

National Social Work Month

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): Each March, we recognize the essential contributions of social work across Canada. Social workers support families, groups, communities, offering support to enhance individual and collective well-being while helping citizens navigate complex systems during difficult times.

In Manitoba, social workers offer critical services and supports to vulnerable children, adults, families and seniors. Social workers serve the people of our province in a variety of settings including social service and non-profit organizations, hospitals, schools, the justice system, in private practice and so much more. As Minister of Families, I see the impact of their work every single day in our province.

* (14:00)

Social workers take on many different roles. They are working to advocate for social change and justice, promoting human rights by supporting individuals with unique needs and helping to build an inclusive society where equity and diversity are celebrated. Social workers care deeply for the Manitobans they support and serve. I lift them up each and every day for the work that they do in our province.

Experts in their field, social workers have been instrumental to improving responsive care, quality of life and access to resources for all Manitobans. I have met so many phenomenal, dedicated, genuine social workers who go above and beyond for the people that they support, helping to make our communities stronger, healthier and more stable. Without their vital efforts by our social workers, this wouldn't be possible.

So, the government of Manitoba recognizes and celebrates and values the dedicated work of the Manitoba College of Social Workers and all of its members throughout our beautiful province.

So today and every day, our government is committed to recognizing, supporting and celebrating the essential role of social workers in every part of our province. Miigwech for their immeasurable hard work.

Please join me in recognizing Manitoba social workers and celebrating National Social Work Month.

Miigwech.

The Speaker: The honourable member for La Vérendrye. No. The honourable member for Midland, sorry.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): I'm pleased to rise in the Chamber today to promote awareness of National Social Work Month, which takes place all throughout March every single year.

Social work professionals play a vital role here in Manitoba, and it is important that we recognize their many contributions, skills and dedication to the work that they do.

Every day, social workers rise to new challenges, working on the front lines to provide high quality and essential services to Manitobans from all walks of life, assisting families, children and individuals with the critical supports needed to live more prosperous and fulfilling lives.

The theme for this year is Seven Points of Unity: Many Possibilities, which commemorates the release of the 2024 Code of Ethics by the Canadian Association of Social Workers in January.

Honourable Speaker, this important release highlights all the essential values that social workers provide within our—their service each and every day, traits such as dignity, justice, pursuing truth and reconciliation, integrity, professionalism and the importance of relationships.

We hear time and time again examples of social workers in Manitoba who embrace these values within their work, dedicating themselves to helping people and making society a better place for all.

We on this side of the House are thankful for the many contributions that these workers make and recognize how meaningful their work is for all of those who call this beautiful province home.

Today and for the remaining of the month and every day, I encourage all members of this Chamber

to join me in celebrating the essential role that social workers engage in, and thanking them for their continued dedication to enriching the lives of others and all Manitobans.

Thank you.

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Honourable Speaker, I ask for leave to respond to the minister's statement.

The Speaker: Does the member have leave? *[Agreed]*

MLA Lamoureux: National Social Work Month is an opportunity to pay tribute to the amazing work that social workers have done in the many roles and functions that they serve every single day.

Honourable Speaker, allow me to quote Hansard from March 7, 2022: It is deeply unimpressive to watch the members opposite pretend to celebrate social workers today when for years they have forced them to do more with less: they cut the maximum amount allowable for older children in foster care, they decreased daily supports for foster parents, they cut the newcomer support unit in CFS and unanimously supported BITSA that included a clawback to the children's special allowances intended for Indigenous children in care.

If this at all sounds familiar, Honourable Speaker, this was a quote from the now Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness (Ms. Smith) when she was in opposition benches.

Well, here is this government's chance, Honourable Speaker. When we talk about empowering social workers, it means that, while we recognize their positive contributions, we need to give them the best chance to succeed, and this means putting words into tangible actions.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: Any further ministerial statements? Members' statements? *[interjection]*

Order, please.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Assiniboia West Recreation Association

MLA Nellie Kennedy (Assiniboia): Honourable Speaker, it is a privilege today to speak on the amazing contributions of the Assiniboia West Recreation Association, AWRA. With a presence in the community for over 30 years, AWRA provides an extensive list of programs, events and services for the community of Assiniboia. Whether it be the winter

extravaganza, recreational sport leagues, seasonal craft sales or family fitness programs, the association is home to something exciting for everyone.

An important focus for the AWRA is affordability. The AWRA prioritizes community building and engagement over profit. For this to be possible, we must thank the incredible volunteers who help run the community programs offered by the AWRA.

One of the events I had the honour of attending over the holiday season was the association's Breakfast with Santa. It was a huge community hit, with food, crafts, complimentary photos with Mr. and Mrs. Claus and a visit from a few of the St. James Jr. Canucks hockey players. Over breakfast, Assiniboia was able to come together, enjoy one another's company, build new relationships and share in the holiday spirit.

Through this event, I had the opportunity to meet with the association's mostly women-led board. With the association's long community presence, moms and other community members have felt inspired to contribute to improving the association's programs and services. I am so proud to see strong women taking up space in community leadership and organizing.

Thank you to the board, staff and volunteers at Assiniboia West Recreation Association for the work you have done and continue to do for the community. I look forward to attending future events and supporting the association's long-term initiatives.

Lymphedema Awareness Day

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): Lymphedema Awareness Day in Manitoba is today, March 6, and all members know that this day was proclaimed in Manitoba back in 2014 when I put forth a private member's bill declaring such a day each year as Lymphedema Awareness Day. It did receive unanimous consent, I may add. It was a significant step in raising awareness about lymphedema right here in Manitoba.

Lymphedema is a chronic condition characterized by the accumulation of lymph fluid, leading to swelling and discomfort in the affected area. In Manitoba and Canada, lymphedema affects a significant portion of the population, with estimates suggesting that over one million Canadians may be living with the condition.

Despite its prevalence, lymphedema remains a misunderstood and underdiagnosed condition in Manitoba. Many individuals may not be aware that

their symptoms are related to lymphedema, leading to delays in diagnosis and treatment.

Efforts are being made to improve the management of lymphedema in Manitoba, Canada and the world, including increased education for health-care providers, improved access to specialized care and research into new treatment options. However, more work is needed to raise awareness about lymphedema and ensure that those living with the condition receive the support and the care that they need.

I would like to thank founding directors of the Lymphedema Association of Manitoba: Kim Avanthay, Edith Mulhall and Sue Zwarich. I would like to also thank LAM's current board of president Amanda Sobey, Nancy Rowsell, Craig Harren, Leanne [phonetic]—Leona Waldner, Rhonda Sietz and others for volunteering on a day-to-day basis, for not only carrying on the advocacy and hard work, but bringing awareness and, of course, change.

This past Friday, March 1st, they held their 12th symposium titled Bridge the Gap and tonight, March 6, they're going to do their fourth light up the Legislature. By increasing awareness, improving access to care and investing in research, we can do better and support these affected by this condition and enhance their quality of life. We invite everyone to join us tonight to light the Legislature.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

* (14:10)

River Heights Council of Faith Leaders

MLA Mike Moroz (River Heights): Honourable Speaker, I rise today to share some exciting news about the creation of an initiative for social change in my constituency.

On February 12th, I joined faith leaders from congregations across River Heights who came together to talk about our shared challenges as a community and to explore how, together, we might work to address them.

During the course of that meeting I was impressed by their deep, shared concern for those in need, by their clear commitment to social justice and by their keen interest in working together to find innovative approaches to problem solving.

But more than anything it was their willingness, in spite of individual congregational challenges, to shoulder the necessary work that must be done to bring about progressive change. That was what was

most impressive. It was clear that doing nothing on important issues was not an option.

Honourable Speaker, during our time together, relationships were strengthened, insight and expertise was shared and we agreed to continue our work to find a path forward on a range of social justice issues in areas like community health, daycare, housing and support for the performing arts. While these initiatives are in their earliest stages, their potential is clear.

I want to conclude by saying that beyond anything else, this new council represents a meaningful opportunity for our community to pull each other a little bit closer, at a time when forces seek to pull us apart with an agenda of fear and anger. And that is a call to action we must all share.

Honourable Speaker, many members of the new River Heights council of faith leaders are here with us in the gallery today, and I ask them to please rise and be acknowledged by the members of this House. I also ask that their names be read into Hansard.

Bromley Basford, Vlodomyr Bashutskyy, Yosef Benarroch, Carmella Castaleno-Sinclair, Colin Dorrian, Rena Secter Elbaze, Allan Finkel, Tricia Gerhard, Sheppard Gwende, Merv Lanctot, Matt Leibl, Karen Lumley, Anibal Mass, Frank Obrugewitsch, Kliel Rose, Zsófi Schmiedge, Jozef Sinclair, Susan Smandych

The Speaker: The honourable member doesn't need leave for those names to be added.

Recruitment of Health Workers from the Philippines

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Honourable Speaker, everyone in this Chamber and everyone in the province knows we have a dire need for more staff in our health-care system.

That's why our previous PC government, led by our Labour and Immigration minister at the time, Jon Reyes, went on a recruitment mission to the Philippines to find health-care workers that wanted to make Manitoba home.

Now here's the really good news: many of these individuals are working in Manitoba today. In November, the Labour and Immigration Minister said there was, and I quote, zero recruitment.

But that's just not true. On February 6, myself and our PC Health critic welcomed Aris, Jonald and Krishnia and their families to Manitoba in my office in Portage la Prairie.

Unfortunately, as they are busy on the front lines in Portage la Prairie hospital, some of them are not able to join us today. Aris, Jonald and Krishnia are just three of 58 health-care workers that are working in different health regions throughout Manitoba.

So today I want to set the record straight for all Manitobans that the former PC government's effort brought real enforcement to cut our health-care system. But the recruitment program has since been cut by this NDP government.

In the Winnipeg Free Press on February 7th of this year, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) stated, and I quote, this NDP government has no plan to extend recruitment efforts that focus on the Philippines.

That same day in the Winnipeg Free Press there is a quote from the wife of Aris, who said many more health-care workers would be ready to come to Manitoba if given the chance. I guess the NDP just isn't willing to give them a chance.

On behalf of a grateful province and everyone on this side of the House, I want to say thank you to the newcomer health-care professionals that are making their home, and I just want to recognize their efforts.

The Speaker: Sorry—the honourable member from Tyndall Park. I didn't have my mic on.

Children in CFS Care

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I rise this afternoon to talk about children in care.

The reality is Manitoba's child welfare is the worst in all of Canada, and we have been facing a child-care crisis for at least the last 15 years. And this is why I'm asking for all MLAs to support the need for a focused debate on children who are in care.

Numerous organizations, including MKO, the Manitoba Foster Parents Association and the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth have all expressed support for a debate to take place today.

Honourable Speaker, we desperately need to put children first, and that is why later today I will be moving this emergency debate. It is critical that we discuss the current state of children in care. This includes, but is not limited to, safety concerns, care placements, emergency shelters, foster parents, provincial supports and keeping families together.

Honourable Speaker, I have been here long enough to understand that if it is the will of the House, in particular those who will speak to this motion, that the Speaker will take comments into consideration. My

hope is that those who will speak to this motion will put party agendas to the side and speak clearly in support of having an emergency debate today.

I'm looking forward to what could be a healthy debate about children in care in our province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members' statements?

Speaker's Statement

The Speaker: If not, have a statement for the House.

I would like to draw members' attention to the Clerk's table, as I am pleased to share with the House that Mr. Tim Abbott has been appointed as the new Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, effective Monday, February 5, 2024.

British by birth and Canadian by choice, Tim is exceptionally dedicated, hard-working and committed to the work and the mission of the Assembly. In his five and a half years with us, he has served with distinction in both the Committees and Journals branches, as well as lending a hand anywhere help was needed.

Tim is a true team player, and we are confident that he will excel in his new role. He has proven himself in our Assembly as an exceptionally capable committee clerk, and I think everyone in the room should have an idea of how challenging that position can be, which made him very well qualified to handle the advanced procedural role of Deputy Clerk.

Born and raised in the UK, specifically in the town of Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk, England, Tim earned a bachelor of law degree at the University of Reading. Before starting with the Assembly in 2018, Tim gained several years' experience working with public sector and government accounts for an IT consultancy in the UK.

With our team now being down one committee clerk for the next few months, Tim will be doing double duty as Deputy Clerk and committee clerk. That will be a challenge, but we are sure he is up to it.

In his own words, Tim's time at the Assembly has been the greatest experience of his working life so far. This environment constantly challenges him to be better, to learn more, to push himself for the betterment of the Assembly. He cannot imagine doing anything else that remotely compares to his experiences here.

Tim has said that he strives to follow the exemplary example set by the previous occupant of this position. He has a huge amount of respect for the Assembly, the people who work here and the work of the Assembly staff in supporting members. It is an honour for Tim to be able to serve all 57 members of this Assembly as Deputy Clerk, and he will endeavour to exceed their expectations.

I will also add that our Clerk asked me to publicly thank Tim for stepping into the Clerk's role during a leave of absence. It is quite a lot to ask of someone to be Deputy Clerk for two weeks and then serve as interim Clerk. Our Clerk also asked me to share with the House his hopes that members will be on their best behaviour for the next few weeks.

On behalf of all members, Tim, we welcome you to the table as Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

* (14:20)

ORAL QUESTIONS

Death of Former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney Acknowledgements to Family and Colleagues

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): Again, thank you, Honourable Speaker, and thank you and welcome back to the Chamber to everyone here, of course, all the members in this wonderful Legislature.

Before we get on to business of oral questions today, it is very important that this House acknowledge and mark the passing of Canada's 18th prime minister, the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney.

Prime Minister Mulroney died February 29th at the age of 84. He will be remembered by many Canadians as a great leader and statesman, and I'm sure will be deeply missed by his family and those who had the honour of knowing him.

He is someone who, by his own admission, favoured doing what was right in the long-term, rather than what would be politically popular in the short-term.

