

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, November 5, 2020

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 209—The Criminal Property Forfeiture Amendment Act (2)

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I move, seconded by the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith), that Bill 209, The Criminal Property Forfeiture Amendment Act (2), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Fontaine: To try and bring greater inclusivity and autonomy to community I am pleased to bring forward to the House, Bill 209, which would promote safer and more inclusive communities by directing monies raised by criminal forfeiture to non-profit community organizations that promote addiction treatments, mental health and harm reduction services, housing, community patrol and safety, and restorative justice.

Miigwech, Madam Speaker.

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

Bill 211—The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Unpaid Leave for Reservists)

Mr. Jon Reyes (Waverley): I move, seconded by the honourable member for Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt), that Bill 211, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (Unpaid Leave for Reservists); Loi modifiant le Code des normes d'emploi (congé non payé à l'intention des réservistes), be now read for a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Reyes: Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce Bill 211, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act, unpaid leave for Canadian Armed Forces reservists, to this House.

This bill amends the employment standards act to clarify when a reservist can take leave in order to participate in military skills training. The bill amends

the act by reducing the minimum consecutive employment period required for leave from the current seven months to three months, and the bill will also align it with federal legislation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I am pleased to table the following report for the Department of Justice: The Independent Review of the Manitoba Police Services Act.

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Central Services): I am pleased to table The Public Service Group Insurance Fund: Benefits Summary, Auditor's Report and Financial Statements for the year ended April 30th, 2020.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I'm asking leave of the House to waive the notice provisions for ministerial statements and to allow ministerial statements from the First Minister and the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage (Mrs. Cox).

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to waive the required time notice for the ministerial statements? *[Agreed]*

Remembrance Day

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): In light of the global pandemic presently before us, this year's Remembrance Day is going to be like no other. However, the importance of the day is not lost upon all Manitobans, and it is to honour those who served or are currently serving this great country with courage and with dignity so that we may continue to enjoy our freedoms.

So, today is the start of Veterans' Week—runs through the end of Remembrance Day. Veterans' Week honours those brave men and women who have served Canada, both past and present, in times of war, in times of military conflict, and in peaceful times, as we know, the military personnel that have been so

important in helping us in times of need in Manitoba during, for example, floods.

This year's theme is the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. We were pleased to, just last June, to send the largest provincial contingent to France to share in the celebrations of D-Day and Juno Beach. We had, as you know, Madam Speaker, a military envoy attend the international celebrations. I, the MLA for Waverley, as well as the MLAs for Midland and another member who I will remain nameless until I can remember him, were all in attendance at a variety of events. In fact, as a delegation, we attended more events than all other provinces combined.

And we did that because, here in Manitoba, we understand and honour our military veterans and the services that are provided to us by our current serving members. And I neglected to mention and give some credit to the Minister of Agriculture at the time.

We honour the bravery and sacrifice of those individuals. They fought for our freedoms; they fight for them today. And this means standing alongside, Madam Speaker, when we honour and when we celebrate Remembrance Day, those who fight for justice, democracy, and equality, not only here in Canada, but also around the world.

Another initiative, Madam Speaker, I will briefly reference today is Bill 200. It's of course, as members know, The Municipal Assessment Amendment Act, and it received Royal Assent this past spring. That was following through on our commitment to make veterans' organizations exempt from municipal property taxes. Providing tax relief to veterans' organizations is another positive way that we can—all of us can show our appreciation to veterans and help the Royal Canadian Legion branches, the army, navy, and air force veterans units that are facing financial challenges and, in particular, accentuated by the realities of COVID.

This legislative change will ensure that, through provincial law, all ANAVETS units and Legion branches are treated equally throughout the province by exempting them all from paying municipal property taxes.

We are honoured, Madam Speaker, I know all of us are, to support our veterans and active military personnel right here in Manitoba, and we have many, of course. And I want to acknowledge the great work that our special envoy for military affairs, the MLA for Waverley, and his office is doing for all Manitoba

military members and their families, not only during Veterans' Week, but all year round, and as we approach Remembrance Day.

I encourage all Manitobans, if they cannot, of course, because of the restrictions of COVID, participate in the ways they are used to, in joining a Remembrance Day celebration to celebrate virtually in light of COVID this year, and safely, and to take a moment on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month to remember the many sacrifices made by those who have served and serve today so that we may all continue to live free.

On behalf of all Manitobans, thank you for your service, lest we forget, and we will remember them always.

Thank you.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Freedom has never been free, Madam Speaker, and it's our brave veterans who remind us of the tremendous sacrifice and the tremendous contributions that those who have served in our Armed Forces have made so that all of us can enjoy the opportunities, the freedoms and the privileges that we enjoy.

I think that we, as legislators having the privilege of sitting in this hallowed Chamber, ought to be even more steadfast in our observance of Remembrance Day because it is the democratic freedoms that we practice in this House each and every day that so many people laid their lives down for and returned home to tell stories about.

Now, this year is going to be a different Remembrance Day. I'm very proud to represent a Legion in the constituency of Fort Rouge, and it looks like we're going to be doing things virtually this year. But I can tell you that, on behalf of all Manitobans, the feeling in our hearts will be no less intense and no less patriotic than it has been for past Remembrance Days.

We're very lucky to live in a province where we have many sites and schools and airports that pay tribute to great war veterans past, whether that's Billy Bishop or Sergeant Tommy Prince. And, of course, as we move forward through this most challenging year, I think that we're all looking at things a little bit differently than we may have in the past.

* (13:40)

We're in a time, fighting this COVID-19 pandemic, where we're reminded of World War I and

of World War II. We're told that this is the worst recession that we've seen since before World War II. We're told that the borrowing happening this year is the greatest since World War II. And at the same time, Manitobans and Canadians from all walks of life are being asked to join together and mount a collective effort to save our society and our way of life, much as those veterans and those who served at home did in years past.

Now, this year, I speak to you as our city where we meet here is under code red. And I've been encouraging Manitobans to please not think about code red as a stop sign that's holding you back from doing the things that you love, but rather as that red heart that signifies your love of the community; or, perhaps, red like the poppy, red like the poppy that represents the sacrifice of those veterans who served before us.

And so this year I think we can all agree that we have made sacrifices. Whether you're the schoolchild, a senior or just the average family, you've made tremendous sacrifices. Hopefully, our experience through the pandemic of 2020, as we reflect on the sacrifices that were asked of us—to wear masks, to stay home, to abide by physical distancing—when we reflect that those are relatively humble sacrifices next to those who laid their lives down on the front lines in Europe, in the Pacific, in other theatres of war, that we will think about those contributions a little bit differently and perhaps with a little bit more awe.

So as we begin this Veterans' Week, as we observe Aboriginal Veterans Day and, of course, as we turn our hearts and minds to Remembrance Day, I hope that we all better understand the sacrifice of those great heroes and patriots who came before.

Lest we forget. Gego waniikekeg. *[Do not forget.]*

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Tyndall Park, I understand, would like to ask leave to speak to this statement.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Yes, Madam—to speak in response to the ministerial—

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

Ms. Lamoureux: I'd like to take this opportunity to speak in honour of Remembrance Day next week.

We take this time to honour the many individuals who have fought admirably for Canada over many years. It gives me great pride to honour those who paid

the ultimate price for our province and for our country. We remember those who returned home with the scars of battle in their minds, and we remember that people gave their lives to fight for a brighter future that they would never see.

Madam Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not specifically express our deep appreciation for the contribution of Indigenous veterans to serve our country. One of those veterans includes Sergeant Tommy Prince of Brokenhead First Nation. A great-great-grandson of Chief Peguis, Tommy Prince received numerous awards for his service in both World War II and the Korean War for his courage and exceptional skills.

This Sunday, November 8th, I would encourage everyone to take a moment to recognize and remember our Indigenous veterans on Indigenous Veterans Day.

Madam Speaker, I know for myself this will be the first year in, I truly believe, my entire life where I will not be at the McGregory *[phonetic]* armoury for the heartfelt service. I have been attending this service with my father for as long as I can recall. And throughout the years, I have had the opportunity to get to know a few of our veterans who are still with us here today. Remembrance Day at the McGregory *[phonetic]* armoury was—always presented the opportunity to lay a wreath and to say a prayer as we slowed things down and we truly took the time to recognize what Remembrance Day means.

Madam Speaker, I am sure all of us members have heard the poem, Remembrance Day, but I thought it would be nice to recite here and get on record: We wear a poppy / On Remembrance Day, / And at 11 / We stand and pray. / Wreaths are put / Upon a grave. / As we remember / Our soldiers brave.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. And thank you to all who have and continue to serve.