I have a question for the Premier about affordability issues here in Manitoba, but I will first allow him to—or ask him to respond and put a few words on the record in regards to the passing of Prime Minister Mulroney.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): I want to begin by congratulating Tim on the well-earned promotion. We'll do our best to live up to your estimation.

I just want to take this opportunity to congratulate my colleague from Lac du Bonnet for his service upcoming here as the Leader of the Official Opposition. Up until the current title that was bestowed upon me by the people of this great province, being Leader of the Opposition was the best job I've had in my life. So he serves an important function and I look forward to working together with him to meet the needs of the people of this province.

I want to take this opportunity to send our sincere condolences on behalf of the Province of Manitoba to the family and many friends and colleagues of former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. On a personal level, Mr. Mulroney is the first prime minister that I remember, and his impact on our country was very clear.

In reading the memoriams shared about him, one quote stood out; I paraphrase here: that he governed not for the next 10 minutes of media coverage, but, in fact, for the next 10 years of this country.

And so we say to Mr. Mulroney, fare thee well. We will see you again. And, once again, our deepest sympathies to his family.

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

Education Property Taxes Affordability Concerns

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): We know that there's a growing affordability crisis right here in Manitoba under this NDP government. I know, members on this side of the House know this, because we're listening to—we're hearing this throughout our constituencies, and I know members opposite are hearing this, too, as they're nodding and saying that from their seats.

Now the Canadian Taxpayers Federation is warning the NDP has opened the floodgates to the tax increases. The Education Minister says the increases are somehow unusual, as though he had nothing to do with it.

My first question for the Premier is a simple one: Did his Cabinet understand that cutting funding to school divisions would lead directly to high education property tax increases across Manitoba?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Health care and education, growing the economy. That's what our government's all about. Not only are we investing in education, we're launching a new initiative to ensure that more kids in Manitoba can find the pathway to

success: a universally accessible nutrition program that reaches every single region of the province.

During the PC time in office, they made fun of the idea. In fact, one of their former defeated colleagues said that it was a bad idea.

Luckily, Manitobans know better. They agree with our team. Feeding hungry kids is not only the right thing to do, it's a sound economic investment for the future. That's why we're working together with the people of Manitoba to bring in a universal nutrition program in this province.

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

Mr. Ewasko: Honourable Speaker, this is the same member who used to argue that a two-cent increase in milk prices was a financial burden on families, now showing no hesitancy to green light double digit tax increases.

Let's tell you what has unfolded behind those 'clores'—closed doors of the NDP. The Minister of Education brought forward different proposals to fund K-to-12 education, and the NDP chose the option that directly led to high education property tax increases. The NDP chose higher taxes at a time when families are struggling to—with the cost of living.

The Premier's talking points don't help cover the cost of groceries.

Will he commit today to providing permanent cost-of-living relief in the upcoming budget, or will he continue to raise the taxes on all Manitobans, Honourable Speaker?

Mr. Kinew: On January 1 of this year, we cut the provincial tax on fuel down to zero.

And I want to point out that the members opposite through their time in office, criticized the federal government for charging a 14-cents-a-litre tax on fuel, but they themselves charged a 14-cents-a-litre tax on fuel every single day of their administration.

We made a change to help you, the people of Manitoba. And you know what happened as a result? The provincial inflation rate went below 1 per cent, 0.80 per cent, in Manitoba.

But the facts of this matter go beyond statistics. When I was at the hockey rink, a fellow hockey parent came up to me, and said, you know what? On the way to the rink we gassed up, and with the money I saved, I bought dinner for my family.

More good news stories like that in Manitoba under our administration and more to come with the budget on April 2.

Education Property Taxes Affordability Concerns

Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods): Doug Ford's Instagram account, of all people, announced another policy flip-flop from our Premier on the carbon tax, saying once again he's in favour of it, despite the Premier failing to mention it when the Prime Minister was here in Manitoba. Taxes, taxes, taxes; the NDP can't help but love them even when they campaign on not raising them.

Now we see the best kind of tax for the NDP is the kind they don't have to raise themselves, forcing school divisions to hike school taxes due to the government's meagre increase to their operating grants.

How does this minister think it's appropriate for a tax hike like that for farmers and families during an affordability crisis? *[interjection]*

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. Order, please.

I regret to inform the honourable First Minister that he will have to do his answer again because I did not have my mic on, so he was not recognized.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Right now the members opposite are making fun of people who have to shower after they get home from work. They're out of touch. They don't know what it's like to work with drywall. They don't know what it's like to work with their hands. They don't know what it's like to push a mop to try and earn money for your family to lift yourself out of poverty.

We understand what that's like on this side of the House, and that's why we're taking steps each and every day to save money for the average Manitoba family.

The only question is: Why do the PCs keep criticizing us for bringing in this help for the average Manitoban?

The Speaker: The honourable member for Spruce Woods, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Jackson: Seventeen per cent for blue-collar workers in Morden, 7.5 per cent for blue-collar workers in Louis Riel, 4.1 per cent for blue-collar workers in St. James, 3.4 per cent for blue-collar workers in the Winnipeg School Division, 3 per cent for blue-collar workers in Brandon and 6.5 per cent for blue-collar workers in

the minister's own riding. These are not small increases hitting families at a time when it's harder than ever for them to make ends meet.

* (14:30)

After campaigning on not raising any taxes, will the minister come clean and admit he never had any intention on following through with that commitment?

Mr. Kinew: Manitobans across the province are happy that we cut the provincial tax on fuel. Not only has it put more money in their pockets, but it's also brought down the provincial inflation rate.

And you know what that does? That helps folks who are living in lower income situations. That helps the blue collar. That helps people in the middle class.

The PCs never did this. They let inflation rise to 8 per cent under their watch. They could have taken this step and brought inflation down. They never did.

Why did they sit on their hands while Manitobans were struggling in their time of great need?

Mr. Jackson: We on this side of the House understand that the education property tax is an archaic and unfair way to fund education and something that this party was diligently working to phase out. On that side of the House, we know they've never seen a tax they didn't like to raise.

So will the minister—or maybe the Ag Minister stand up today and tell farmers and families that increases to the education property tax are here to stay?

Mr. Kinew: Actually, one of our first steps was to bring in affordability relief for ag producers in our province.

I was very happy to work with the Agriculture Minister to put in a freeze on Crown land rents.

Now, of course, we also know that the provincial fuel tax cut that we brought in is helping ag producers. It's helping Manitobans in every region of the province.

But what our colleague on the other side of the House does not seem to understand is the impact of the PCs cutting education year after year after year. Not only has that resulted in an underfunded education system, but it means that we are going to be playing catch-up, because investing in education is the best investment we can make when it comes to the economy.

The good news is that our team is strong on health care, we're strong on education and we're strong on

the economy. We're going to continue moving this province forward because it's a new day in Manitoba.

Education Property Taxes Affordability Concerns

Mrs. Carrie Hiebert (Morden-Winkler): Honourable Speaker, in my constituency, we are getting word of 17 per cent school tax increases; 17 per cent.

For the average homeowner in my division, that is nearly 400 more dollars per year. School trustees felt squeezed because the NDP government offered them less than the former PC government and told them to go to the taxpayers for the rest.

Manitobans are still waiting for reduced grocery prices this Premier (Mr. Kinew) promised for them. But, like everything else this Premier does, that promise has not happened.

Can this Premier explain why he is underfunding school divisions and forcing double digits to taxpayers?

Hon. Nello Altomare (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I want to thank my colleague across the aisle for that important question because I do want to remind her of what happened these past seven and a half years.

You know, every time I meet with school divisions, I meet with parents, they really care about their public schools. They really care about their public schools because it's a reflection, Honourable Speaker, of the importance that their community places on the education of their children.

What they didn't have for seven and a half years, Honourable Speaker, is a real partner at the table with the school division and parents and families.

Here's what the big difference is: When I go and meet with school boards, meet with parents, you know what the first thing they say to me is? It's the first time we've actually met with the Minister of Education, and we look forward to continuing our partnership as we—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Morden-Winkler, on a supplementary question.

Mrs. Hiebert: Each and every day, families are making tough decisions at the grocery store. Items that used to be occasional treats for kids are quickly becoming luxuries.

We've all seen it every time we go to the grocery store: items put back on the shelf where families had to make a call between a child's favourite snack or

something that's on sale, making the choice between healthy or—and nutritious or cheap.

Parents give their kids the best. It's human nature. But this Premier is making that harder each and every day for families and parents.

Why does this Premier promise everything and deliver only empty promises?

MLA Altomare: Again, I want to thank that member, because, you know, that member wasn't elected in 2019 or 2016, and what happened and what she missed is what—the systematic deterioration of the public 'educase' system by that particular side of the House. They were unbelievable in their inability—in their inability—to understand how important public education is.

So, what did we do? Under the leadership of our Premier, a nutrition program right away. What did we do? (2) 14 cents a litre on affordability; and (3) Honourable Speaker, we'll be developing and producing a budget on April 2 that's going to show even more affordability measures. That's going to get done.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Morden-Winkler, on a final supplementary question.

Mrs. Hiebert: Families are making difficult decisions each and every day because groceries and household necessities are more expensive, and this government has done nothing to help them, despite the Premier boasting a victory over inflation.

Family budgets are under so much strain that one run-in with a bad pothole when driving their kids to school could leave their bank accounts to—drained and them stranded without a vehicle. Families in Morden cannot afford a double-digit tax hike.

So I ask the Premier again: Why is he underfunding school divisions and making families pay the higher taxes during an affordability crisis?

MLA Altomare: Again, I want to thank that member for the question because, again, it allows us to put the facts on the record.

Here's a piece that's really important. You know what? They found it quite easy to send cheques to out-of-province billionaires, including the ones that are jacking up the prices on those food bills that that member was talking about. How shameful is that? Millions of dollars sent—by the hard-earned taxpayers here in Manitoba sent out of province so that out-of-province billionaires could benefit from the hard work of Manitobans.

But you know what, Honourable Speaker? We're joining our hard-working Manitobans by creating the most affordable province in the country: 14 cents a litre, a nutrition program that's going to lead the country and right now, we've got—

The Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

Fuel Tax Rate Saving Concerns

MLA Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): Honourable Speaker, when this Minister of Finance proposed his gas tax holiday, he made promises that the savings would make their way to Manitobans, and the Premier (Mr. Kinew) even threatened local grocery stores to lower their prices. He threw out numbers like \$250 over six months would be saved.

But, unfortunately for him and the entire NDP government, facts matter, and these facts disagree with them. Prices shot right back up in two weeks.

This minister and Premier promised that savings would find their way to Manitobans, so I ask him a simple question: Where are these savings?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): You know, for many years—seven years in a row, in fact—Manitobans had a government that wasn't concerned about the affordability challenges that they were facing. You know, seniors, folks across this province, struggled with higher costs of living.

Finally, our government came in, and we brought them relief. We brought a fuel tax holiday that now has us having the lowest fuel cost in the entire country.

We've got more work to do, Honourable Speaker. We're going to be doing that work. We look forward to bringing forward more good news with our budget in April.

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

MLA Khan: Honourable Speaker, this minister wants to talk about gas prices. Well, I table this chart here for him to read, since he can't read numbers. Gas is actually more expensive today in Manitoba than it was on January 1. Maybe he can read that.

Data shows that the price was only in effect for two weeks. This holiday was clearly not designed to help Manitobans, but rather a talking point from an overpromised \$3-billion campaign.

By using this minister's own math, families will save \$26.

* (14:40)

Why is this minister pretending his government is providing real savings when, in fact, it doesn't even cover the cost for a meal for two people?

MLA Sala: You know, a lot changed on October 3rd. A lot changed in this province. The—Manitobans went from having a government that didn't understand the affordability challenges that we're facing to having one that really did understand the day-to-day challenges.

This government—we know that we've had the lowest inflation rate in the country for two months in a row, Honourable Speaker. That means lower costs for Manitobans up and down.

The years of the PCs raising prices on Manitobans are over. We're going to keep doing the work of making this province into a more affordable place to live.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Whyte, on a final supplementary question.

MLA Khan: Honourable Speaker, numbers matter and facts matter. And it's clear that this minister and this Premier have no idea how to read numbers.

The simple fact is that on April 1st, the carbon tax will go up to 18 cents, and when this gas holiday tax ends, this minister and Premier will raise taxes on Manitobans by 14 cents. That's a 32-cent increase Manitobans will be hit with.

Why won't this Premier and minister stand up for Manitobans and stand against Justin Trudeau and the carbon tax and make life more affordable for Manitobans?

MLA Sala: Honourable Speaker, let's review the previous government's record. They raised hydro rates on Manitobans in every creative way possible. They raised taxes on renters by \$175 a year. They raised costs on farmers with increasing their cost of Crown leases.

That's their record, Honourable Speaker. What's our record? We're going to keep energy rates as low as possible. We've brought in a fuel tax holiday that's lowering costs for Manitobans. More work to do. We're going to bring forward good news on April 2nd when we release our budget.

Upcoming Carbon Tax Increase Impact on Grocery and Heating Bills

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Honourable Speaker, in less than a month, on April 1st, the NDP will be complicit in a carbon tax hike of 23 per cent on everything from groceries to home heating.

Saskatchewan and Alberta have taken action to stop carbon tax on home heating and have voiced their opposition to these tax hikes.

Why won't this government do the same and take action to stop these annual tax hikes on consumers by the federal government?

Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance): Again, you know, Manitobans struggled for many years with a government that didn't pay attention to their affordability challenges.

We know that the PCs took a fight to Ottawa where they wasted millions of dollars in Manitoba taxpayer money, fighting a losing battle against the carbon tax. That's their record.

What's our record? Lowering costs for Manitobans. Giving Manitobans a fuel tax holiday that's giving them a break every time they head to the pump. More work to do in making affordability greater for Manitobans. More good news when we release our budget on April 2nd.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Portage la Prairie, on a supplementary question.

MLA Bereza: Honourable Speaker, the carbon tax is being applied to every stage of production that goes into a loaf of bread. From the production of farm equipment to seed and fertilizer needed to grow the crop and all of the crop inputs to get the crop harvested. On the fuel use to get the—that crop to market by truckers and all of the inputs by the bakery to bake that loaf of bread and get it on the store shelves.

There is a tax upon tax. Families want to know what the minister and his government are doing to stop the carbon tax from making groceries and that loaf of bread even more unaffordable.

MLA Sala: Honourable Speaker, the opposition wants to stand here and talk about opportunities to lower costs for Manitobans when they didn't even take the same actions—yet they failed to act on lowering the fuel tax.

Our government actually takes action and has taken action to reduce costs for Manitobans. Our record of one of—is of one of action; theirs is one of inaction. We're going to keep doing that good work. Manitobans can expect more good news with our budget on April 2nd.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Portage la Prairie, on a final supplementary.

MLA Bereza: On April 1st, the 23 per cent Trudeau carbon tax hike the Premier (Mr. Kinew) likes to support will erase any meagre savings from the fuel excise tax holiday.

So, while the Premier is failing to give relief on groceries, Trudeau is set to take it away with this 23 per cent carbon tax hike.

Will the Premier keep his word on grocery affordability? Does this government have any plan to address the rising cost of groceries or will families and consumers just have to keep paying more and more every year with this Trudeau and NDP government?

MLA Sala: Again, let's review the record of the previous government. What did they do? What did the critic for Agriculture—what did they do? They raised costs on farmers by raising their Crown land lease costs. They raised taxes on renters. Who are renters? Seniors, people with disabilities, people on fixed incomes. That's their record. And they also did everything they could to creatively jack up hydro rates in every way imaginable.

We're going to keep hydro rates low. We're going to keep life more affordable in this province. More good news to come on April 2nd.

Surgical Wait Times Request for Plan to Address

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): One of the first things the NDP did when they took office was eliminate out-of-province surgery options for Manitobans. They did this without first doing anything to increase surgical capacity here in Manitoba.

A recent Ipsos poll shows that 42 per cent of Canadians are so frustrated with wait times that they are willing to pay out of pocket to receive care faster somewhere else.

Just a few months ago, if you were waiting for surgery and able to travel, you could get your surgery months sooner and it was covered by Manitoba Health. Now, under the NDP, you're stuck waiting for surgery under a government with no plan to address surgical wait times or you're forced to pay tens of thousands of dollars out of pocket just to get timely care.

When can Manitoba patients expect a plan from the NDP to address—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): The member opposite's question really puts on display a fundamental difference between our government and that side of the House.

And that difference is that our government believes in Manitobans. We believe in investing in Manitoba. We believe that capacity here at home and people getting care at the bedside in their own province is and should be a priority.

And you know what, Honourable Speaker? Manitobans agree, and they made that decision very, very evident on election day.

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

Mrs. Cook: Honourable Speaker, for months, the NDP said they had all the answers, and it's been almost half a year and we have yet to see any kind of plan to increase staffing or increase surgical capacity. If they have a plan it's the best 'kes'—best kept secret in Manitoba.

Canada is facing a national surgical capacity and staffing health-care crisis, and Manitobans have yet to see any plan from the NDP.

So I'll ask again: When will the NDP put forward their plan to increase surgical capacity in Manitoba, or should Manitoba families start looking at taking out a second mortgage?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, I welcome any opportunity to talk about the many investments our government has already made in strengthening capacity for surgeries here in our province.

Not only have we added beds with the acute-care system, we've added staff to the health-care system. We've invested in making sure that folks can get their orthopedics, their spine surgeries and a host of other procedures right here in Manitoba.

And I know that's difficult for members opposite to accept because instead of investing in health care, they cut it for almost eight years under two terms of the PCs.

Our approach is different because it's a new day in health care in Manitoba. We're investing in capacity building and working alongside health-care workers to get it done.

The Speaker: The honourable member from Roblin, on a final supplementary question.

Mrs. Cook: Well, the minister can try to deflect and look backwards and cast blame, but Manitobans' patience with their tactics is wearing thin.

The Health Minister previously called using provincial funding for out-of-province surgical options, and I'm quoting here, an exorbitant expense. Manitobans, however, would say, that having to shell out thousands of dollars on their own to get timely care because of NDP cuts is an exorbitant expense.

* (14:50)

Manitoba patients need a real, tangible plan from the NDP to access timely surgical care before they end up forced to go broke in the middle of an affordability crisis. It's been months since they've cut out-of-province surgical options for patients and still no plan to increase surgical options here in Manitoba.

Since the minister won't answer the question, I'll ask the Premier (Mr. Kinew): Where is the plan?

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, our government has made more investments in staffing the health-care system, boosting capacity here at home and making sure that Manitobans can get care at the bedside in their own communities. More investments in under six months than that previous failed government did in over six years in government.

Honourable Speaker, I will take no lessons from members opposite who cut health care, closed emergency rooms and disrespected health-care workers like it was their favourite thing to do. It's a new day in Manitoba. We're fixing health care each and every day.

Despite what members opposite want to believe is happening, we're getting it done.

Children in CFS Care Request for Debate

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Manitoba has the highest per capita of children in care in Canada.

Will the Premier support the need to have a focused debate on the issue of children in care today in the Legislature?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): I want to thank our colleague from Tyndall Park for raising this really important issue.

Like all Manitobans, I've been very, very moved in a sad and challenging way by events that we've

witnessed in our province recently. It brings to light the intergenerational impact of the child welfare system and previous policy mistakes in the public sphere over the past 150 years.

I've shared a clear message with our team: Let's govern in such a way that we don't have to come back 20 years from now and apologize to this generation of children. We will be working with everyone to get this right. Indigenous leaders, community leaders, members from other parties as well. We owe it to the next generation of Manitobans.

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

Children's Special Allowance

MLA Lamoureux: If you refer to Hansard back on October 9, 2020, our current Families Minister criticized the previous government for taking away hundreds of millions of dollars from the children's special allowances meant for children in CFS care. The minister now has the opportunity to give this money back.

Will the minister share if there is a provision being made to return these funds in next month's budget?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): Miigwech to my colleague opposite for the question. I just want to correct the record. Those CSA dollars actually have been not collected by the government for a couple of years now.

And perhaps the member's not currently aware that there is a class action suit in respect of that CSA dollars, are we are—been actively working to negotiate a settlement with all of the plaintiffs and come to the table—come to the negotiation table in a good way. In a good way to restore the harm that was done with both that policy and directly to the children in care.

I hope to have very good news very soon about reaching a settlement.

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

Emergency Placements

MLA Lamoureux: There was a recent tragedy in Carman where a mother, her three children and their teenage cousin were all murdered after it was known that they were not living in a safe place.

How is this government working with the relevant CFS authorities to ensure that emergency placements

are safe and that there is sufficient oversight in placements so that children will not longer be put in unsafe placement again?

MLA Fontaine: First and foremost, Honourable Speaker, I want to, on behalf of our whole government, offer our deepest condolences to the families of the victims on February 11th.

I think it's important to point out that our Premier (Mr. Kinew) attended both the vigil and the funeral and actually shared some really important reflections about his time out in Carman in respect of—that Carman came together for that family. And I would suggest that all of us in the House would come together in our grief in respect of what happened to Carman.

What I can say is that I immediately directed the department to work with a general authority to review all CFS contact leading up to the tragedy in Carman. I'm expecting or hoping to get that report by the end—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

I would take this moment to respectfully mind people in the gallery that participation is not allowed. It's against the rules. So I would respectfully ask you to respect those rules.

School Nutrition Programs Funding Announcement

MLA Nellie Kennedy (Assiniboia): I'm proud to rise today to ask a question to my colleague, the Minister of Education, on our first day back in session.

Our government promised to introduce a universally accessible nutrition program, recognizing the importance of nutrition as a basic need for academic success. Our government has made incredible progress in a short period of time.

Can the Minister of Education please update the House on how our government is ensuring students have barrier-free access to food every day, which will give them the opportunities they need to succeed?

Hon. Nello Altomare (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I want to thank my colleague, the MLA for Assiniboia, for bringing that question to the floor of the House today. It's a very important one, and one that Manitobans are looking forward to actually very much participating in.

I can say that as a government, we're going to be investing \$30 million for the '24-25 school year for school nutrition programs: \$15 million going directly to school divisions for local meal programs based on

enrolment; \$6 million to public schools in communities with the highest socio-economic need; and \$9 million in grants through an application process through schools to exercise their ability to look at their community, decide what they need and then put in the program what's important.

But I—

The Speaker: The minister's time is expired.

Sewage Spill into Red River Impact on Lake Winnipeg Fishery

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): The people of Interlake-Gimli and all Manitobans are very concerned about this government's failure to act during the recent month-long sewage spill into our waterways. This raw sewage is going to end up into Lake Winnipeg and downstream all the way to Hudson Bay. It will contribute to algae blooms, impact our commercial and sport fishing industries and make swimming at our E. coli-infested beaches unbearable. But this government is doing nothing.

Will the Environment Minister please tell us why they did absolutely nothing, and what they will do to ensure these kind of spills are not going to happen in the future.

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): I want to thank the member opposite for this question on a very important issue that I know is top of mind for Winnipeggers and for Manitobans, those that live and work and play around the Red River and also Lake Winnipeg.

I can update the House that our department is actively investigating the issue, and I'm very proud to announce that later today we will be announcing stronger enforcement in The Environment Act, as well as funding to—that will flow to the City of Winnipeg.

We're here to work with our partners, unlike the previous government. We are a collaborative government, we are working with the City of Winnipeg, with municipalities and First Nations downstream—*[interjection]*

And on the topic of showers, I also want to say a sincere thank you to the citizens of south Winnipeg that stepped up while this sewage leak was ongoing. And—

The Speaker: The member's—minister's time is expired.

The honourable member for Interlake-Gimli, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Johnson: Commercial and recreational fishing combined generate \$700 million in economic benefits to the province. The NDP are putting the health of Lake Winnipeg and the health of our economy at risk by their failure to take action to protect our lakes and rivers from these raw sewage spills, the most recent being one of the largest spills in Manitoba's history, and we barely heard a peep from this government.

* (15:00)

What is the minister and Cabinet doing to protect Lake Winnipeg's fishery from raw sewage, as they are letting it flow into our prestigious waterways?

MLA Schmidt: Let's talk about the members opposite record in the last seven years: 248 million litres of sewage dumped into Lake Winnipeg; 223 incidents. That comes after seven years of frozen operating grants to municipalities across the province. Those frozen operating grants have real-world impacts.

Manitobans have a new government, a listening government and a government that's going to take action. I am so proud of this role. I am proud of the role that I will take in protecting the environment and our waterways, unlike the members opposite.

The Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

In light of the fact that I didn't have my mic on during one of the answers, we did lose a considerable amount of time for question period. So, in this instance, I will allow one more question.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you for that wisdom, Honourable Speaker.

The minister has been silent over the past month. Can the minister explain what they are doing to prevent these disasters that feed algae blooms, and what will they do to protect our lakes, our rivers and our pristine beaches from this raw sewage?

Or will the NDP's new tourism slogan be, bring your kids and grandkids to swim in our E. coli-infested waters?

The Speaker: The honourable minister—*[interjection]* Order. Order.

MLA Schmidt: I want to, again, remind the members opposite that they had seven years on this file, seven years where they failed to invest in infrastructure, left a significant infrastructure deficit. Those deficits have real-world impacts.

Manitobans have elected a new government, a government that is proud of Manitoba, a government

that is proud of our water and our environment, and we are going to take the steps to do so.

As I said, later today we will be announcing a strengthening of The Environment Act, something that the members opposite failed to do in their seven years. No opening of The Environment Act. We are going to protect waterways. We are going to protect Lake Manitoba—

The Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

And the time for oral questions has expired.

Petitions? No petitions?

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Honourable Speaker, could you please canvass the House for leave to waive the process set out in rule 39, and allow the House to debate a matter of urgent public importance regarding children in care under the following provisions: (1) Once the motion is moved, the debate may begin immediately; (2) No member may speak for more than 10 minutes; (3) The debate may continue for up to two hours, shall not go past 5 p.m., shall not carry over to another sitting day and shall end after the last speaker concludes their contribution to the debate; and (4) There shall be no vote on the motion at the conclusion of the debate.

The Speaker: Is there leave to waive the process for the consideration of a matter of urgent public importance as set out in rule 39, and allow the House to consider a matter of urgent public importance regarding children in care under the following provisions: (1) Once the motion is moved, the debate may begin immediately; (2) No member may speak more than 10 minutes; (3) the debate may continue for up to two hours, shall not go past 5 p.m., shall not carry over to another sitting day and shall not end after the last speaker concludes their contribution to the debate. There shall be no vote on the motion at the conclusion of the debate.

Is there leave?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

The Speaker: I heard a no.

MLA Lamoureux: I move, seconded by the member for Midland (Mrs. Stone), that in accordance with rule 39(1), the regular business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance,

namely, significant concerns surrounding oversight into the safety and security of children in care following the horrific slayings in Carman involving young children in the care of CFS, reports of cannabis being provided to youth in a foster home and serious concerns involving the supervision of children in emergency placements and in the need of specialized care.

The Speaker: Before recognizing the honourable—*[interjection]*

It has been moved by the honourable member for Tyndall Park, seconded by the honourable member for Midland, that the—that in accordance with rule 39(1), the regular business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely, significant concerns surrounding oversight into the safety and security of children in care following the horrific slayings in Carman involving young children in the care of CFS, reports of cannabis being provided to youth in a foster home and serious concerns involving the supervision of children in need of specialized care.

Is it the—before recognizing the honourable member for Tyndall Park, I should remind all members that under rule 39(2), the mover of a motion on a matter of urgent public importance and one member from the other recognized parties in the House are allowed no more than 10 minutes to explain the urgency of debating the matter immediately.

As stated in Beauchesne's citation 390, urgency in this context means the urgency of immediate debate, not of the subject matter of the motion.