And I'd like to ask for leave for a moment of silence following this statement.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave for a moment of silence? *[Agreed]*

Please stand.

A moment of silence was observed.

Madam Speaker: The next ministerial statement is from the honourable Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage.

Diwali Celebrations

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): Today we recognize Manitobans who, like millions of people around the world, are preparing to celebrate Diwali. Known as the Festival of Lights, Diwali is the five-day Indian festival observed by Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains. And it's also observed by people who are not religious.

Diwali represents a period of renewal, inspiration, optimism and a recommitment to values centred on peace and harmony.

The lighting of diyas or lamps represents victory of good over evil, light over darkness, truth over falsehood and knowledge over ignorance.

The Festival of Lights serves as a beautiful reminder of the value placed on family, friendships and a peaceful coexistence.

While Manitobans are not able to gather as in previous years, we must remember that during these unprecedented times to remain kind, to help our neighbours and to support each other. Even in the midst of darkness, light and goodness will ultimately prevail.

Madam Speaker, I am so proud that diversity is one of Manitoba's greatest strengths. It unites families, friends and communities from across our beautiful province. And it encourages all of us to share our wonderful traditions and our vibrant cultural celebrations.

So, as Manitobans, we all have the opportunity to learn from one another, appreciate one another and live harmoniously side by side, like a row of lights, which is Sanskrit translation for the word Diwali.

Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to wish a happy Diwali to everyone preparing to celebrate this very important festival. I extend my warmest wishes to all of you, on behalf of all of us in the Chamber, and to all of your loved ones, for a safe, healthy, happy and prosperous Diwali.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I would just ask anybody that is wishing to speak remotely, that they please let our moderators know that they wish to speak, otherwise we do not know who is wanting to rise and speak to this.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Diwali is a festival celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains in Manitoba and around the world.

For some, Diwali coincides with the harvest festival, new year and various religious celebrations. For example, in the Sikh religion, it is celebrated as Bandi Chhor Divas to celebrate the anniversary of Guru Hargobind Ji being released from the prison at Gwalior Fort along with 52 Hindu Rajput princes. It is celebrated with great joy as it was a time when right prevailed over wrong.

Diwali is celebrated during the darkest night of the lunar moon with important rituals taking place on the third day.

The word Diwali comes from the Sanskrit word deepavali, meaning row of lighted lamps. When celebrating Diwali, communities will create a fascinating festival of lights in their homes, shops and various public spaces. It is truly a beautiful celebration of faith and community.

* (13:50)

The celebration of Diwali goes back more than 2,500 years. In India, Diwali is one of the biggest celebrations of the year. The ancient celebration is linked with various stories and religious contexts. Many of the stories of Diwali's origins commemorate the triumph of good over evil and knowledge over ignorance.

During Diwali, folks will shop, decorate their homes, adorn their spaces with fragrant jasmine, feast, make personal resolutions and spend time with their loved ones. Diwali has also become an opportunity for cultural exchanges. Community members, politicians and religious leaders will meet worldwide and—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

An Honourable Member: Leave.

Madam Speaker: There's a request—is there leave to allow the member to complete his statement?
[Agreed]

The honourable member for Burrows, to complete his statement.

Mr. Brar: Diwali has also become an opportunity for cultural exchanges. Community members, politicians and religious leaders will meet worldwide, and this often represents the importance of diversity, inclusion and togetherness.

Madam Speaker, my colleagues and I understand that this year it is very different for folks celebrating Diwali here in Manitoba and around the world due to the pandemic we are fighting against. We wish

everyone a safe and joyful Diwali with their closest loved ones.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Was there anybody else that was going to speak to this or ask for leave to speak to this?

If not, we'll move on to members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Remembrance Day Ceremonies

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): Every November 11th since being elected, I have had the honour of attending Remembrance Day ceremonies organized and hosted by the Norwood St. Boniface Branch 43 of the Royal Canadian Legion. They're typically sombre occasions, as we remember our young men and women who paid the ultimate sacrifice in order to secure the freedom we share here in Canada.

Unfortunately, this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there'll be no official celebrations to attend in person on Remembrance Day.

The mission of the Royal Canadian Legion is to assist veterans in order to promote remembrance and serve our communities and our country. A small group of dedicated volunteer members who work year-round to promote remembrance, assisting Canadian veterans and their families in times of need, they are also involved in facilitating many charity groups in the community at large. The Legion is a role model for all—us all, especially during this pandemic where we must give of ourselves and work together to help combat COVID-19.

'Manitobans' have come together in the past when facing challenging circumstances. Brave Manitobans have fought in both the Great War and World War II. During the flood of 1950, Manitobans unified in the face of adversity, worked as a team to save their homes, homes of their families and of their neighbours. During the ensuing polio epidemic of 1953, Manitobans again came together and did their part in order to stem the tide of the disease. In 1997, Manitobans worked in unison to fight the greatest flood in the Red River Valley since 1852.

In all of these circumstances, Manitobans have overcome what seemed to be an overwhelming adversity and prevailed. This year, with no official in-person Remembrance Day ceremonies who honour those who paid for our freedom with their lives, you can find ways, though, to pay your respects by either

visiting a cenotaph safely in person or by means of a virtual ceremony—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Smith: Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to continue.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to allow the member to complete his statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Smith: You can attend virtual ceremonies that are available online.

We must also honour the memory of our fallen veterans by working together to help stop the spread of COVID-19. On November 11th, we as Manitobans will take a moment of silence to honour the fallen heroes, and I encourage everyone to take another moment to plan our part in helping their fellow citizens with overcoming this pandemic. You must also remember that our front-line workers are working tirelessly every day for all of our safety.

Thank you to everyone who has done their part already, and I encourage everyone to heed advice of our public health officers and work together to help protect our fellow Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Jenna Forslund

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, for kids across Manitoba, a teacher who can instill a love of learning in their students is critical to getting a good education. That's never been truer than now, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, where innovative teaching techniques that meaningfully engage students is paramount.

In northeast Winnipeg, one educator who has exemplified how much of a difference meaningfully engaged students can make is Jenna Forslund.

Ms. Forslund teaches math, science and environmental studies for students, grades 7 through 12, at Elmwood high school, and has taken the importance of innovative and dedicated teaching to heart.

Her engaging teaching style in the classroom has included everything from helping students build a 3D model of a city to learn about Indigenous land rights, to empowering students who mentor younger kids through water-related sustainability workshops, and regularly integrating technology into math and

science classes, something that's more important now than ever.

Ms. Forslund's impressive work has not gone unnoticed. Earlier this year, she was recognized for her outstanding achievements with the Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence in STEM. She is truly an exemplary leader for students around our neighbourhood, throughout the community of Elmwood, and a—and is well-deserving of this award.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, it's vital that all educators be given the resources they need to help students learning during this unprecedented time. We know that investments like smaller class sizes or access to technology make a real difference for kids and their teachers, and I believe that the provincial government has a role to play in making supporting educators like Ms. Forslund a top priority.

On behalf of our community, I wish to congratulate Ms. Forslund on her outstanding work and this prestigious award and thank her for her many years of hard work as a dedicated educator.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

WRHA Laundry Facility Closure

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Madam Speaker, insensible to basic common sense and decency, ignoring urgent demands of Manitoba's doctors, incomprehensively, we are seeing that the Pallister government is continuing, even now, in a global pandemic, from Flin Flon to Roblin to Selkirk, forging ahead on its health-care consolidation plans of cuts, privatization and closures.

A few weeks ago, health-care workers came to my office seeking help. They are part of a group of WRHA laundry aides whose simple yet decent livelihoods have been shattered by this government's reckless cuts to our health-care system.

This government closed down the WRHA laundry facility in the city of Selkirk. Workers were forced to take early retirement or reapply at a laundry facility on Inkster Avenue in Winnipeg.

This government cut full-time jobs for laundry aides at the Inkster site. They have lost full-time hours and benefits they need to provide for their families. Even though their work is integral to health care, they are now precarious workers, never knowing from week to week if they'll have enough hours to pay household bills.

These laundry aides describe their current working conditions as utter chaos under this new quadrupled amount of management that was brought in without practical experience of how this fast-paced facility is supposed to run. Management brought in expensive robots to replace staff, but these robots don't work. They're gathering dust in corners. New management has cut necessary water breaks.

Laundry aides used to take real pride in their work, but now they say there are no more considerations for quality. Unattended piles of laundry are stagnating for too long, growing mould. When friends and family need to be admitted to hospital, laundry aides tell them to bring their own linens.

Commitment to quality, workers' ability to provide decent incomes for their families, all of this is gone under this PC plan of health-care consolidation and cuts.