In their remarks, members should focus exclusively on whether or not there is urgency of debate and whether or not the ordinary opportunities for debate will enable the House to consider the matter early enough to ensure that the public interest will not suffer.

MLA Lamoureux: For far too long, the current approach and responding to the needs of children in care here in Manitoba have been inadequate. I want to begin by sharing a few examples. Some are as recent as last month, while others are within the last two years.

We can begin with the recent tragedy in Carman. A mother, her three children and their teenaged cousin were all murdered. It's a tragic case in point. These children should never have been deemed to be in a safe place. There were many warning signs, including an adult resident who had a predisposition to aggressive and violent behaviour.

Furthermore, just a couple weeks ago, it was also revealed that a Winnipeg foster home operator was providing children as young as 15 years old with cannabis daily.

Honourable Speaker, we have a role to play in terms of licensing, monitoring, enforcing with compliance and with departmental policy. How is our province going to ensure better oversight of these children, especially those who are at high risk of sexual exploitation, drug use and self harm?

A few years ago, a Brandon facility for youth in care was forced to close because financial mismanagement of the company was discovered. Where was the oversight in all of this?

And just a few months back, a Winnipeg judge condemned the system that left a vulnerable 14-year-old girl without the housing supports that she needed after her release from custody. She was at high risk. She had been in custody. And at her hearing, she repeatedly asked questions about when and where her foster placement would be. A day after she was released from custody, she was found dead.

* (15:10)

Honourable Speaker, I want our most vulnerable children here in Manitoba to know that they are cared for.

And to underscore the importance of this issue, there were 37 youth deaths by suicide in 2023. Over 20 per cent of them were from a child in foster care or a young adult transitioning out of care. These numbers are the highest ever reported to the Manitoba advocate for children and youth in care. Clearly something is not working, and it is at the expense of children here in Manitoba.

Honourable Speaker, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that these issues are not new. In fact, several agencies, including the Auditor General and the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth have issued recommendations about foster homes and children in care.

Some of these recommendations touch on the reports that we have seen surface in recent months and years. This includes recommendations No. 12 and 19 from the Auditor General. Recommendation 12: the department periodically review and revise the foster homes licensing regulation to ensure standards are up to date.

And recommendation No. 19: the department, in consultation with the authorities, establish expected

frequency of completing required security checks on foster parents and other adults living in the home and follow-up actions that should be taken when foster parents do not comply with safety standards.

Honourable Speaker, some of these recommendations go all the way back to the Phoenix Sinclair report, over a decade ago, which recommends that child welfare workers meet minimum education requirements to ensure a standard of safety to kids in care.

In preparation for this debate, I have had hundreds of conversations over the last few months about the state of children in care, about our child-welfare system, safety concerns, placements, emergency shelters, foster parents. And I want to be abundantly clear that the ultimate goal is to keep children safe with their families, in their homes and in their communities.

Now, Honourable Speaker, in an ideal world, and a world that we can work towards, this is how it would be. Unfortunately, today's reality is that there are nearly 9,000 children still in care right now, and we need placement homes, shelters and foster parents. And we need to invest in them, because they are here to support the children.

Honourable Speaker, through all of my conversations, here are a few ideas that have been put on my radar and I think should be debated and considered. We need to better support Indigenous leadership and initiatives on issues of children in care.

I recognize the limitations of being too prescriptive in what we are bringing forward today, but take the federal bill, C-92. It's a huge step to recognize and restore Indigenous people's jurisdiction over child and family services. This bill is all about the best interests of the child.

So I want to know, how can our province help? All of us here in this House can work with First Nations, Métis and the numerous authorities to ensure that the recommendations produced by the Auditor General and the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth would be fulfilled. Think about security checks, risk analyses of foster homes, increasing maintenance funds. Will the government release a timeline on when will this—on when this could happen?

We can also better support Indigenous leadership through empowering communities and supporting through development of laws and resourcing them. Placement should increase—should include family and culture. What are ways we could enforce this through legislation? Perhaps there's a 'mechanism' that could

be put in place that, while making decisions for placement, it's done solely in the interests of the child, family and culture.

Honourable Speaker, I believe organizations, agencies and foster parents are doing the absolute best that they can with the resources that they are being provided, but children are not getting the services that they need. We need a harm reduction strategy for young people in place immediately.

One of the resources—one of the reasons why we have so many problems in group homes and emergency shelters are simply because there are not enough foster homes to ensure children have a safe and stable home to live.

Honourable Speaker, I have a lot of foster parents in my constituency, and they have shared with me first-hand of the financial pressures, especially over the last several years, that they have had with regards to basic maintenance rates, which have simply not kept up with the rising cost of living.

And in consultation for this debate, I spoke to numerous groups who discussed the need to increase rates for foster parents to ensure that foster children have all the necessary supports to live in a loving, stable and supportive home. We have foster parents here in this House who, as sitting MLAs, have expressed the same concern.

Now, Honourable Speaker, just over a month ago, on January 29, the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth said in committee that she supported today's emergency debate. This past Monday my colleague from Midland brought forward an excellent motion calling on—calling for the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth review to be conducted by independent experts. This would be a great way to ensure that, moving forward, changes proposed and made are consistent and more predictable and fair for all.

Unfortunately, this motion was not supported by the minister, just like the leave request today, Honourable Speaker. With that said, the minister has a real chance to do something here today. For example, the minister could speak in favour of this debate. Allow for us MLAs to actually talk about the critical issue of children in care here today.

You know, if we reflect to Hansard, on October 9, 2020, the now-minister responsible for Families criticized the fact that previous governments took away the children's special allowance meant for children in CFS care. We're talking hundreds of millions of dollars.

Honourable Speaker, the minister's words here are strong, and she has the opportunity to actually put them into action. Will the minister return the money back to Indigenous children? Will this be represented in the government's first budget?

I share these quotes and motions from government, opposition and the children's advocate for the mere purpose of highlighting how everyone around the table, and here in the Legislature, clearly agrees that changes need to happen. And frankly, Honourable Speaker, they are only going to happen if we take responsibility as a whole and put the child first.

As I wrap up, I want to thank everyone who has taken the time to meet with me over the last few months. I've had a lot of consultations, a lot of Zoom calls, a lot of in-person meetings, and the information that has been shared with me is truly invaluable. I've learned so much, and despite the government denying this leave request to have this debate today, I will—and I know there are many members in this House who will—continue to fight and do everything that we can to better support those helping and advocating for children in care today.

My last thought, Honourable Speaker, is I really want to thank those who have joined us today in the gallery. Your hearts are so good, and we are so grateful for the work that you're doing here in the province, and for the children of Manitoba. We are exceptionally grateful for each and every one of you; thank you for your support and all of the work that you're doing.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Honourable Speaker, I wish to add a few comments to this in support of this motion and the urgency and need for this debate, and I want to thank my colleague, the MLA for Tyndall Park, for taking the time to raise this critical matter.

This is an important discussion to have, and I would submit to you that this is urgent, as there are too many children in care. It is heartbreaking that in the past few weeks alone, seven children have passed away, including one in my constituency, in Carman. I believe all of us around this room can agree: we do not want to see this ever happen again.

Our children deserve more; Manitobans deserve more. Manitoba's children, our most vulnerable, deserve—at the very least—for us as elected officials across all political stripes to put partisan politics aside and debate this motion urgently, and support this

motion. The child-welfare system is complex, challenging and more often times than not, very painful, and kids need safe and healthy homes to support them throughout their childhood years and during those key developmental years and beyond.

The current CFS system is about to undergo a significant change, with the passage of bill C-92, and I think we can agree that we want to ensure families stay together and for children to be connected to their own communities, their cultures and their faiths. I do believe this is a direction that all of us in this room want to see. But I also know that significant changes to complex systems take time and do not happen overnight. And while we all work collaboratively to move in this direction, we need to financially support the foster families and the family-based caregivers that are providing the necessary care right now.

This is why this matter is so urgent, Honourable Speaker. This is a matter of public importance. With the high number of children in care, compounded by the affordability crisis impacting Manitobans right now, it is crucial for us as elected officials to urgently debate this motion.

Everyday life is increasingly unaffordable for Manitobans, and with the rising costs of living and weakening economic conditions, economists have indicated we're headed towards even more challenging times ahead.

* (15:20)

Furthermore, Honourable Speaker, without getting into the specific matter of the motion itself, I'm sure that you recognize the very urgent nature of the fact that over 6,000 children and youth in care, foster parents are doing vital and important work by opening up not only homes but also their hearts to children and youth, our future.

A Stats Canada report from October has estimated the cost of raising a child is \$17,000 a year. As of now, foster parents receive between 8,000 and \$10,000 in Manitoba. This is not even 50 per cent of what it takes to raise a child.

This is not about extra compensation or compensating children. This is about keeping up with the rising costs of living to provide the basic necessities to help children in care thrive. As a parent myself, I know how expensive raising children are. Basic necessities like a carton of baby formula for \$35. That \$20 sweater that the child's going to outgrow in three months. The purchase of a stroller and a car seat can set parents back hundreds of dollars alone.

Children grow quickly, and I think all of us as parents know that costs just increase with age. According to a study done by Stats Canada, raising a child from birth to the age of majority can cost up to \$293,000. As Manitoba has one of the highest jurisdictions of children in care, the costs of providing a loving home to children in need should not be an impediment to foster parents, and it is now time that this NDP government open their wallets to provide the necessary supports to our most vulnerable children.

I would encourage that we need to have this debate, because Manitobans are in an affordability crisis. This affordability crisis not only affects our economic fabric, but our social fabric as well. We have a responsibility as elected officials to ensure children have the best chance to succeed. This is ensuring that children in care not only have the basic necessities of food, shelter and transportation, but are also provided the opportunities to socially grow alongside their peers.

In addition, often children come in to care in crisis: trauma, addictions and health challenges. These high rates of adverse childhood experiences often lead to mental health challenges. Children require additional financial supports and additional interventions, and many foster parents are paying out of pocket for these supports as well.

During the committee for the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, the Manitoba advocate was asked directly by the MLA for Tyndall Park if they thought this was a matter of urgent public importance. The advocate agreed with a direct and simple answer of yes.

As the independent body responsible for overseeing children and youth in care, it is prudent that we as a House take the steps that our advocate sees as necessary and move this urgent matter forward to debate.

I am seconding this motion because I believe that is a non-partisan issue. I wholeheartedly agree that we can come together from all political parties, from all sides of this House, to stand up for children and youth in care.

On Monday, members of the House met to discuss the five-year legislative review for the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth. As my colleague, the MLA for Tyndall Park mentioned, I did bring forward a motion to create a non-partisan, expert-guided subcommittee to do justice to this important and complicated review to our complex child welfare system;

an independent committee of experts to review the independent body of the advocate.

Unfortunately, the NDP at that time refused to make that a non-partisan matter. We on this side of the House strongly believe the topic we are about, and hopefully will about to debate today, about the impacts of our children and youth in care, and I know that the minister has had a lifelong commitment to improving the lives of our most vulnerable.

When one in four Canadians cannot even afford basic necessities, where does that leave foster parents who are paying out of pocket to provide not only the basic necessities for our most vulnerable children and youth, but also the important extras as well that create a fulfilling academic and social life? This is why we do need to come together. This is why we need to allow for debate of this important motion.

I am supporting this motion from the MLA for Tyndall Park because I believe that this is non-partisan. It is vital that we stand up for the basic needs of our most vulnerable children and youth in care. It is vital that we support our foster parents, especially—and I cannot stress this enough—during a time when it is so difficult for Manitobans to make ends meet.

Today we have a chance to come together as legislatures and realize that the burdens on families are intense and that we need to do more to support those that take the most vulnerable children into their homes and into their hearts to provide a safe and nurturing space.

Foster parents are dealing with the same cost of living increases as everyone else, but their supports have—from government have remained stagnant. We can do better, and we must do better, and that starts by leaving partisanship at the door and coming together as Manitobans to support those that open their hearts and their homes to our most vulnerable children and youth.

The MLA for Tyndall Park gave ample notice to all of us, on all political parties, to debate this motion. This is why we support this motion. We've had the time to consult and talk, and I've been listening to foster parents across the province and thank all the communications that I've had with them to date. And I would urge you, Honourable Speaker, to let this move towards debate. Let us have a healthy debate about this very important topic and matter.

Thank you.

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): First and foremost, let me just say miigwech to the member opposite for bringing forward this motion.

I think it's important, before I answer some of the questions or some of the recommendations that were both in—both my colleagues opposite's statements, I think it's important to situate the—this debate in its proper historical context.

And that is to say that Indigenous children have always been used as a means of propelling colonization. They've always been used as a tool of colonization. I know that everybody in the Chamber here recognizes the role that residential schools played in our colonial history here in Canada. And I know that everybody in the Chamber would understand that children were seen as the means of executing colonialism on these lands by killing the Indian in the child.

I think it's really important to situate this conversation in that historical context. So first, residential schools, children as young as four, five years old, stolen from their families. Some of their families didn't see their children for 10 years. Some of their families never saw their children. And families had no control over their children. The state could come in to a First Nation community, into a First Nation family, and with no legal means did families have the ability to say, no, you're not taking my child. You're not taking my four-year-old child. You're not taking my five-year-old child up to a school that we don't know where you are. Families had no control over the ability to parent their children.

And then we saw the '60s scoop. We saw the state, child welfare, come in and enact a policy that stole children from Indigenous families and shipped them off everywhere across the globe. Sold them off. And in that case, families had no control over their children. They could not say to the state, no, you're not taking my children. No, you're not adopting my child into the States or into Australia or New Zealand or England. That is my child, I'm keeping my child. Indigenous families had no control to keep their children safe.

* (15:30)

And then we morph into what is the modern-day CFS system, a system that I'm not here to defend as the minister responsible. I, too, was once in care. I, too, was once a child in care because of the system, and my mom had no control to be able to protect me or do what she needed to keep me safe. We have a

system of child welfare across the country, and certainly here in Manitoba, that is predicated upon Indigenous families, Indigenous nations, not having control over child welfare.

One of the first things that I did—I think I had only been minister for not even 48 hours—was I directed our team and my department to prioritize the transfer of jurisdiction of child welfare to First Nation, Métis communities and leadership. That was my first directive.

We now have, for the first time in our history, a legislative framework by which, through bill C-92, jurisdiction—which is such colonial language—but jurisdiction over our children can now finally rest with our families, with our communities, with our leadership. That is the path that we are undertaking right now.

That is the priority of this government. It is to dismantle and decolonize a system that is a part of residential schools, the '60s scoop, that has created so much harm in the lives of Indigenous peoples that we are still paying those consequences today and in the last couple of months. That is the result of Indigenous peoples not having the care and control over their own children.

And so that is my commitment and my dedication as the Minister of Families, as the minister responsible, to work with Indigenous leadership, to pursue the path of jurisdiction. And I can tell you, Honourable Speaker, I am very excited that Manitoba is on the path to jurisdiction, and we are doing good things, exciting things, in respect to jurisdiction.

We have Peguis that is now its own jurisdiction. We are on the cusp of MMF, the MMF—the Metis nation taking full control of their care—their children in care. We are on the path to many First Nation communities that have provided notice under bill C-92 that they are exercising their right to jurisdiction.

We have a variety of First Nations in Manitoba that, right now, as we speak, are developing and coding their law. And once those laws are coded, we, as a partner with Canada, will be at the table to sign those co-ordination agreements and to transfer jurisdiction of child welfare to where it belongs, with Indigenous peoples, Indigenous families and Indigenous nations. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) and I are committed to this. My message to First Nation leadership is we are willing and able and ready to work with you in exercising that jurisdiction, and that is my top priority.

I want to just share a couple of things and correct the record. I know the member opposite for Tyndall mentioned the CSA dollars, so the children's special allowance, and absolutely, she's right in my quote that she relayed in the House today.

I want to remind the House that it was members opposite who tried to bury in BITSA, in an omnibus bill, tried to bury that they were legislating away the rights of Indigenous children to that money. Members opposite did that. They legislated the rights of Indigenous children away, and they tried to bury it.

But they were found in court to be—that they had violated Indigenous children's constitutional rights. And right now, I am proud to be the minister responsible to set right that horrible policy of taking money away from children in care.

We are actively engaged in the negotiations in settling the CSA settlement, and like I said, I'm hoping in the next little while that we will have good news to share and make things right.

I want to remind folks as well, Indigenous peoples know what's best for our children. We have always known what's best for our children. And this government is making that right and making that whole and making our children whole. That is my priority.

And so, while some members want to sit in the House all afternoon and debate a motion, I have work to do. I have work to do as the minister to meet with our leadership, with Indigenous leadership, that know what's best for their children and for their communities. I am busy working on behalf of our children and behalf of all of Manitoba's children.

Again, let me stress, jurisdiction is our top priority. To situate children and to transfer the welfare of Indigenous children to where it rightfully belongs: with our people, with our families and in our communities.

Miigwech.

The Speaker: I thank the honourable members for their advice to the Chair on this motion proposed by the honourable member for Tyndall Park (MLA Lamoureux) for a matter of urgent public importance. The 90-minute notice required prior to the start of routine proceedings by rule 39(1) was provided, and I thank the honourable member.

Under our rules and practices, the subject matter requiring urgent consideration must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if the matter is not given immediate attention. Critically, crucially, there

must be no other reasonable opportunities to raise the matter.

I have listened very carefully to the arguments put forward. Although the many issues facing children in care are indeed very serious and worthy of consideration and discussion, my duty in this moment is to determine if there are other opportunities for debate on such matters.

With that in mind, I must note that members have had the opportunity today to make a statement on this topic during members' statements, and also to ask questions during oral questions. Further, those opportunities and others are available every sitting day in the House. As well, the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of The Advocate for Children and Youth Act, in which members can participate.

Accordingly, I do not believe the motion meets the criteria as a matter of urgent public importance, as there are other opportunities to debate the matter. With the greatest of respect, then, I must rule that this motion—out of order as a matter of urgent public importance.

* * *

The Speaker: Petition—grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): Could you please resume debate on second reading of Bill 5, The Adult Literacy Act, and then call second reading of Bill 6, The Manitoba Assistance Amendment Act?

* (15:40)

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 5—The Adult Literacy Act

The Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Government House Leader that debate on second reading of Bill 5, The Adult Literacy Act, will resume. The debate presently stands in the name of the member for Portage la Prairie, who currently has 27 minutes remaining.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Honourable Speaker, this is a topic that is near and dear to my heart. My grandparents immigrated from Ukraine a number of years ago, and I know we talked today about the second year of the invasion of the Russians into—upon the Ukrainians.

My grandparents were also marginalized during this time. They didn't have the ability to read or write, they couldn't speak English, and they were taken advantage of many times. From the times that they were paying a bill, from the time they were trying to get a mortgage, from the time that they were trying to buy groceries, they always ran into issues like that.

We can never have things like this happen again. We must not marginalize and see why it is important that we look at adult literacy.

Manitoba recognizes and values the advantages of a fully literate citizenry. However, the adult literacy skills of many Manitobans are not at the levels which enable them as individuals to participate fully in increasingly knowledge-based society and economy.

Literacy refers to the skill base that enables people to participate and adapt to change in the workplace, the home and our community. It provides a foundation for further learning and includes some of the following: written communication skills; reading texts, documents; writing; numeracy; thinking skills to learn and solve problems. And again, I go back to my grandparents and think about them when I talk about this.

In a society that is becoming more complex and in an economy that is increasingly competitive, literacy skills are critical. In fact, in a knowledge-based economy, literacy is the skill base for labour productivity. The widespread adoption of information and communication technologies requires that individuals have literacy skills and can apply them in a technical environment.

Ideally, every childhood experience and schooling provide a strong literacy foundation. Our adult experience, training and schooling should provide the enhancements to this foundation.

Literacy skills are the basics of a person's development as an adult learner. Some of us don't have the opportunity to have that opportunity to come for us.

The economic impacts of low literacy, particularly among adults, are not sufficiently recognized by employers. Research indicates that Canadian employers do not invest in employee training and skill development at a level comparable to many other developed countries.

International studies estimate that countries with a one per cent higher average literacy score experience over a one and a half per cent higher GDP per capita.

Wouldn't we all like to see our GDP per capita go up by one and a half per cent?

With shifting economic realities, including a global communication and international commerce, the productivity of Manitoba's labour force will be a crucial factor in the province's future.

In addition to addressing the skill levels of working-age Manitobans, there are several groups that require particular attention. Demographic projections indicate that Indigenous people will play a more prominent role in Manitoba's future labour force.

There are unique needs with respect to literacy and language among Manitoba's Indigenous populations. Skilled immigrations are viewed in Manitoba as an important source of future labour supply. Many new immigrants face language barriers to full labour market participation. There are other population groups with particular literacy needs: francophone, under-employed and unemployed.

We almost—we also must recognize, as I spoke today, about the 58 Filipino people that are here working in the health-care system because of the past Labour and Immigration minister and his work that he did to bring these health-care workers here. It gives us an opportunity that we must be—make them feel comfortable here, that this is their home, that this is a place where they can feel safe, they can feel comfortable and they know that they can work together with us.

There are clear social benefits associated with increased literacy skills in the area of health, justice and social cohesion, cultural inclusion, personal empowerment and active citizenship. For example, health and literacy are related. Research indicates a strong relationship between a person's literacy level and his or her physical well-being. The Organisation of—for Economic Co-operation and Development has stated that higher literacy numeral—numeracy levels help reduce demands on the health system, which is important as countries struggle to finance the cost of providing health services.

Again, when it comes to literacy, it's important that people that are coming over here as immigrants are able to understand and be able to have knowledge of things like if they are working in the health-care system or if a person is working at HyLife that he's—that they are aware of the dangerous situations that can also help—happen in the workplace.

There also may be significant relationships between literacy and the justice system. Evidence suggests that the increases in literacy levels may act to

reduce crime levels. Many Manitobans who are clients of social service systems require personal support as well as literacy development. In the long term, addressing literacy needs should support reduction to the costs associated with social services.

The consultation process was designed to engage key stakeholders and the public and to contribute their knowledge and expertise in shaping adult literacy strategy. The information gathered, as well as the ongoing feedback during the development and 'impletation,' will serve as a foundation of which to build a response to address the literacy challenges of the province.

Stakeholder meetings. Meetings and round table discussions were held with key stakeholder groups, including immigrant organizations, representatives from Indigenous communities, non-government organizations and agencies, representatives from francophone community and business. These sessions followed a format similar to that of the learner and practitioner's discussions. Public sessions provided opportunities for individuals and groups to make oral presentations regarding the adult literacy strategy in a public forum.

Each presentation was limited to 20 minutes. Presenters were encouraged to provide written copies. Again, important as we move forward to make sure that the new people that are immigrating into Manitoba do have the opportunity to learn at their level, to be able to become better citizens, as we've heard.

What literacy-related competencies are necessary for an individual, meaningful participation in Manitoba? Consultation participants supported the need for literacy competencies. There was no fundamental disagreements with the description of the literacy skill base as articulated in these discussion papers.

* (15:50)

The increased need to be able to use literacy foundation skills to analyze and process information was a reoccurring topic. In one case, that was referred to as a document literacy. The inclusion of essential skills, instructions in adult programming was noted as an important means to focus learners on work readiness.

The importance of functional literacy was identified. To this end there was a number of references to the needs for better health literacy for patients, particularly for seniors, immigrants and those functioning at low literacy levels.

Now is the time that we need to continue to look at literacy levels as well too. When we see the number of scams that are going on in our province, from other places out there as well too.

A number of other functional challenges were referenced, with particular mention of understanding and completing government-related documents, including the wording of client registration procedures and regulatory guidelines.

There were express needs to—for plain English in government service to the public. Many participants placed emphasis on the way that oral communication is conducted by government personnel when communicating with the public. Everybody should feel that they have a worth here in our province.

The difference between literacy training and English as an additional second language for immigrants who are already literate in their native language was emphasized. The importance of cultural contexts, particularly in literacy development with our Indigenous citizens, was noted as well.

The importance of not being tied to one definition of literacy, but to recognize the range of literacies that exist in our diverse population and the complex society, was identified.

Related so many—related to many of these ideas was the emphasis on literacy skills as fundamental to an individual's active participation in society, and the opportunity to gain access to a better way of living. And isn't that what we all want, is just a better way of living for all of the people that are here with us?

What are the best ways to raise and maintain literacy levels in Manitoba? In Manitoba, the literacy movement has grown and been nurtured through an environment that is strongly community based. It is then not surprising that the consultation participants based many of their comments about raising literacy levels on strengths of their local improvement at the teaching and learning level.

Most participants felt there was a strong need for more coherent system that continues to facilitate the community-based model. There was a general call for more collaboration, more partnership between programs, support agencies and government departments.

There were many parties who advocated enhanced literacy programs, accessibility, including flexible hours of operation and more programs located within practical distance of learners. Where that is so

important is people that are dealing with shift work so that they can become trained properly.

There was a strong 'advocacy'—advocacy to create a one-stop shop in certain strategic locations. These larger programs centres would be structured to meet the needs of all of their adult learners.

In Portage la Prairie, for instance, we have a place there called the Portage Learning and Literacy. And, again, that gives people the opportunity that are new to the constituency of Portage la Prairie to come and learn about the language, to learn about how to get a social insurance number, to learn how to get a birth certificate and many other things that are done there.

Libraries, a socially inclusive service, were recognized by some of the participants as a key resource in terms of holding expertise, outreach, Internet access, facilities availability and general support services. At present, they are seen as a 'proliferal' player.

A few participants indicated that in many communities there are no libraries and no access to books, particularly in the North, and we must do better.

There is one specific call for a ministers advisory council on adult literacy. There was a call for an institute of literacy independent of government, which would conduct and dismantle research—disseminate research.

Teaching and learning: there were many suggestions that related to the very important process of learning in literacy in the classroom. There were numerous calls to further promote the active participation of learners in developing learning plans, deciding the learning instruction process and assessing a key adult learning principle. We must make sure that our education system has the ability to help with literacy when it comes to both adults and children in our province.

There was a distinct advocacy for a variety of teaching approaches based on learner needs and community capacity. In other words, there was little call for standardization. There was one specific call for specifying a number of target groups and designing suggested methods for the teaching-learning process for each one.

There were a few strong calls to officially recognize family literacy as an effective adult literacy strategy, which is relevant and an important contributor to better family life. There was also a call for explicit learning plans for each adult learner. There was a call to purchase and adopt a specific software

learning program that is believed to be the most effective.

Many indicated that there was a need for more contact hours for learners where the personal circumstances allowed. Many practitioners wanted a better method of assessing learners' needs in order to build a more effective programming. There were many calls for more professional development training, for volunteer tutors and paid instructors and teachers.

Presenters advocated for sufficient and current professional development as a means to attract and retain staff. There were strong calls to establish a modern and complete teacher resource library and to make it easily accessible.

There was a discussion among some practitioners regarding the current literacy stages curriculum framework. There were reactions against the mandating of stages, particularly if they were tied to funding. A few supported the use of stages for appropriate learners. Some organizations identified that implementation of stages curriculum framework depends on sufficient program hours and learners' contact time, which, in current funding levels, did not support. Again, not everyone works a 9-to-5 job anymore.

There were a few calls to increase the promotion and the use of general education development as an option for learners. There were some recommendations to establish a credible provincial post-secondary program for teaching methodology.

However, this was not unanimous. A few groups, while not opposing the post-secondary education component, objected to mandatory certification.

There was a general agreement that there should be a unique and specifically articulated set of skills that an effective adult literacy teacher or instructor should possess.

Everyone who commented felt that the pay rates were far too low for teachers, instructors. There was one call for paid preparation. There were some strong recommendations both for and against standardizing. There were many calls for transportation subsidies, again, which is an issue for a lot of newcomers that may not have a driver's licence at this time, and it may be important for them to be able to read in order to get a driver's licence.