In Alberta, we are seeing wildcat strikes from health-care workers. Unfortunately, I can see that happening here too. From laundry aides to ICU doctors, their message is one and the same to this PC government: prioritize the health-care needs of Manitobans. Stop your reckless cuts.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Government's Pandemic Response

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): There is a point in the future that this pandemic will be a thing of the past. We'll be able to look back on the virus as a memory. In the meantime, I think we have a very hard road ahead.

* (14:00)

We've been in code red since Monday. We started in code orange back in September, and doctors are pleading with this government to do their job, and the Minister of Health questions their motivation—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamont: The Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business have all said that this government's supports for small business are not enough.

Now, I've spoken with business people who are not eligible for any provincial aid because of the strings that are attached. Businesses are disqualified if they get federal help, and the problem, in many cases,

for the programs that have already been announced is that money has already been gone.

We're now in code red; cases are climbing, and they are doubling every 10 days—doubling. This is the single biggest emergency in 100 years, not just for Manitoba, but for the world. It demands the single biggest response in 100 years. Of course, there are limits to what governments can do—of course, there are—but in Manitoba we are nowhere near those limits because we are holding back on investments in money right now that will save lives and save businesses.

Since code orange and code red, we have not seen any new legislation that will commit to helping Manitoba businesses. There are one-person businesses with no employees or one employee who cannot apply for the wage subsidy, and wage subsidies don't help businesses that have to stay closed or that don't have revenue.

I want to be absolutely clear about what is breaking us. It is the false belief that, in what everyone acknowledges is the worst crisis in a century, that we have to keep running the economy the same way.

We need an emergency business response, just as we need an emergency health response—and both have been sadly lacking—to make sure that we all get through this and that no one gets left behind.

I hope that the government will be ready to introduce such legislation on the day we return.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Veteran's Week

Mr. Jon Reyes (Waverley): Madam Speaker, I rise today to inform members of this House and all Manitobans that beginning today and through to the end of Remembrance Day is Veterans' Week.

Veterans' Week honours those brave men and women who have served Canada through times of war, conflict and peaceful times. This year's theme is the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II.

Our government continues to focus on all Manitobans, especially to our veterans who sacrificed so much so that we could all live free. As special envoy for military affairs, I want to thank our Premier (Mr. Pallister) for having given me the opportunity to be part of the Manitoba delegation for the 75th anniversary of D-Day at Juno Beach in Normandy, France, last June, a pivotal moment to the start of the Second World War.

Madam Speaker, 2020 continues to be a challenging and unprecedented year with the onset of COVID-19 for all Manitobans and those across the country and around the world. However, as Manitoba's military envoy, I have been busy throughout the spring, summer and fall leading up to Remembrance Day.

This summer took me to several Legions and ANAVETS throughout Manitoba to hear about how they are dealing with COVID-19 and the economic recovery in Carberry, Brandon, Swan River, Grandview, Erickson, Minnedosa, Neepawa and Gladstone, to name a few.

I want to remind all members that this Remembrance Day will be the first in over a century held in the midst of a global pandemic. This fact does not deter us from losing sight on the importance of this day. It is to honour those who have served this great country with courage and dignity so we can practice our rights and freedoms.

Thank you to HMCS Chippawa, the Charleswood Legion, Seven Oaks School Division, Fort Richmond Collegiate, Park Care Manor and Deer Lodge Centre for allowing me to participate in your virtual ceremonies. Thank you to all who are being creative in their own way for Remembrance Day.

So on November 8th for national Aboriginal Veterans Day and on November 11th for Remembrance Day, please find the time and take a moment to remember those who served.

Thank you for your service. Lest we forget. We will remember them.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Second Wave of Pandemic Health System Readiness

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, doctors and other health-care heroes are speaking out. The Premier's half measures are failing. The situation is getting worse. Small businesses are hanging on by a thread and need new financial assistance.

But this Premier has failed to prepare. Everyone knew that there was going to be a second wave coming, and yet it appears to have caught this government, this Cabinet, this First Minister unprepared.

And that's not just our opinion. That is the opinion of 82 per cent of people in Manitoba, Madam Speaker, and they're right. Doctors have been working—have been warning for more than a year that the ICU capacity was an issue.

The Premier needs to be accountable. Why did he fail to prepare our health-care system for the second wave of COVID-19?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Yes, Madam Speaker, absolutely we're in the middle of a COVID pandemic. It's unprecedented. Every jurisdiction around the world, frankly, is dealing with a second wave. We're dealing with it, as a consequence of preparations, more strongly than we would have been without them.

And, Madam Speaker, we thank our leading health care—public health experts for their constant work. That has been something that has been very much appreciated, I think, by all.

Madam Speaker, we appreciate the input of all physicians. The member has referenced physicians' input. But we can't have several thousand public health officers. We have Dr. Brent Roussin, and we will place our trust and confidence in him at this time. We will continue to do that because—in the certain knowledge of this challenge—we need to not panic but rather have a plan. And we are following that plan with real health leadership provided by Dr. Roussin.

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

Physician's Letter Regarding Pandemic Apology Request for Government Response

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, hundreds of doctors have signed open letters saying that this government's response is failing. In fact, there are letters going back a year that said this government's cuts to emergency rooms and cuts to health care were causing critical issues in our intensive-care units.

Now, even though there was a year's warning and even though the pandemic hit eight months ago, and we had a summer with relatively few case counts in which this government could have prepared for the second wave, they didn't. What have they been doing this week instead of helping to ramp up ICU bed capacity? Well, they've been attacking physicians. They've been refusing to apologize to those physicians—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —after insulting them.

The Premier of Manitoba should apologize for his Health Minister's comments and for his conduct. It would be an act of good faith and a sign that this government is going to start listening to the experts on the pandemic.

Will the Premier apologize?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I know that the member opposite, Madam Speaker, has some experience in apologies, and I know that he is right to be contrite.

Now, our minister has worked diligently with more focus, arguably, than any Manitoban, and I don't think there's a Manitoba doctor who wants his job.

So, Madam Speaker, I would suggest that this is a time for grace. I would suggest that this is a time for mutual support. I would suggest this is a time to get with Team Manitoba and not try to score political points in this place, or outside of it, for that matter.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, you know, you never lose anything by saying sorry, and in this case in which there are physicians and other health-care heroes saying that they have serious concerns about our health-care system, it's remarkable that not only is this Health Minister but also this Premier trying to throw shade, trying to cast aspersions, trying to demean their good intentions, their proper motivations.

Madam Speaker, an apology would not save lives directly, but it would help to reset the relationship. It would show that this government, instead of trying to attack, attack, attack, is actually maybe willing to listen for a change and willing to admit that sometimes they get it wrong.

If this Health Minister will refuse to apologize, if this Premier will refuse to apologize, is there anyone in that PC Cabinet who will stand up and do the right thing?

Mr. Pallister: I appreciate any reference to doing the right thing from the member opposite, Madam Speaker. And I appreciate any reference that the member may make to apology. And I appreciate any reference the member may make to admitting past mistakes as well.

The fact of the matter is, the member himself has not been accountable for past mistakes, nor has he

acknowledged that what this government was handed was a miserable pack of mess by the previous administration: after 17 years in power, Madam Speaker, the longest wait times in the country, the worst results.

And, Madam Speaker, we have maintained and strengthened our investments in health care to the tune of more than \$640 million in this year's budget alone. We have—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —attacked a pandemic by working and—working with and listening to our medical experts.

And, Madam Speaker, the member opposite is not a doctor. He should not pretend to be one, even though he's given business to doctors for many, many years.

* (14:10)

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

Hydro Rate Increase Request to Cancel

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Not a physician, Madam Speaker, but somewhat of an amateur historian, and history will record this government's failure during the pandemic. Unfortunately, they will also record the failure of this Health Minister and the Premier to do the right thing.

We also know that they have failed abysmally when it comes to protecting local business. Local businesses are already stretched thin. Those organizations that represent them are speaking out, even individual business owners fearing risk of reputational harm or reprisal from this government, even they are motivated to speak up. They want to protect their livelihoods. They want to protect the jobs of the people who work for them.

Now, we know one of the big hits that this government is going to put on them is an increase to Manitoba Hydro rates.

Will the Premier listen? Will he cancel this raise to hydro rates for Manitobans and Manitoba businesses?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): The NDP put Hydro quintuple in debt when they were in power—quintuple—and now the member talks about defending ratepayers. They pursued projects they had no business pursuing.

And the member talks about irreversible expenditures the NDP ran up, and now he says he's the saviour of Manitoba ratepayers? I don't think so. Neither do the small-business people; they understand that our programs are the third most generous in the in country in terms of total budget, that they are working to create more jobs than in any other province.

And, Madam Speaker, I have—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —understanding, intimate understanding of the lobbyists who work with organizations I once was active in and support, Madam Speaker, but I will tell the member this, we are doing everything we can to support those organizations. We'll continue to do that, but we are focusing our resources directly on the small-business community, not on special interests, and that is what we'll continue to do.

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

Mr. Kinew: Because of the actions of this Premier and his silent Cabinet, we know that Manitoba businesses are going to have to pay more to heat their homes. Natural gas rates are going up. The same is true of Manitoba homeowners.

Winter is coming, Madam Speaker. But rather than helping Manitobans by making life a little bit easier, a little bit cheaper this winter, the Premier is hiking natural gas rates.

Now, rates already went up by 5.6 per cent earlier this month, and now the Premier wants to raise it another 3 per cent by rushing through a piece of legislation later this evening. That's nearly a 9 per cent increase this month.

Families need help to make ends meet. Businesses are closing the door. The Premier is sitting on his hands.

Will the Premier stop his plan to increase natural gas rates and cancel his BITSA bill today?

Mr. Pallister: We have conditional non-repayable loans and working capital programs, Madam Speaker, that are helping over 10,000 Manitoba businesses as we speak. There were no such programs in place before under the NDP after 20 years.

We have targeted business supports as well. Wage subsidies, student wage subsidies have helped over 20,000 people get back to work.

Maybe the NDP would like to—today—acknowledge that those programs are working better than any other jurisdiction. Others have already. Public insurance rebates—lower public insurance premiums; the NDP raised them, we lower them. Workers comp rebates—the NDP raised the workers compensation premiums, we lowered them. Infrastructure spending at record levels, Madam Speaker.

I can only tell the member that he's wrong and I can only suggest to him that while they took money away from small businesses, we're putting it back in the hands of small-business people.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, you know, I can only hope that the Premier will see reason and back away from that 9 per cent increase to natural gas rates.

We know that he is dead set committed to increasing people's hydro rates. Doesn't make a lot of sense; Manitoba Hydro is profitable. We all know that: \$100 million in profit last year, \$50 million projected for this year in spite of the pandemic.

Now, what is the response of this Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) and this Premier? Well, they—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —want to tax people on their hydro bills. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: They want to dramatically increase the rates that Manitobans have to pay during the worst recession that any of us can remember.

Well, we have a clear message on this side of the House: That is wrong. That is wrong. There is no reason to force through this hike.

Will the Premier back down from ramming through an undemocratic increase to Manitoba Hydro rates this evening?

Mr. Pallister: The member speaks of something he has great experience in: knowing what's wrong.

Madam Speaker, what would be wrong would be to take \$10 billion away from Manitoba ratepayers and throw it into silly projects they'll have to pay for for the rest of their lives and that their children and grandchildren will have to pay for. That would be wrong, and the NDP did that.

Madam Speaker, the member also should acknowledge when he speaks about small business that taxing people and raising PST on their home insurance would be wrong. That's what the NDP did. We took that off, and so now tens of millions of dollars in the hands of small business.

But, Madam Speaker, it goes further than that. They also put the PST on your home insurance, and I don't think you have a home-based business, Madam Speaker. But the fact of the matter is we're taking that PST and putting it back in the households of this province.

Where the NDP took money away from kitchen tables and from small businesses, we're putting that money back in the hands of the people who build our economy.

Deaths Due to COVID-19 Medical Examiner Inquest

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): The Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his Health Minister's blaming, condescending and absent approach to COVID-19 has resulted in avoidable deaths in Manitoba.

Under The Fatality Inquiries Act, the Chief Medical Examiner has the authority to call an inquest surrounding the cause and manner of deaths of Manitobans. I am writing the Chief Medical Examiner this afternoon, urging him to exercise his authority under the act to call an inquest as soon as it is safe to convene one to investigate the circumstances of dozens of deaths in Manitoba due to COVID-19.

Will the Premier also encourage the Chief Medical Examiner to do the same?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, at a time when Manitobans most need reassurance and the leadership of opposition parties to fall in line and do their part—as Brent Roussin—Dr. Roussin—loves to say, we're all in this together—the NDP does not miss an opportunity to try to advance their narrow political interests at the expense of Manitobans. Right now, today, the opposition could help by indicating that they have confidence in the senior health leadership installed in this province to keep all Manitobans safe.

Will they give that assurance to Manitobans?

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

Ms. Fontaine: The Chief Medical Examiner, Madam Speaker, can call an inquest on deaths due to a

contagious disease that is a threat to public health and in a prescribed type or class of facility or institution under which the regulation specifically mentions Parkview Place.

The Pediatric Cardiac Surgery Inquest—an inquiry into the 12 deaths at the Winnipeg Health Sciences Centre in 1994—is an example of such an inquest to provide Manitobans with a full explanation on what transpired and what recommendations were made to prevent future deaths.

Will the Premier (Mr. Pallister) follow the law and support a public inquest into the deaths of COVID-19?

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, this is sad but it is regrettably typical of the opposition party.

Madam Speaker, we believe that the early interventions of senior health-care workers acting in accordance with their colleagues and their—doctors and nurses in this province—that early intervention has saved lives in this province. The early work that was done to protect personal-care homes by making one worker per site, the early work that was done to secure PPE even while global supply was diminished, the early work that was done to make sure we were getting the right equipment into Manitoba, the early work that was done to create more ICUs—these things have saved lives.

* (14:20)

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

Ms. Fontaine: Manitoba law requires that an inquest be conducted into the death of Manitobans due to COVID-19. The decision to call a full inquest into all of these deaths rests solely with the Chief Medical Examiner. Given the numbers of Manitobans who have died to COVID-19, including more than two dozen Manitobans in personal-care homes, an inquest is paramount to families having some type of accountability from the Premier.

Again, I will be sending a letter within minutes, Madam Speaker, to the office of the Chief Medical Examiner, encouraging him to exercise the authority under the act to fully investigate the circumstances surrounding these deaths so that we can prevent future tragedies.

Will the Premier do so as well?

Miigwech.

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, it is clear to me that Manitobans have a desire to know more about the significant planning that is under way to be able to flex the health-care capacity. I even believe that the doctors' letter that was written clearly shows there's a desire among doctors and others to know more about the plan.

This is why our chief integration officer offered more detail into that plan last Friday, but we are committing to offer a briefing to all MLAs of this Legislature, to doctors, to Manitobans and to the public. That briefing for MLAs will be coming up shortly, I would invite that member and all members to be attending that to learn more about the ways in which this team is working to keep Manitobans safe.

Paramedic Services During COVID-19 Worker's Mental Health Concerns

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, paramedic services in Manitoba are under significant strain. One retiring paramedic told media that calls for their services have risen to unprecedented levels, leaving hours at a time where no ambulance at all is available. Chief Lane explains that there's not been yet a new ambulance service in many years, despite growth in service demands.

The toll to the pandemic—the toll, rather, during the pandemic has been enormous, with WCB claims associated with burnout and mental health tripling since last year.

What is the Province doing to resolve this growing concern?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I'm really pleased to be able to answer a question on the subject of the support that this Province provides for the Winnipeg fire and paramedic service, because there's been so much misinformation out in the public.

This misinformation caused me to again ask my officials to provide new detail about what we actually do and how we've increased services. Here's what it shows: that in just the last five years, our fund for paramedic service in Winnipeg has grown by 400 per cent, while the City of Winnipeg's funding has fallen.

Madam Speaker: The honourable leader—pardon me, the honourable member for Union Station, on a supplementary question.

Paramedic Services Privatization Concerns

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, during the pandemic, the Pallister government has chosen not to address the concerns I've just raised, instead running full speed ahead with a plan to privatize paramedicine in Manitoba.

Recent proposed regulatory changes include the following: the proposed amendments will enable for-profit corporations to engage paramedics and emergency medical responders to provide primary care and prevention services.

This is a familiar refrain from the Pallister government: underserve the public and open the system up for private interests.

Why won't this government simply provide the public ambulances that are so sorely needed?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): So, Madam Speaker, we have—I actually am—understand that the full city fleet in the city of Winnipeg is 36 units. We've replaced every single one of those units in the last five years. There are more new ambulances on the way.

We have hired new paramedics right across the province of Manitoba. We are creating the new college of paramedicine. We are professionalizing this profession under the RFPA. We know that paramedics welcome the work we do. And even while the members on the other side chirp about these things, we know that Manitobans are celebrating how we are continuing to advance the profession of paramedicine in Manitoba.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, right now, when health services are stretched to the breaking point, this is the moment the Pallister government is choosing to push this through. It really shows their priorities that the minister is going to allow private operators into the system to engage paramedics and emergency responders for primary care and emergency services.