It was also important that, if they were facing any issues regarding law enforcement that they would be able to understand that. So, again, adult literacy is very important that way.

There were calls to strengthen the current learn line which provides important support for adult literacy. A few literacy programs are funded for operation in the summer. This was considered to be a good way of flexibility, again, so that people could do this while they were on holidays or had a certain amount of time off.

* (16:00)

Workforce employment-based focus. It was generally agreed that the literacy skills of Manitoba's workforce are the foundation of the province's productivity, and the employees with strong literacy-essential skills faced better chances of promotion and job security. In Canada, both provincial governments and federal governments contribute to labour market skill development.

In order for these people to feel welcome, in order for them to feel successful, we must give opportunity to our people that they must—they have to be able to have the opportunity to gain and to speak the language of the country that they're in.

Business representatives indicated there is a current labour shortage, and we all know that, in many different sectors, as we talked today about the sector of health that we're dealing with.

The problems in the North were clearly delineated and unique approaches were called for. The tight labour market in some of the northern communities is creating serious problems. Coupled with related problems in support of such a—as living recommendation—accommodations is affecting learners retention. Many who leave or bypass literacy training for jobs are not prepared, and the labour market turnover is very high in those situations.

In many cases, employees were turning to the immigrant community to fill entry-level shortages, as well as shortages where their needs of specific skill set. If we don't make people feel welcome in our communities, why would they want to stay? Again I ask: Why would they want to stay? I can see no reason why they would want to stay.

An Honourable Member: Why would they want to stay?

An Honourable Member: Good question. Why would they want to stay?

MLA Bereza: I don't know. I—that's my question as well.

Many employers are convinced the benefits of literacy development of their workforce. Many employees are also convinced of the needs to improve their foundation skill. There was a lack of consensus to who should be responsible to address the issue of workforce literacy. We have to take some responsibility, as well, to make sure that our people are trained properly, that they're working in a safe environment, that they can understand that environment that they're working in.

There was a lack of consensus as to who should be responsible to address these issues. Some employer representatives, although not disagreeing, felt that it was preferable to adopt better hiring practices than to engage existing employees in workplace literacy strategy initiatives.

In order to keep our workers, to keep them healthy, to keep them happy both mentally and physically, it's important that adult literacy plays a strong part here.

The Indigenous focus. The Indigenous participants, learners, instructors, practitioners and organizations were provided input were very clear as to which directions programming should take in order to properly address the serious literacy needs of their adult population. The specific comments were there was a passionate advocacy to develop effective separate approaches that would provide suitability, autonomy to program providers and culturally appropriate experiences for learners.

The mobility of our current Indigenous population was noted as a specific challenge to literacy. There was one strong recommendation to train adult educators with the skills to be able to work in northern communities. There was strong advocacy to meet specific needs for literacy training, particularly in remote communities. It was noted that many learners are accessibly provide-provincially funded programs outside of their communities.

There were specific calls for vast improvements to programming and supports for Indigenous women who are single parents.

The first language of many Indigenous people is not English. There was a call for at least one centre dedicated to teaching English as an additional language. There was also a call for reinvigorating an E-L-A curriculum for those learners.

Important focus. As previously mentioned, there was a number of comments that underline the dif-

ference between adult literacy and English as an additional language. There were a few comments from literacy practitioners in rural areas to include migrant-immigrant language development as part of the general approach to meeting language developments for their clients. In some areas, literacy programs accepted learners who had completed E-L-A training; some of other literacy programs accept immigrants who bypassed EAL.

There was significant feedback received on teaching and learning. Despite their commitment to local literacy activity, all participants saw the value of some kind to facilitate structure to promote the flow of learners through the system of learning. There are currently a large number of literacy and ALC programs, as well as a number of specific literacy support agencies and organizations. Many felt that an array provides confusion at the local level and there is a need to provide rationale for this array in order to clarify an overall role. We must make it easier for people to be able to learn the language of us, here, that we're talking with.

What are the best ways to raise literacy levels here in Manitoba? The Manitoba literacy landscape is characterized by a variety of strong commitments, by programs to instruct those with low literacy levels. The students and the practitioners spoke passionately about the importance of their endeavours. Many of the students have had significant interference and interruption in their education.

And, again, like my parents—or, grandparents that immigrated here from Ukraine, they didn't have the time to do this. We must do a better job to make sure that we are doing this with our adult literacy and making sure that no one is left behind when we're talking about adult literacy. We must make sure that everybody that comes to this great province of ours has the opportunity.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other speakers?

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Honourable Speaker, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to put some words on the record today regarding Bill 5, The Adult Literacy Act. It's a pleasure to stand in the House today and share some words.

Honourable Speaker, before I begin my remarks regarding The Adult Literacy Act, I would ask you, Honourable Speaker, for a little bit of leniency, as this is my first opportunity to speak in the Chamber since the 2023 provincial election. With your lean-leaning—

oh, my goodness—with your leniency, Honourable Speaker, I would like to thank a few people.

First off, I would like to thank my wonderful campaign team. I would like to thank them for all the hard work they had done to have me re-elected for a third term to the Legislative Assembly as the representative for Dawson Trail. I also need to thank the people of Dawson Trail for putting their faith in me once more as their provincial representative. I would also be remiss if I did not congratulate you on your appointment as Honourable Speaker, and I look forward to working together.

I also would like to thank you, Honourable Speaker, for your grace, as I needed a bit of time to continue on my healing journey. I continue to struggle with my mental health, and the unpredictability of trying to find the right balance of medication. But, Honourable Speaker, I can tell you and the rest of this House, proudly, that I am in a place where things have stabilized and I am eager to work together with my colleagues and the newly elected Chamber.

Before I continue to my remarks on Bill 5, The Adult Literacy Act, I would also like to thank my colleagues for their support and concern. I also want to thank the member for Thompson (MLA Redhead) for his concern during my healing journey. I've been overwhelmed with the words of support and encouragement, and have been humbled by the amount of individuals that have thanked me for continuing to share my story.

* (16:10)

Now to my remarks on Bill 5, The Adult Literacy Act, Honourable Speaker.

When I sat down to write these thoughts and remarks on the bill, my mind immediately went to the month that has just passed and the importance of literacy.

Our children are the future of Manitoba, and it is of the utmost importance that we share our love for learning and take the time to answer their questions and plant the seeds of importance of reading.

I Love to Read Month is one of my favourite times of the year. Honourable Speaker, one's reading ability impacts directly on their writing ability and their literacy skills.

There's a quote that I would like to share by Carl Sagan: One of the greatest gifts adults can give to their offspring and to their society is to read to children.

This year, during the month of February, I had the opportunity to read to 41 classrooms. I say that again, 41 classrooms. Some books were fun, some books were serious and some were incredibly insightful.

Some book titles that I read were: The Big Cheese, by Jory John; We're Going on a Bear Hunt, by Michael Rosen; The Barnabus Project, by The Fan Brothers; Olga and the Smelly Thing from Nowhere, by Elise Gravel.

A recommendation for a book came to me, as—was the book, Ada Twist, Scientist, by Andrea Beaty. The book is for early years, ages six to eight, and was one of the many in a series.

There was also Iggy Peck, Architect; Rosie Revere, Engineer; Lila Greer, Teacher of the Year. These books all teach the children of the importance of asking questions, making decisions, attempting new things and truly helps them to build skills to be creative and find a love for learning.

Setting our young ones up for success in life starts at a very young age. Having schools that are not overcrowded and have children care available is crucial.

I will touch base on an incredibly significant issue in the town of Ste. Anne with the current school setup. The staff at the school are very much dedicated to the students and to their learning, to the betterment of each student's future. I cannot show enough gratitude for everything they do for our children and for the community.

The learning environment that currently exists, however, is not conducive to successful learning. There are multiple schools operating in the same building, ranging from K all the way to grade 12. I can remember this one time visiting the school, and walking into the elementary door, and I walked through a group of high-schoolers that were smoking outside.

And I thought to myself that this is just not acceptable, especially for kindergarten kids, to have to walk through that.

I can confidently say that literacy and education is not being served through the cancellation of a school in Ste. Anne that was planned to open in 2027.

If we want to focus on adult literacy and education, we have to provide our children with the learning environments that are beneficial to their early development.

It is very unfortunate that the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning (MLA Altomare) values

education so little that this was not taken into consideration when they cancelled the project for this community.

Not only was this school that has now been cancelled benefiting all the children in the community, but it was also benefiting parents; parents who need child care to, let's say, attend Ste. Anne Adult Learning Centre to better their future and the future of their children.

Daycare waiting lists have hundreds of children, and this is just devastating for the community to continue to have to struggle to find affordable, reliable daycare. It makes me question how serious the government is about education and adult literacy.

I would like to think that this is contrary to the information that I read in Bill 5, The Adult Literacy Act.

Honourable Speaker, I would now like to take—to speak more about the centre I just mentioned, the Ste. Anne Adult Learning Centre that has been operating in my riding in the community of Ste. Anne for some time.

The Ste. Anne Adult Learning Centre offers adults the opportunity to further education by offering courses that help them achieve a high school diploma, prerequisites for post-secondary study or to improve their employment skills.

The mission statement of this organization states that their mission is to empower all students and promote lifelong learning by providing a high-quality education and learning opportunities in a safe, friendly, adult-centred learning environment. They believe that all adults can learn and contribute a wealth of life experiences to their learning process, and that their students deserve meaningful, adult-appropriate learning opportunities.

I can truly say they do follow this in the interactions I have had with the centre. I wonder if this centre was considered in the consultation process for Bill 5, The Adult Literacy Act. If not, Honourable Speaker, they may want to consult them, as I believe they would have some insightful, valuable information that would be incredibly beneficial for a bill such as this, The Adult Literacy Act.

I can say that it is never too late to consult and learn from teachers in this facility, as they deal with adults in all different corners of life through their education journey. The adult learning centre also helps other areas of education, such—and provides a wide

range of classes, which include business and computer, accounting principles, accounting systems, applied business and technologies, English language arts, transactional English, mathematics, essential mathematics, intro to applied and pre-cal, applied mathematics, pre-calculus math, physical education, physical science, biology, physics and social sciences, community service student-initiated projects, psychology and law.

Honourable Speaker, all of the above that was mentioned tie into the literacy, and Bill 5, in The Adult Literacy Act.

Once again, in the consultation process, the Minister of Advanced Education and Training (MLA Cable) would've missed an opportunity to hear from an organization that is a not-for-profit organization that fosters optimal education and lifelong learning.

They value the courage and commitment of adult 'learners', and they are committed to supporting all learners who want to make positive changes in their lives through educational opportunities that they offer. They recognize the need for adult 'learners' to achieve a high level of confidence and self-esteem, to be able to be successful not only in their educational programs, but also in life.

And as you can imagine, Honourable Speaker, to be successful through adult reading and literacy does help people to achieve the goals that they would like for their own lives, and improve their situations.

The Ste. Anne learning centre firmly believes that for individuals to be competitive in today's job market, they need strong literacy, numeracy, technology skills and emotional competency. Honourable Speaker, to this me—to me, this sounds like an organization that should be consulted, and hopefully were, in the drafting of Bill 5, The Adult Literacy Act.

Honourable Speaker, the Ste. Anne learning centre is one of many organizations that promote adult 'learnacy'—literacy and learning. All education is important in every stage of life, and that is why the Ste. Anne Adult Learning Centre is one of the organizations that I provide a scholarship to.

The MLA Bob Lagassé most improved student award is one that fits perfectly with this organization. Who better to deserve an award than an adult who's decided to have the courage to go back to school and improve their literacy skills? [*interjection*] Oh, yes. My bad.

The Speaker: Order please. The member can't use his name in the Chamber, so.

Sorry; the honourable member from Dawson Trail.

MLA Lagassé: Okay, I will call that a rookie mistake.

Where was I at? Okay. So as I was saying, I do provide a bursary to this school, and again, touching on the fact that, you know, it takes a lot of courage for an adult to go back to school and to learn. And, you know, especially if they didn't finish their grade 12, or they were finished at grade 10, I really feel that these people should be uplifted and given the opportunities to move forward, to improve themselves.

* (16:20)

Over the years, it has been remarkable to see the accomplishments of these students, and witness their commitment and dedication to their schooling and their future. Honourable Speaker, I also reflect on my own educational journey. When I sat down to write my debate notes for Bill 5, The Adult Literacy Act—I have shared in the past my experiences in the education system, and that it was not always a positive one on that particular path.

I can remember multiple times being stuck in the hall because the teachers didn't know how to deal with a child who couldn't sit still. I can also remember many a time where I was left out of the general education process, such as reading and math, because the teachers felt I was too disruptive, and/or they were not equipped to deal with a child with my calibre of needs.

I also can recall one time being left out of an outing to this particular building, and one of the teachers telling me that I would never amount to anything. And here I sit now, today, as an MLA in this building, and I'm very proud to say that I did amount to something in spite of that negative.

I could have seen myself needing programs like those mentioned in Bill 5, The Adult Literacy Act. And I can honestly say that if it had not been for a few teachers who took the time to invest in me and my educational journey, I would have seen myself needing these programs that this bill is designed to help.

I think back to one particular teacher who really took me under her wing and built me up, and taught me that it was, you know, it was okay to learn differently, that I could be part of a classroom, that I didn't have to be kicked into the hall. And I really thank that teacher. She's long passed, but I really do thank her for investing in me and my journey.

Honourable Speaker, as Bill 5, The Adult Literacy Act states, higher literacy skills lead to reduced poverty and improved personal and economic and social outcomes for families in and around the community. The bill goes on to state adults in Manitoba require literacy skills to take full advantage of the current and future education and employment opportunities.

The government literacy practitioners, newcomers and organizations, Indigenous organizations and communities, education and training providers and appropriate non-government organizations across the adult education system need to work together to provide effective literacy programming for all adults. And as we heard from a few of my colleagues, that in particular would be important to the immigrant population here in Manitoba, which we are seeing an increase in the riding of Dawson Trail, and the services offered to them would be absolutely fantastic, through learning.