The minister thinks that we need a for-profit, two-tier, American-style health care where access to care depends—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: —on the size of your—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: —wallet. We know that's wrong, and especially so during a public health emergency.

Will the minister back off his plans to privatize paramedic services?

Mr. Friesen: This member has entered into the record over the past number of weeks a litany of falsehoods. But this is the greatest one yet, because I believe they have actually misread the bill itself. I think this is a routine language component that must be added to allow all the current operators to simply operate ambulances.

But I did want to take the opportunity to also say, I would be remiss if I did not say one of the greatest services we've done to improve ambulance fees is where the NDP failed to reduce ambulance fees from Manitoba, we have cut those fees in half in this province, saving everyone money every time they need an ambulance.

Education System During Pandemic COVID-19 Tests for Teachers

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): The government's failure to prioritize timely COVID tests results and information to teachers is leading to many being absent for an extended period of time.

The minister and this government had months to prepare for the return to school and the anticipated influx of tests that would come with it, yet they've continued to fail to reach their own testing quotas, and even with the many outbreaks happening in our schools, they still haven't prioritized testing for teachers and other staff. This is putting a strain on our system and creating increased stress on our educators.

Will the minister commit to prioritizing testing for teachers immediately?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Education): There has been tremendous co-operation between public health and school officials as we've reopened the schools since September, Madam Speaker. And, certainly, we've seen a number of cases, of course, that have come to the school, as we would expect because there are many more cases within the community, but we haven't seen that transmission within the school.

We continue, though, together with public health to look at different ways to ensure that quicker testing and 'quicking'—quicker results can be provided to those who are working within our school systems.

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

Federal Funding for Schools

Mr. Altomare: Madam Speaker, 150 schools, that's how many schools have had exposures and outbreaks in only the first two months of the school year, and while the numbers continue to rise this government is failing to make the necessary investments in our school now.

This own minister told CBC the other day that only only \$17 million out of the \$100 million of the minister's money is set aside and has been spent on a safe return to school. That's not even half the amount they cut in laying off thousands of educational staff this spring, which is shameful.

And even with the federal government putting forth \$85 million to create smaller and safer classrooms, the minister won't spend it.

Will the minister commit to spending the federal money to address the outbreaks occurring in our schools and make our classrooms safe?

Mr. Goertzen: The member is factually incorrect. I did indicate that in September, 15 and a half million dollars was spent by schools on preparation for COVID-19 within the schools; that is only for September. We expect a similar amount of money to have been spent in October. We'll get those results, Madam Speaker, and, of course, our expectation is that schools are going to continue on through this school year and a similar amount of money will probably be spent, if not more each, and every month.

Now, I know the member opposite would have liked us to have spent \$100 million on the first day, and then I guess come back on the second day and say spend another \$100 million and the third day another \$100 million.

Madam Speaker, we are providing the needs within the schools system. Hundreds of millions—or millions of dollars have been spent on staff. We'll continue to give those resources as they're needed.

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

* (14:30)

COVID-19 Tests for Teachers

Mr. Altomare: We'd have liked to have seen a plan earlier, but it's good that we're getting an outline right now of the hundreds of millions that are supposedly being spent.

But the delays in testing and delays in contact-tracing are resulting in delays in schools being notified. This is unacceptable. Teachers are fearful that the virus is unknowingly spreading in their schools because delays in public health notifying. Madam Speaker, 13 days: that's how long a school community had waited to be notified about exposure. School divisions are having to take it upon themselves to notify schools, students and parents of possible cases.

Will the minister commit to prioritizing testing for teachers so that schools can get notified immediately of possible exposures?

Mr. Goertzen: Public health has taken on a significant and difficult task in ensuring that there is notification to all those who are close contacts within our schools. That, of course, has been a challenge, Madam Speaker, but they've been working tremendously hard at it. More than that, they've also been notifying the broader school community where there's been a case, even if their student hasn't been an identified close contact.

Yes, of course, there have been cases in our schools, as we expected. About 3 and a half per cent of all the cases identified across the country in schools are in Manitoba. That is proportionately what we would expect in Manitoba, given our population.

We've—stand with our public health officials who are doing tremendous work, Madam Speaker, in a very, very difficult time.

Northern Health Services Travel Costs and Funding

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Through freedom of information, we've discovered that there's been a decline in day surgeries conducted in northern Manitoba of some 28 per cent since 2016. These are procedures that should be done close to home, particularly now with COVID-19 and the reduced flight schedules from the North. This is requiring more time being spent in the city with no increase in the amounts paid by Northern Patient Transportation.

Why has this government allowed the steady erosion of health care in northern Manitoba, and will the minister commit to increasing payments from NPTP to cover the added costs at this time?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, Madam Speaker, today is truly a good day.

It's taken a long time, but finally we have unqualified support by members of the opposition for this Province's first ever clinical and preventative services plan, a plan built by hundreds of Manitoba health-care providers and a plan to get better care sooner, closer to home; a plan that relies exactly on the evidence of being able to repatriate routines and procedures closer to the community. And I thank the member for Flin Flon for finally seeing the light.

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

Mr. Lindsey: Madam Speaker, I don't know what planet this Minister of Health is actually referring to with that answer. We know for a fact that the number of day surgeries has declined in each and every year for the last four years in northern Manitoba.

He talks about a plan. We've never seen a plan other than cuts, cuts, cuts. It's not just one centre. It's not just one closure. It's a steady decline year over year. Means northerners have to use services in other centres like Winnipeg, which are already under tremendous stress. It means travel, unnecessary expense for hundreds of my constituents and constituents in the North, and it tests the limits of the whole system.

Why won't the minister ensure that northerners can get the care they need closer to home like he promised?

Mr. Friesen: On the contrary, Madam Speaker, our plan is exactly that the people of the North and the people in rural Manitoba will have the care they need closer to home after years and years of missed opportunities to do that under the former government.

That member says he has not seen the plan. He must be living under a rock. I'm not sure what planet he's on because, Madam Speaker, we're talking about volumes of reports with executive summaries that point us, finally, in the right direction to be able to reduce wait times, to help the people of that member's community get care closer to the community.

Some of those investments are in place now. One of those investments is the \$27-million emergency department we just opened at the Flin Flon hospital.

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

Mr. Lindsey: You know, Madam Speaker, the minister repeating falsehoods doesn't make them true.

This minister's actions have caused more northern Manitobans to spend more time in Winnipeg to get the health care they need because the system in the North has seen cuts across the system, not increases. Less is not more.

So during the middle of a COVID pandemic northern Manitobans are forced to spend more time in Winnipeg, increasing the likelihood of them carrying the COVID back to their northern communities. This lack of services in the North is now compounded by reduced flight schedules.

So, Madam Speaker, when will this minister actually commit to increasing the resources for northern health care and immediate assistance for northern patient transportation?

Mr. Friesen: So, Madam Speaker, I think this is a rare point of agreement between the member of Flin Flon and our government, because it sounds like the member is expressing exactly this fidelity to the idea of getting care closer to home, which we're fully committed to—of getting less wait times for people.

And the Premier (Mr. Pallister) said today that in Manitoba under the NDP we were waiting the longest of any Canadians; and he's saying, as well, to get that right care in the right place at the right time. It is exactly the direction in which we will go. We need the member's support to be able to continue to support the transformation of our health-care system to focus on getting better care sooner for all Manitobans, and we're on our way, including for the people of the North.

COVID-19 Outbreak at Keeyask Station Concern for Spread into First Nations

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): This morning, I received a letter from MKO, which I table, pleading for federal intervention in an uncontrolled COVID-19 outbreak at Keeyask, which is at code red. MKO says that Manitoba Hydro is ignoring their concerns, has provided no COVID plan when many nearby First Nations communities are at the highest risk.

Now, there's a long and shameful history of Manitoba Hydro ruining the lives and livelihoods of northern First Nations while we who live in the south reap the benefits. The Premier has no problem ordering Hydro to raise rates, force layoffs and sell off businesses.

Will Hydro shut down for 14 days to make it safe, or is the Premier going to order Hydro to continue

working even if it means putting First Nations communities at greater risk?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Crown Services): Certainly, as I reported and I report daily on the progress that—and the partnerships that are being continued on with our First Nations, our staff, our KCNs and public health, Madam Speaker, that all 724 workers have been tested.

We're certainly very aware of the concerns. We share them, because safety is No. 1, Madam Speaker, and that's what we're going to continue to focus on.

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

Emergency Measures Organization Role in Pandemic Response

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): The government keeps saying this pandemic is an unprecedented crisis, yet they chose to shut down the incident command centre in the middle of it. No one knows who made that decision.

What's just as incredible, Madam Speaker, is that Manitoba's Emergency Measures Organization has been completely missing in action during this crisis. EMO is tasked with pandemic preparedness. They have a detailed plan on their website for schools, communications and business—except it's from 2007.

According to the document I table, EMO is supposed to lead the pandemic response.

Has anyone in the government read these documents; and why has emergency measures been completely absent in what this government keeps saying is the worst crisis in a century?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Again, Madam Speaker, I understand that research is work, but the member should still do it.

The respiratory virus and steering committee, which has been in place throughout the entire year, is always in contact with the Emergency Measures Organization. The Emergency Measures Organization has been at the table on the calls all year ever since COVID started, without exception.

* (14:40)

Increase in COVID-19 Cases Code Red Designation

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, the success of a government in an emergency depends on the government's ability to bring all

resources and people with experience together in a united effort. The government's failure to do this, as we can see from the letter from hundreds of doctors, indicates clearly that we are now at an important and very significant point. We are in grave peril; it is an extreme emergency.

Madam Speaker, over the last seven days the number of new cases per 100,000 population is similarly very high in all areas of Manitoba except for Prairie Mountain Health, which is lower.

Is the poor involvement of others in decision-making a reason that all areas of Manitoba except for Prairie Mountain Health are not being called code red as they should be?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): The member is a medical doctor, Madam Speaker, and he would understand the challenges that would be posed to any Manitoban of having hundreds of people advising a person on their health condition. Such is, I think, a reasonable example of a parallel situation where we need to have senior health leadership and we can't have 800 doctors doing it.

And so as a matter of simple professional respect, I would say it would be wise, and especially now during a pandemic, to show faith and supportive behaviour in reference to suggestions made to our senior health officials, including Dr. Brent Roussin. And I am sure that the member would understand how that professionalism would be integral to achieving better results for the protection of Manitoba citizens.

Paramedic Self-Regulation Government Update

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Paramedics are highly skilled health-care professionals who provide quality, life-saving care on the front lines right across the province. In 2016, our government committed to move towards self-regulation of paramedics.

Would the Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living please update the Assembly on the progress in keeping this promise to our paramedic professionals?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I thank the member for Riding Mountain for yet another good question about paramedics in Manitoba.

Our government is committed to establishing paramedicine as a self-regulating health profession, and we are in the final countdown to make that happen. We are making necessary amendments to

legislation and regulations to create the college of paramedics. This will improve the quality of care to Manitobans, support the professional growth of paramedics and increase transparency.

We thank all paramedics for being on the front-line of health care every day, but especially now during health—during COVID-19. We thank those paramedics as well, who are part of those Red River graduates who are going out to help and increase the capacity at screening sites.

Thank you to paramedics. We'll continue to invest in your profession.

Changes to Crown Land Leasing Beef Producer Case Concern

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Manitoba beef producers are upset and concerned about the Crown land changes this government has made. I am continuously raising these ranchers' voices in the Chamber.

One of these ranchers has written six letters to this minister requesting a payment plan. She is willing to pay the lease but needs support to do so.

Why the minister is not showing compassion and give her a phone call? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development): So let's just cut this phony baloney about NDP caring about farmers. Let's talk about how the Leader of the Opposition walked the picket line during a CN strike, stopping grain movement. Let's talk about the rail and road blockades that they—interrupted farm's supply. Let's talk about the forced municipal amalgamations, calling the municipalities howling coyotes.

Let's talk about the widening scope of the PST to include insurance on farm buildings, hurting farm families. I could go on and on, talk about they want to shut down Maple Leaf Foods in Brandon.

Where is their compassion for farmers? Instead, they're out there to kill the farming industry, and they should be—own up to it.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

I have a ruling for the House—time for oral questions has expired.

And may I just say that after the last minute or so, that everybody's got that out of their system so that when we move into the rest of the day we can have a more relaxed, respectful environment.

Speaker's Ruling

Madam Speaker: On March 12th, 2020, the honourable member for Wolseley (Ms. Naylor) rose on a matter of privilege regarding the government's failure to present a report on the government's Climate and Green Plan. She expressed her opinion that this failure to provide information as required by legislation misled the House and breached her privileges as a legislator. The member concluded her remarks by moving, and I quote, that this issue be moved to on all-party committee for consideration.

The honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) and the honourable Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) also spoke to the matter of privilege before I took it under advisement. I thank all members for their advice to the Chair on this matter.

For the information of all members, in order for the matter raised to be ruled in order as a prima facie case of privilege, members must demonstrate both that the issue has been raised at the earliest opportunity and also provide sufficient evidence that the privileges of the House or the privileges of individual members have been breached.

Regarding timeliness, the honourable member for Wolseley asserted that she was raising at the earliest opportunity on this issue after providing an adequate amount of time since the start of session for the minister to table the government's Climate and Green Plan annual report before the House.

In reviewing the statutory provisions pertaining to the report in question, it appears that the honourable member for Wolseley may have raised this matter prematurely, as the deadline for the tabling of the report had not yet passed at the time the matter of privilege was raised. As a result, it is difficult to rule that this matter met the true test of timeliness simply because the member indicated that she raised the matter at the earliest opportunity without providing mitigating circumstances.

Regarding the second condition of whether a prima facie case has been demonstrated, the member argued that, and I quote, the failure of the government to provide information as required by legislation misleads this House about the true state of the government's actions and, as such, breaches her privileges as a legislator. End quote. She further stated

that, and I quote, violating this legal obligation for public accountability obstructs her from doing her job and holding the Pallister government to account. End quote.

Based on her comment in the House on March 12th, 2020, the honourable member for Wolseley (Ms. Naylor) appears to have a grievance against the government regarding the tabling of the government's Climate and Green Plan annual report rather than a matter of privilege.

Furthermore, I would like to quote from a ruling given by Speaker Hickes on December 7, 2004, and I quote: I have checked the procedural authorities, and there is no reference or citation that advises that it is a matter of privilege if a government does not table information when requested to do so, with the exception of items that are required to be tabled by statute. Should the information in question sought be an item that is required by statute to be tabled, there may be some scope for privilege, as Speaker Fraser of the House of Commons ruled on April 19th, 1993, that failure to table a document as required by statute was a prima facie case of privilege. End quote.

In looking at the tabling requirements for the government's Climate and Green Plan, it indicates that the report is to be tabled within 15 days after it has been prepared if the Assembly is sitting, or if the Assembly is not sitting, within 15 days after the next sitting period begins. For this particular matter of privilege raised, the Speaker is not in possession of information that would verify if the report in question was in fact published or ready to be tabled in the Assembly. Therefore it is virtually impossible to know if the deadline has been missed.

I appreciate that the report in question may be an issue of concern to the member, but I must rule that this matter does not constitute a prima facie case of privilege.

* * *

Madam Speaker: Petitions? Grievances, and I understand there may be a grievance from the honourable—or by the honourable member for River Heights.

* (14:50)

GRIEVANCES

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I rise today on a grievance.

I speak today to say in the strongest possible terms that I support the hundreds of doctors and other health professionals who have signed a letter to the Premier (Mr. Pallister) calling for much more substantial measures to address the COVID-19 pandemic in Manitoba.

The Minister of Health was wrong to say the doctors are trying to cause chaos. The doctors say very clearly that we in Manitoba are in grave peril. These words by the doctors and their colleagues were not chosen lightly.

We have an extreme emergency. The words of the doctors and other health professionals were not part of a political attack. There are, I am sure, among the many hundreds who have signed the letter, those of all political persuasions. They speak not from a political perspective, but from the perspective of health professionals who care deeply about the health and well-being of Manitobans. In fact, they have dedicated their lives to it.

The government says it has lots of capacity, but as the doctors point out, we may be short of ICU specialists and others. Not all doctors have the needed expertise to work in ICUs. Even physicians who are specialists in internal medicine may not be immediately able to switch into working in ICUs. There are limits in terms of personnel who have the expertise to safely expand our ICU capacity and the personnel that are needed for that expansion.

There is also a concern that a number of people who work in our ICUs may get infected, and we have already seen one—Dr. Mooney—and we have seen his case; and the question is if there are others, it is a concern that—whether we will have the extra capacity in staffing if a number of critical people like Dr. Mooney become infected.

In personal-care homes we have already seen the drastic shortages in staff because staff have become infected or need to quarantine. As hundreds of doctors have pointed out, there needs to be an expansion of the public health measures to reduce virus transmission. We must have a much larger and more effective lockdown. The Southern Health authority, the Northern Health authority and the Interlake-Eastman authority all have rates of new cases per 100,000 people which are similarly high as the numbers are also high in Winnipeg.