Honourable Speaker, Bill 5, the adult literacy, has huge potential to be an effective tool, as long as the proper consultation has been done, and this is not just being put forward without that consultation.

To this, I'm not certain that all the proper organizations that deal with education and literacy have been consulted. If the Minister of Advanced Education and Training (MLA Cable) would and could possibly provide a list of the organizations consulted in the drafting of Bill 5, The Adult Literacy Act, it would go a long way.

Knowing which organizations would help put my mind at ease, and I'm sure others' minds and—at ease about this particular bill, Honourable Speaker. The explanatory note on the bill states The Adult Literacy Act requires the minister to develop, implement and evaluate an adult literacy strategy in collaboration with others involved in adult literacy.

I would like to again state the significance of collaboration—of the collaboration portion. I'd like to give the Minister of Advanced Education and Training the benefit of the doubt that the collaboration was done properly for the bill. It would be a disservice to my role as a member of the official opposition, and to those who elected me to get answers, to pass a bill without all the proper information.

Honourable Speaker, once again I mention it would be irresponsible and a disservice to the constituents of Dawson Trail, who put their faith in me and have elected me to this position, to pass a bill without

knowing all the collaboration was done thoroughly and plentifully.

With that, Mr. Honourable Speaker, I'm going to conclude my remarks. I thank you once again for the opportunity to speak in the Chamber today.

MLA Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and everyone in here for allowing me a few minutes to stand up and talk about this very important bill that's brought forward, Bill 5, The Adult Literacy Act.

I don't think you'll get any argument from anyone in this Chamber, or actually in this province, the importance of literacy. And then when I got—reading the bill and got to deep dive a little bit on some information and some briefing notes, I said, let's back it up a little bit and let's talk about what the actual explanatory note in this bill is.

And, for those of you who don't know in the Chamber, because I don't know if anyone's actually paying attention to anything that's happening in here, as everyone seems to have their side conversations and be on their phones and whatnot, I said, it's important; let's talk about what actually Bill 5 is. The Adult Literacy Act requires the minister to develop, implement and evaluate an adult literacy strategy, in collaboration with others involved in adult literacy.

So, I mean to me, that sounds pretty good, right? I think everyone agrees that the—what the bill is designed for: the minister to develop, implement and evaluate an adult literacy strategy is actually a good thing.

And I said, okay, well let's go a little farther. Is literacy reading and writing only? And as we hear people speak, and I remember back in the fall session as we heard some colleagues speak, it was really focused on reading and writing, and I was under the impression that that also involves communication as well, speaking, language.

And, yes, I was right. At its simplest, literacy is the way in which we interact with the world around us, how we shape it and how we are shaped by it. It is how we communicate with others via reading and writing, but also by speaking, listening and creating. It is how we articulate our experience in the world and declare we are here.

So that was one of the many, many definitions I read on literacy. And the reason why I decided to quote that one is because I think it's important for the end part there, where it says, we are here.

What does that mean when you say, we are here? Well, we are here is a form of validation. It's a form of recognition. It's a form of acknowledgement that you are here, and literacy is a way in which we get that done. The reading, the writing, the communicating, through creating. And I think all those things are very, very important.

So this Bill 5, I think we started off on a good platform together, saying the literacy act is important. We need to figure out how we can support Manitobans in literacy in all of its context.

I am—you know, when we're communicating with each other as well, there is the verbal aspect, which is probably the first and foremost that, you know, we actually get ideas across. But even communicating just through body language would be a form of that. How do you look? How are you representing yourself? What is your story? As you come to that, all non-verbal cues in the form of literacy.

Reading and writing, of course very, very important, and I'll talk about that a little bit later on how important reading is and the story that really touched my heart about someone who was unable to read.

When we back up the forms of literacy and we say communication is one of them, it reminds me of a very important—I said literacy—I said, okay, what is communicating? And I said, communicating. And I said, well—and well, I—actually, I don't think anybody in this Chamber probably knows this about me; it was written a few articles ago—but English is actually my second language. I was born in Canada, very proudly in 1980, and family decided to move back to Pakistan in 1983. So I was three—'84—sorry. My brother was born here in '84.

So mom and dad came here and they really struggled with life in Canada. Father was an MBA from Pakistan, was a vice-president at a big bank in Lahore, Pakistan, and very successful. And he said, let's go to Canada for a better life. So mom and dad packed up and came to Canada, three older siblings. So they came here in '78.

My sister was born in '78, that year, Canadian, and then my two older brother and sister from Pakistan. And then I was born in '80 and my brother was born in '84—sorry, I'm digressing to a lot of details, but I have 30 minutes to tell this wonderful story, so I said, let's really dive into this wonderful story. I'm going to paint a tapestry. I'm going to create some literacy with you, creative words and visions.

So, father came here, and I know, you know what, I bet you, actually, as I look around the Chamber and you look at Manitoba, I bet you a lot of people can probably relate to a story similar to this, whether you're my colleague here, family emigrated from Ukraine and built a life here, you know, from wherever you might be across the world. My fellow Punjabi brothers across the way, as well, I'm sure can relate to this story.

* (16:30)

So they came here, and my father really struggled with a job here, really struggled with the language. And again, very successful vice president of a bank back in Pakistan. And they didn't like it. They didn't understand the norms here. They couldn't get integrated into society here. Language was a tough barrier. Finding a job was very, very tough. From a very accomplished vice president of a bank coming to Canada and not have anything.

And this was before—this was in the '80s. This is—no cellphones, no connectivity like we have today to further push literacy in this province and society. They were really disconnected. They were one of the first families, actually, first Muslim families, in Ottawa to settle there in the late '70s.

So they decided to pack up and move. I was four years old. I remember this very vaguely. We moved to Pakistan, the whole family, suitcases gone. And after, I think, eight months, they came back. We all hated it there. Apparently, I was the one that got the most sick, and they—we—apparently, the kids just hated it, and we just didn't like it, so we came back. And the education system there, let me tell you, is very different than the education system here, and foreigners get treated very different than locals there. But regardless, we all came back.

So we came back when I was about five and a half years old, and I couldn't speak a word of English. Not a word. And went to grade school and, okay, you're in grade—I think it was kindergarten or grade 1 at the time. And I remember going to school with my mom and dad, terrified, going to Canadian school, and they said, okay, here you go. And thank God there was another kid who was Pakistani, who spoke Punjabi, as well, and Urdu with me. So him and I became very good friends and best friends, actually, and he really helped me along that journey.

But I remember how terrified I was that I couldn't speak—and I still remember that to this day as a 43-year-old man standing here in the Legislature, I

was terrified that I could not speak English as a little child.

So when you think about—and then, you know, you worked at it and you worked at it, and I struggled with pronouncing Rs for a long time; I couldn't say R. It's really hard to roll the tongue. It's very different than Arabic or Punjabi. So I remember as we move forward in life and, you know, you grow and, you know, I just lay an English game on and then you learn and you learn, and here we are today as a 'legis'.

And so I talk about that because communicating is very, very—language speaking is a very important part of the literacy component. And when we talk about this bill here, it's not just a piece of legislation. You know, it's a promise to the people of Manitoba and every citizen that we in government, as elected officials, are going to provide them with the tools so that they can succeed. And one of those fundamental tools is literacy in all of its forms.

When we look at the changing landscape of Manitoba now, and you look around and the immigration is really large, and we have, you know, lots of Ukrainians coming here, and the work that the previous—very fantastic work the previous government did in bringing Ukrainians and historically what we've done also with immigration through, you know, the PNP program, you know, bringing in non-Canadians to become part of Canada. And they're learning the language, and you see them in their communities and you see them at the, you know, whether it be the restaurants or the gas stations or, you know, a reception, and they're trying to learn that part. And you say, wow, this is someone who's come to Canada who's working hard, who wants to have a good life, who wants to build that, and how can we further support that?

So, you know, this adult literacy bill really talks about that. Well, it's supposed to talk about that and supposed to dive into on how we can support the adult literacy, and these Canadians, the growing people who might struggle with English, on how to learn, how to communicate, how to write that.

You know, we look at adult literacy, it's not only important, it's vital to ensure that everyone can fully participate in the workforce and community. It allows people to improve their skills and education. When you talk about that and you say, okay, well, if you struggle with literacy, how can you really succeed in a country that you're not literate in? And whether you're from a foreign country or you're born and raised here and you've had difficulties learning to read and write

and communicate, all of that can really be difficult for someone who's trying to become successful.

So when you look at, you know, further their workforce and community, literacy is the fundamental tool for adults to get a job, right? To understand, to read, to understand the workforce, what's required for them in their job, what they're going to be looking out for. And again, not just reading, also communicating. And not just communicating verbally, communicating through their proper attire and workforce and how to integrate into that workforce.

This all ties into adult literacy. It's important for quality of life and financial security. When we talk about, you know, financial literacy, imagine being someone who struggles with the bare basics of just literacy as an adult. You can't read, you struggle with that aspect of it and then you have to understand financial literacy. So that illiteracy in this bill, it's really important when you talk about how—what type of programs are this government going to do.

This is an important aspect of this bill here. So when we talk about the adult literacy section, the quality of life and financial security gained through this bill would be really, really beneficial. It's life changing on how adult literacy can really affect someone's ability to earn money, to put a roof over their head for their family, to provide and to grow.

And there's lots of great things happening in this province on adult literacy, and I'm going to touch on that in a little bit, on how we can ensure that Manitobans are supported in literacy, not only K to 12, but also through their adult years. It protects people from being taken advantage of through fraud or scams and ensuring they have the literacy skills to protect their interests.

You know, as you get older, as—I don't know where—whether you've had that in your family or not, but maybe reading a credit card statement is the most daunting thing in the world for you. Understanding your basic finances in your house and how to run that aspect of it. So financial literacy is a really big part of that.

You know, when we talk about adult literacy, we can't forget the K-to-12 education program. We can, in fact—we can't forget that, you know, I was one of the kids of the system who, in kindergarten, couldn't speak a word of English. And now I think I have a decent grasp of the language. I could probably read the dictionary a bit more and widen my—expand my

vocabulary with the use of different adjectives and whatnot.

An Honourable Member: Encyclopedias.

MLA Khan: Encyclopedias, there's apps for that as well, but you've got to know how to download the apps, and then you can use the apps to expand your adult literacy.

But kids need support in that as well, as they learn to read in Canada. You know, imagine the young families coming here, my family for example, we'd go—get plunged into school and you don't know how to read. Well, thank God for my friend, Asif was his name. I don't know if he's watching. Asif, if you are, thank you very much for all your help, but we still keep in touch. Yes. So, you know, that's important.

When we debate this bill, it's important to remember that literacy, again, is not just about reading and writing. It's about empowerment. It's an opportunity and dignity. Literacy opens the doors to employment, to education, a full participation and inclusion in our society. It is the foundation on which many other skills are built. It's a foundation on which success is built. And again, we have the K to 12, then you have the adult literacy component of it, and we need to make sure that people always have these tools for education, for learning, for growing, for all of the reasons that I just listed above.

You cannot ignore the fact that there are still far too many Manitobans struggling with literacy. We need to help them. These are not just numbers or statistics. They're our neighbours, they're our friends, they're the person when you go to pull up, you know, gas or buy your groceries or get your Tims. They're people delivering valuable goods for us throughout the entire world. They're our people working in IT and blue-collar jobs. They're people that—working in rural Manitoba and helping our economy thrive here. These are people that are integrated in every aspect of our society, so it's incumbent upon us to help them with adult literacy.

Yet these are still individuals who, despite their talents and potentials, they still face barriers to reaching their goals. An adult may have a job, an entry-level job, and they are limited in enhancing how far they can grow because they may lack basic literacy skills that many of us take for granted.

I know I take it for granted, personally, myself, but when I go back to my story of when I first came to Canada, I think that really, you know, shapes the path of how I, in this building here, can work through

legislation on helping more people enhance their literacy skill. It's not a—it's not just a personal issue, it's a societal issue. It's one when individuals lack the ability to read and write, it impacts all of us. All of us.

* (16:40)

We—I mean, this is one of those, you know, and I don't want to say low-hanging fruits, but it's one of those measurable objectives that can be measured. It can be traced. It can be tracked on how many people are learning their literacy; adult literacy programs can do that. It affects our economy, our health-care system, our communities. It limits our potential as a province, the more illiteracy we have.

I'm going to read another very interesting—and this is, I mean, we've all said it here, but I wanted to just talk quickly here. Literacy is the global metric that we use to assess the health and competence of communities. High literacy rates have been found to correlate to everything from better access to economic opportunities to better nutrition—we talked about that earlier today—to environmental sustainability and many more factors.

So right there we have it that the health of a society is literally directly tied to its literacy rates. If that's not enough to get people's attention then I'm not sure what else would be.

Businesses thrive, communities thrive when we have higher literacy rates. Workforce, innovation flurries. Look at all the—whether it be tech developments or, you know, just working in the industry through innovation, innovation overseas and, you know, bringing that technology here. This is how Manitoba is going to get to the next level.

It's why it's extremely important that, you know, we as elected officials, the Minister of Advanced Education, current NDP government, continue on the path of adult literacy, but us on this side of the House to hold them accountable for the implementation of this act. That we must ensure that the programs are effective, accessible and responsive to the needs of our diverse population; not only our diverse but our growing population.

So it's incumbent upon us to make sure that the minister does this in this act here. It's not just about providing basic literacy skills, it's about empowering individuals to reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to our society.

It's important that this NDP government, with this bill, do not fail and fall into old habits and over-promise, overspend, under-deliver and then place our province in more debt, and, you know, potentially more illiteracy. We need to make sure that doesn't happen.

You know, we know from experience, we know from history, that people will now make announcements. I mean especially on this side of the House, we can look at the current government now, you can see that they've made all these announcements in their campaign, and, you know, when we talk about financial literacy, you have \$3 billion of promises that there's no intent to plan.