In Winnipeg the seven-day average for the last seven days is 27 per 100,000. In the Southern Health it is 23 per 100,000. In Interlake-Eastman it is

24 per 100,000. In the Northern Health authority it is 30 per 100,000. Only in the Prairie Mountain Health area is it down at 5.5. And so Prairie Mountain could be an exception, but the rest of the province needs to be in code red.

What happens in the North affects people in Winnipeg because we may be needing to provide the ICU capacity in Winnipeg for people in the North. Indeed, as we saw in an earlier pandemic when we had many cases in northern First Nations, it strained the ICU capacity in Winnipeg.

We need stronger measures to reduce the potential for transition all over the province and we need to act particularly in areas where people gather or where there's a high risk of transmission. Just as the doctors have said, there needs to be a bigger lockdown, a bigger shutdown, a decrease—a major effort to decrease the transmission.

At the same time, it's critical that there be support to Manitoba businesses who are struggling and to help individuals who are in great difficulty.

We must commit to and have the capacity to do testing without long waits for COVID-19. We must have the capacity to analyze and report the test results within 24 hours and we must have the capacity to complete the contact tracing within 24 hours and assemble and report results rapidly so this information is quickly available. Anything less than this is not good enough because by day four people can be infectious and pass the virus on to others. Only when testing and contract tracing can be done reliably and rapidly can these be used effectively to control the pandemic. As the doctors say, and I, too, here, there are far too many stories of this process taking far too long.

The doctors speak of more consultation being needed with vulnerable communities. First Nations need to be involved in decision making. They are critically involved in the North and as we see with the outbreak at the Keeyask dam right at the moment.

We need to have detailed plans to ensure that individuals who are homeless, individuals who are immuno-compromised are adequately protected.

In personal-care homes we have had horrific outbreaks at two personal-care homes: Parkview and the Maples. There have been problems at these homes dating back many years. The government and the government before have under staffed these homes and put people at risk. We need not only to boost the staffing levels to boost the number of people working

in homes and providing care, but we also need regular testing. In other jurisdictions where there are high rates, all homes are being tested—all staff, all residents—up to twice a week. We need to be doing something much more vigorous, particularly in personal-care homes where there are already cases, or when there is a first case in a personal-care home. We must be recognized that there are times when people will be infectious but asymptomatic and the people in the personal-care home are too at risk to take the risk that they are not picked up.

We need more accountability and transparency in Estimates and in question period. The Minister of Health has worked hard to avoid giving many answers. The government needs to be much more fully sharing details: details of the structure of the incident command centre, making sure that Indigenous groups and physicians are involved. I looked today at the Ottawa reporting; it is much more detailed than we are giving. We could be doing much more and much better in reporting to all Manitobans.

It is a tragic part of the COVID-19 pandemic that far too many cases are to be found in government funded or operated institutions: personal-care homes, hospitals, correctional institutions. The government needs to stop blaming others and ensure that the government is doing all it can, and in particular that the recommendations of hundreds of doctors and health professionals are followed.

There will certainly in due course be inquests and a public inquiry into the government's contact—conduct of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. We in the the Liberal Party have called for the resignation of the Minister of Health. Sadly, he has lost the confidence of many in Manitoba; the minister was not prepared for the second wave of the pandemic.

My advice to the minister is this: if the minister wants to save his job as Minister of Health, he needs to apologize to the doctors he's attacked and he needs to implement immediately the changes the doctors recommend if we are to decrease the number of new COVID-19 cases and to reduce the likelihood of exceeding the pandemic capability in our ICUs, the capacity we have in health care.

I say this to the Minister of Health, who I have worked in this Legislature for some time, and I think it's time that he listened and acted, and I ask you to do this, Mr. Minister.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

ORDERS OF THE DAY**GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Could you please resolve into Committee of Supply.

Madam Speaker: The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply to consider Estimates.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)****AGRICULTURE AND
RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT**

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Greg Nesbitt): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of Agriculture and Resource Development. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Before my first question, I would request the honourable minister to not play a dodge game as he did in the question period today, but to answer the questions that I'm asking on behalf of our respectable producers who feed us.

My first question is: Manitoba Beef Producers and Keystone Ag Producers have approached honourable Minister of Agriculture with some requests to improve Western Livestock Price Insurance Program, AgriStability and set-aside programs for them.

What was minister's response to these requests and why the agricultural critic was not kept in loop for that communication?

Thank you.

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development): Mr. Chair, I'm first just trying the audio here. Does the audio come through all right?

* (15:10)

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, it's just fine.

Mr. Pedersen: Certainly, on western livestock producer insurance premium or WLPPI, as we call it, this is a good insurance tool for beef producers. It was a tool that they could use. Then, when COVID hit in

beginning of March, the premiums skyrocketed, and for those who hadn't bought in before the premium became very expensive in order to buy in.

We—between myself, the government of Saskatchewan, government of Alberta and, in fact, we had some support out of provinces like New Brunswick, because they're interested in the Western Livestock Price Insurance Program—we lobbied the federal government very hard to come up with a program where we could somewhat subsidize those increased premiums to make them affordable. Now, the federal government said no. They were—they kept using the excuse that it's a regional program, it's not a national program. And so, you know, the opportunity was missed there.

The premiums are, again, the premiums are being posted now. You go on MASC's website and you can find the premiums, and they're, you know, they're—it's a decision on the producer's side, but we would like to see this built into the next five-year plan—Canadian Agricultural Partnership plan—which is covered under all these things like AgriStability and AgriInsurance.

So we would like to see—change the name, so it's not the western livestock. Call it the national livestock. And we don't care what you call it. Let's get it in as a national program. We see that there is—there will be interest from all provinces, producers, if this becomes an insurance program and, again, it's something that producers can decide where they're comfortable, not only with the premiums but the support levels that the premiums will give them, and it becomes a very useful tool, much like AgriInsurance, the crop insurance and the changes we're making to forage insurance, to make it work much better for producers.

This is the kind of support that really builds because these types of programs become insurable. They become bankable. They become predictable so that you can go to your financial institution and say I have bought in premiums at this price and to give me this support level, which is what AgriInsurance does right now, which forage insurance can do when you use it and where we'd like to see the western livestock insurance, whatever its new name is, but we're going to lobby very hard to build that in the new program.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Brar: Thanks, Minister, for that answer.

Follow-up question that I want to ask again is, would the minister consider keeping the ag critic in

loop for future communications with ag organizations and producers?

And my—another question is talking about insurance. This government has cut funding to MASC and to run or implement insurance programs, we need insurance agents and proper staffing to serve our producers.

Can the minister reflect on, for example, how many insurance agents we have right now, for example, just in Interlake? Do we have enough? If not, how many do we have and why, in this situation, this government is putting budget cuts on MASC?

Mr. Pedersen: Well, let's clear up the misconceptions right off the bat. There is no budget cuts in MASC, and for the member to put that out there is not only false, but it's a disservice to the farm community too because there has not been any budget cuts in MASC.

In fact, in the last number of years, MASC has spent \$10 million in enhancing the technology. I think it's a disservice of the member to treat farmers like backwoods people. They're very technical savvy right now, and it's—when COVID came, offices were closed for the safety of the employees. But that did not stop the service, because when you contact an agent—MASC agent—either through—by email or by telephone, whatever, the lines were forwarded.

Everybody was still working, and they were working from home, and the responsibility between the agents is still there. It's—you don't have to have one person in one office for everybody. You can move this around, and we make sure that when somebody comes, it's all about customer service, and they're doing this.

And, you know, so many of—so much of this MASC work, and especially if I talk about crop insurance, can be done online now. You can do your seeding report, your fall harvest report online and it can be done that way.

A lot of the—of our field agents were 'encounting' some hesitancy from the farm community during COVID. They didn't want someone coming on their yard. They wanted to maintain that physical distancing, and so online and by phone works for these kinds of reports, and that's where MASC will continue to modernize in here, and I really take offense when the member tries to think that everything has to be done like it was done 20 years ago.

Farmers are very technical savvy right now, and for the member to insinuate that they're not is a disservice to the farm community.

Mr. Brar: I know that the insurance agents, they are stressed, overworked, burdened, because they are transitioning from that traditional system to the new system. As of now, they have to handle both systems at the same time and, on top of that, they have to have 35 unpaid days off. That puts additional burden on them and their families.

So why the government is still recruiting summer students if they say that there's no need for this manpower and all the work is being done using technology?