I would question that that is a lack of financial literacy by this NDP government. That—and this is important, this gets back to the bill—I'm going to bring it back to Bill 5, The Adult Literacy Act, when it talks about that literacy. And we already clarified earlier that literacy refers to all of that.

So whether it be communication, reading, writing, financial literacy, we talked about the importance of that; reading basic credit card statements and financial statements, that it's clear that this NDP government really should maybe take a lesson back in financial literacy. And we can go to the fall session when we spoke about that. The minister was having problems in understanding, you know, what was greater, \$870-million surplus or, you know, \$250-billion deficit. And we had to walk through that scenario.

But when you look at this act, The Adult Literacy Act, and how it can help Manitobans go forward, it is something important that needs to be done, as Manitobans are already dealing with rising costs of inflation, with the impending removal of the carbon tax, with this NDP government will raise it 14 cents. Were they going to increase, or they're in support—well, actually, I don't even know if this Premier (Mr. Kinew) is in support or—not support; he flip-flops so many times.

Again, my colleague mentioned earlier today that he had once again flip-flopped with Premier Ford. You know, does he believe in supporting the carbon tax? As of now, it sounds like yes. So, you know, again, it's simple financial literacy. When it comes to The Adult Literacy Act, Bill 5, financial literacy. We'll leave it there, I'll move on. I can earnest—I can see the Speaker wants to stand up. We'll move on.

You got to have a little—we got to have a little bit of fun in here when we're having some fun. So,

financial literacy is very important Mr. Speaker. I know you were under-standing up to applaud that for me, so I really appreciate that.

It is important that we have financial literacy, that this government is held accountable for their financial literacy. When we continue to talk down that path, and it is important, and this part of the act again, so I want to be clear that, you know, as the finance critic on this side of the House, it's my job to hold that side of the House accountable to the promises and the commitments they made for this province.

This all directly ties into the adult act, and it ties in because there's actually a clause in here, which I will highlight now, because it's going to take me a couple of minutes to get this.

The—sorry, I'm looking for the clause here, it's highlighted. I believe it is clause number 4.2, grants and consolidated funds—within the act. So I'm going to come back to that here. So as the Finance critic, it's important to have a financial literacy and how it interacts with adult literacy.

It's very important that everyone is able to get the education they need to be financially literate and part of this, and it starts, well, K to 12, and then it continues through adult literacy if people are still needing that assistance.

You need to be able to read the fine print in contracts, your credit card statements, I mentioned bank statements, any agreements with words. I mean, basic literacy is something that people struggle with.

There was an individual I had met a little while back. Homeless, was getting his—he was homeless—was getting his life back together, was working. He said he went all the way through school—and this isn't in Manitoba, so everyone can relax; it's not in Manitoba here.

But he went all the way through school and nobody knew he couldn't read. Like, they did not know he couldn't read. He graduated high school. This isn't in Manitoba, it's another Canadian province a little bit to the west. All the way to the west.

He couldn't read. How do we let that happen that someone can get all the way, K to 12, and then as an adult, they had had to go back and take adult literacy courses and understand the basics. And then they had a job and they were working their way off of being homeless, and now, you know, having a job, putting a roof over their head.

And this act, I think, can get to that, so it's encouraging that, you know, Bill 5, The Adult Literacy Act, can get to that. If you can't read, you can't understand instruments, it's a safety risk as well. It's a liability as well, not only for you, for someone else that you may work with.

We see that lack of literacy allows for more frauds and scams to happen. We hear it all the time where seniors are being taken advantage of, Mr. Speaker, and you know, I think my colleague from Steinbach had an incident where he was potentially scammed just with the, you know, as the senior population is dealing with financial components and technology, so technology literacy, and that's—it's really important when it comes to those aspects.

So you know, the hope is that this new strategy for adult literacy will include a financial literacy component, but those details are lacking in this bill. It does say within this bill that they can amend it and they're going to meet and they're going to make some changes. So I think the thing is, you know, we want some clarity on where this is happening.

It will also assist young adults who are wanting to buy homes and start a life. Literacy is important for success. It all starts with literacy: reading, writing, communicating, verbal and non-verbal.

The bill is to establish a strategy for adult literacy, but it has very little information, unfortunately, on what that strategy might look like.

So I'm hoping that this is a step in the right direction, but the minister will be able to tell us a bit more of what they envision the strategy would entail. Unfortunately, this bill should entail some more details; it does not. It allows for that to be added in later. I hope that there is a committee for that, they—our various stakeholders, are you allowed to have some input into what that will look like, because that strategy is going to be very important.

We had to ask these questions in the fall session when this has come up before. I believe they were answered with non-talking points or just talking points on another random, obscure thing or, you know, them throwing the shade back on historical references from the last 40 years, which seems to be a pattern here.

There are government programs out there to address adult literacy and I'm hoping that the government—current government—will tell us a bit more about this and the good things, and how the—some of the things these adult programs are doing and incorporate

that maybe into the strategy that's going to be put forward in this act.

What is interesting, though, is—I want to get back to—is financial literacy, and this bill doesn't outline any funding of this new strategy. So I'd like to know if the current government will be committing to new funding for adult literacy programs as part of the strategy that they'll be developing within her department.

I do see here, in section—on page 3, circling it all the way back to Bill 5, in case anyone was wondering where I was going. Four comma two, the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala), on the requisition of the minister, may make grants out of money appropriated by the Legislature for the purpose of the Manitoba Adult Literacy Program.

So, I mean, that's a very vague boilerplate—I guess, maybe a mention there that the Minister of Finance on the requisition of the minister may grant—may make grants out of money appropriated by the Legislature for the purpose—okay, so, where are they getting the money from? Where are they going to make the money?

* (16:50)

Do they have a magical wand that they can wave and money will pop up for this literacy program? Very similar to the magical wand that they're going to wave for their health-care program, for their energy program, for their efficiency program, for their homeless strategy; I mean, this wand is going to be—I can't wait to see it.

But so far there's no wand. There's no plan. There's no detail on where they're going to get this money from. Gets back to financial literacy. I know we were laughing at that and people wanted me to get back to it, but financial literacy's important.

It says here the Minister of Finance can make grants out of money appropriated by the Legislature. How much money, where'd they get the money from, what are they going to cut? Or, better yet with this government, what taxes are they going to raise?

These are valid questions that Manitobans have a right to know. Literacy is important. Just to be clear, we are not arguing the—we all agree that we need to support adult literacy. It's—that's not the question. And this bill is a step in the right direction on how to get that done. The question, Honourable Speaker, the question that everyone should be asking in this House, and all Manitobans, is: How are they going to pay for this?

To simply say the minister can make grants out of money appropriated by a magical—it doesn't say a magical wand, but maybe it should. We need to understand that. That's where further dialogue, committees, we need to understand—Manitobans need to understand—what are they going to cut, what are they going to raise the taxes on?

This bill grants—there's no number, there's no formula mentioned in the bill, there's no percentage, there's no matrix—there's no metrics, sorry—on what they're going to be—matrix as well, maybe that's—I won't digress. There's no number, there's no formula, there's no mentioning how much money.

Manitobans, that's not good enough for Manitobans. That's not good enough for anyone in this building; shouldn't be good enough for the minister and her—their department.

When you talk about the funding of this program, that is a concern that I think Manitobans and everyone here should be—but the bill mentions organizations that are currently providing literacy programs. And I know many of these programs in this province, groups are doing fantastic work. And I want to take a second just to acknowledge the great work these groups are doing.

You have groups like Fieldstone Ventures Adult Learning Centre, Red River polytech adult learning centre, MITT adult learning 'ceneer'—and MITT, which is located in the great riding of Fort Whyte—Assiniboine Community College Centres for Adult Learning, Yellowquill colleges and many, many other ones are already doing fantastic work.

So, does this bill further support them? Does this bill give them more access to funding and resources? Does this bill take away some stuff that they're doing and try to bring it under another umbrella? We don't know what the strategy is. We just know that they want to accomplish adult literacy, which is important, but where are the details within this bill?

These schools are helping adults get the skills they need to succeed and flourish, and a vaguely worded bill like this, like many of the legislation the NDP have already proposed, are—was not done properly. Was not done with stakeholders, was not done with experts in their field. This was rushed through as a piece—and it was rushed through in the fall—and now we're talking about it now. So they've had a couple months to sit back and look at it.

You know, Honourable Speaker, when we talk about Bill 5, The Adult Literacy Act, and the time in

which it was done, I mean, the exact example can be used of the gas tax. And I'm going to tie this into financial literacy in this thing, here, because when the minister brought that up, they refused to budge and move on anything. We went to committee, we heard from Manitobans. They wanted changes done, and we got those changes done. And because of those changes, more Manitobans were covered.

Same thing is happening in this bill here. It doesn't cover everyone, there's not enough detail, there's no talk about funding or how it's going to happen—or, it does say the minister can waive—the minister can make grants out of money appropriated by the Legislature. That's where this bill is falling a little bit flat.

We need to have some more clarity; there needs to be more details on that, or we're going to have the same thing that the gas tax was meant to do, which was save Manitobans money. In reality, they're paying more money now than they were on January 1. They're paying three cents more; that's financial literacy 101. We had seen throughout Canada that when a province put the gas tax in, the gas tax dropped for two to three weeks, and it went back up. It went back up.

We warned them this was going to happen, and what happened? It happened—it happened. And they're paying more for gas tax. Not only that, they're going to be paying more on April 1, because this Premier (Mr. Kinew) refuses to stand up to his best friend Justin Trudeau and say, hey Justin, we got to stop this. It's hurting Manitobans. And the relevance is financial literacy: 18 cents plus 14 cents is 32 cents. That is more than saving 14 cents. Financial literacy.

So when it comes along to this, Honourable Speaker, my time's running out. I can see the NDP are getting very excited. They're getting very excited. They want to jump on board with us. You guys can come on over for financial literacy; we will help you. It's a program we're going to be offering. It's fantastic.

Honourable Speaker, this bill is a step in the right direction. Financial literacy is very important. I look forward to talking to the minister. I look forward to hearing recommendations and changes and how we can make this bill better for all Manitobans to improve literacy for everyone in Manitoba.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): It gives me great pleasure to speak to this bill, Bill 5, the adult

literacy bill. My first day back in the Chamber, so I'm very happy to be here and speak to this bill.

So for me I'm going to look at it a little differently. It has allowed me to read to my grandchildren, Finleigh and Shayne and Harper and Macy. And just in the last month I have a new grandbaby, and—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Balcaen: First grandson. So, Rowan, I get to read stories to him as well, and it just fills my heart, just like my wife Sharlene and I used to read to our children, Riley and Sawyer. So it gives me great pleasure to speak to this bill and the importance of adult literacy, the ability to read, the ability to write.

You know, we learn important words as we move through our journey, important words that we put out and—that it's important to not only us but all Manitobans. Words like progressive and words like conservative and words like party, that are very important for members of Manitoba to make sure that they understand the importance of those words and the effects that they have on our communities and how great this can come forward.

And also, you know, I learned to pronounce great names and people that are really going to bring history to Manitoba. People like Wayne, people like Kelvin, people like Greg—

The Speaker: Order, please. The member's not allowed to use people's names. [*interjection*]

Order. The honourable member for Brandon West. You have to be re-recognized.

Mr. Balcaen: Sorry. I was referring, Honourable Speaker, to people that I went to school with during my elementary, junior high and high school years, people that have made great history as we've moved through. So it's very important to me to be able to pronounce those names, read those names and understand the contributions that they will make to Manitoba.

Personally, my grandparents came over—my great grandfather, just like I've heard from other speakers, came over from Belgium. And when they came here, they did not speak any English. And they, matter of fact, their language was Flemish and a small portion of French. And they had a difficult time when they came here. And they had to learn how to communicate in their communities.

As a matter of fact, my grandfather, because of his inability to speak English and the fact of his

religious background, had his home and his business burned down in Alberta where they settled. And that forced them to move to another area, and he had to start studying the English language because he feared for his family. He feared that the family would be harmed by some other act that is brought upon him or his family, or anybody else there.

So, again, he had to learn English. He had to learn literacy. He had to learn numeracy. He was running a tailoring business. And at that time, you know, when he was in his former country, he could talk with the people and he could communicate and he could deal

quite effectively, but now he had to learn this new language. He had to learn new numeracy, new literacy, and it was very difficult for—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hour now being 5 o'clock, when this matter is before the House again, the honourable member will have 26 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 o'clock, the House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 6, 2024

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS		Ministerial Statements	
Introduction of Bills		Invasion of Ukraine-2nd Anniversary	
Bill 7—The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act Marcelino	497	Kostyshyn	503
		Narh	503
		Lamoureux	504
Committee Reports		National Social Work Month	
Standing Committee on Public Accounts First Report Piwniuk	497	Fontaine	504
		Stone	505
		Lamoureux	505
Standing Committee on Public Accounts Second Report Gunter	498	Members' Statements	
Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs First Report Dela Cruz	498	Assiniboia West Recreation Association Kennedy	505
Standing Committee on Crown Corporations First Report Brar	499	Lymphedema Awareness Day Ewasko	506
Standing Committee on Crown Corporations Second Report Cross	499	River Heights Council of Faith Leaders Moroz	506
Standing Committee on Crown Corporations Third Report Blashko	500	Recruitment of Health Workers from the Philippines Bereza	507
Standing Committee on Crown Corporations Fourth Report Moyes	500	Children in CFS Care Lamoureux	507
Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs Second Report Dela Cruz	501	Speaker's Statement	
Standing Committee on Crown Corporations Fifth Report Brar	502	Lindsey	508
Tabling of Reports		Oral Questions	
Lindsey	502	Death of Former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney Ewasko	508
		Kinew	508
		Education Property Taxes Ewasko	509
		Kinew	509
		Education Property Taxes Jackson	510
		Kinew	510
		Education Property Taxes Hiebert	511
		Altomare	511

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

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