*(15:20)

Mr. Pedersen: Apparently math is not the members' strong suit. Where does he come up with 35 days? It's five days, the same as every other government employee across the province.

And, you know, I realize staff is stressed. Who is not stressed these days? Whether you're an MASC employee or whether you're a homemaker or whether you are working in a store, everyone is stressed these days. And we have looked after our employees as—just like everybody else, in terms of mental health help, and it's not different for MASC staff than anybody else.

Now, in terms of summer students, we actually ended up not hiring any summer students this year because we couldn't be out in the field and we couldn't be doing—because that would be contact with people. And that's a really unfortunate situation, because many of our employees started out—our current employees of MASC started out as summer students. They learned what was happening at MASC; they got an education; they came back to work for MASC.

For the member to insinuate that we shouldn't be hiring summer students is totally wrong, is totally short-sighted, and we need to be hiring these summer students, whether it's in MASC or whether it's in government or wherever. This is the future of your—if you don't look forward, especially these days when we know that there are many—our aging population. There's lots of retirements. We need to make sure we've got those young people out there to be able to take over. We need to be training them and showing them the opportunities in there.

So it is, again, it's just unfortunate when the member puts out false facts, or false information. It's

not a fact. It's a false information, and it does a disservice at any time. And in times like COVID it certainly doesn't help the population of Manitoba.

And, you know, the member asked—he wants to be included in briefings. Well, you could start by not spreading misinformation and then maybe we can possibly look at something down the road. But if whatever you're going to hear and then you're going to turn around and twist it, there is a big trust issue right here right now.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Brar: Mr. Chair, I don't have any questions further.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to the consideration of the resolutions.

At this point we will allow virtual members to unmute their mics so they can respond to the question.

I will now call resolution 3.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$13,457,000 for Agriculture and Resource Development, Policy and Transformation, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$136,113,000 for Agriculture and Resource Development, Risk Management, Credit and Income Support Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$16,752,000 for Agriculture and Resource Development, Stewardship and Assurance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$16,684,000 for Agriculture and Resource Development, Production and Economic Development, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$36,045,000 for Agriculture and Resource Development, Water Stewardship and Biodiversity, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$12,891,000 for Agriculture and Resource Development, Resource Development, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$950,000 for Agriculture and Resource Development, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.9: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$213,350,000 for Agriculture and Resource Development, Loans and Guarantees Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for these Estimates is item 1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 3.1.

The floor is now open for questions.

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Chairperson: Resolution 3.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$6,270,000 for Agriculture and Resource Development, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Agriculture and Resource Development.

MUNICIPAL RELATIONS

Mr. Chairperson (Greg Nesbitt): The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Municipal Relations.

I would now ask that the honourable minister and critic from the official opposition turn on their video to indicate that they're ready to proceed, if applicable.

* (15:30)

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I just, in the interest of time—I realize that we are very short on Estimates time and, you know, as frustrating as that is, we are still hoping to get to a few more departments here. Simply asking that maybe we would forgo our opening statements so that we could have the opportunity to get straight to questions. I only have a few and then we could move straight into the next department here in this room.

So I ask leave for that to happen, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Concordia has asked for leave. Is leave granted? *[Agreed]*

We'll now waive opening statements.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for departments in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 13.1(a) contained in resolution 13.1.

Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or have a global discussion?

Mr. Wiebe: Global.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. It is agreed upon that the questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wiebe: I would like to ask a question about the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. I know that AMM has prioritized their selections very early in the year. Very interested in getting some of that—those projects moving forward.

Just asking if Manitoba has selected their projects for the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Programs, and if the minister could give us a quick update on that.

While the minister is looking that up, I just wanted to thank her for taking the step to forgo the opening statements. I'm sure she has a very—lot to say and would have liked to have done that, so I appreciate her taking the step to move straight to questions.

Thank you.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Municipal Relations): Thank you to the member for his question, and it is a pleasure to be here today to take his questions. I have been in this role for just over a year now, and I do believe this is the first question the

member has posed to me in 12 months, so I'm very pleased to have a collaborative discussion with the member about municipal funding for the province of Manitoba and look forward to this collaborative dialogue.

In the interest of time, I did forgo my opening statement, but I would be very remiss if I did not take a moment to thank all of my staff in the department, the people who show up for work every day throughout this pandemic and work—have worked diligently to continue to support our member municipalities.

*(15:40)

I want to thank the leadership of my deputy, Bruce Gray, who has been an outstanding leader in ensuring that our department runs smoothly and that people are able to get the resources and the support that they need while staying safe as well as providing municipalities what they need in terms of resources and being a steadfast resource for municipalities to call upon.

We have spent countless hours working, ensuring that we're getting the right information out to all of our municipalities throughout the province and working with them all on a co-ordinated effort to ensure that whether it be a response to the pandemic or response to moving into a different—moving the pandemic response system up a level, and what does that mean for the municipalities and how we can best support them, has been absolutely critical.

And, of course, at the centre of that has been my deputy, Bruce Gray, and so I do want to thank him and everyone else who works in Municipal Relations.

Earlier in the spring, we knew our government had decided that shovels in the ground and getting people to work and investing in infrastructure would be one of the best ways to ensure a recovery of our economy, as well as creating jobs. And so what we did is we supersized, if you will, the Building Sustainable Communities fund, and in a world where it takes sometimes months to get a program together and to open up an intake and to determine priority projects, my department was working rapidly when we said we're supersizing this fund and needing to select up to \$10 million worth of projects and then ensuring that the projects could proceed and then flowing that money out the door.

It was a remarkable feat and yet everyone rose to the challenge to ensure that we got this money out the door, and I know that almost every member in this

room, whether it be the member for Concordia or the member for Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt) or in my own constituency of Riel, benefited from those projects.

I was really pleased to go and announce projects: an accessible playground in the constituency of St. Vital, with that member; a new playground in the constituency of Transcona, with that member; and really working and—across the entire province to ensure that these projects could proceed that brought so much excitement to many communities, and it was a real honour to do that and that's just one example of where my department responded rapidly.

The other one was when we doubled the amount of money for the Green Team funding this year. That was an exciting opportunity where we had more youth employed through many of our programs, not least of all the Green Team, and that was an overwhelming task for my department and I want to thank them for diligently—

Mr. Chairperson: One minute remaining.

Ms. Squires: —getting themselves—getting the applications ready and assessing each applicant and flowing that money with the least amount of strings attached so that they could have the resources to hire the people that they need.

Now the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, as the member knows, our government did commit \$500 million under our Manitoba Restart Program as part of an economic stimulus package which included \$230 million for municipalities as part of Manitoba's contribution to the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program.

And our government has always believed that there is no greater environmental problem in this province than the cleanup of Lake Winnipeg and to that end, we invested two—we're investing \$268 million towards phase 1, phase 2 of the North End Water Pollution Control Centre.

I would like to highlight that it was in 2003 that the Clean Environment Commissioner told the NDP government to act on this priority—

Mr. Chairperson: The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay. So, I mean, we're looking for a bit more clarification there and maybe the minister could try to focus that down.

My last question, I guess, Mr. Chair, thank you, is with regards to a directive that was issued for—

letter that was sent April 15th from this minister to municipalities, the beginnings—beginning early days of the pandemic, suggesting strongly to those municipalities that they look to the Province—to examples being set by the Province—and begin to trim their budgets and, in this case, suggest that perhaps layoffs could be on the table.

I'm just wondering if the minister could give us some insight into how many municipalities took her up on that, and if they tracked the number of people that were laid off, how many job reductions were initiated due to the urging or the suggestion of the minister?

Ms. Squires: As I was saying in my previous answer, the North End Water Pollution Control Centre, phase 1 and phase 2 has been a priority for our government. This is also a—this was a priority identified by the clean environment commissioner in 2003. At that time, the project—the total value of that project would have been significantly less than the 1.6 billion—1.7 billion dollars that we're looking at today. And yet the NDP did nothing on this initiative that would have really put Lake Winnipeg in a completely different situation.

The cost of ignoring that problem—not only did we see the North End Water Pollution Control Centre project cost escalate to the \$1.7-billion figure that we're looking at today, it also saw the depletion of the health of Lake Winnipeg in such a catastrophic way that all the NDP members, when they—and I know the member that sits across from me, he has a cottage out there and he's greatly, greatly concerned about the health of Lake Winnipeg, as is everybody in my constituency and all the members' constituencies.

The health of that lake is something that we're all concerned about, and yet the NDP inaction on Lake Winnipeg caused it to be named the most endangered lake in the world in 2013 by international experts. That is the NDP record on the north end—on Lake Winnipeg.

And our government does not think that that is acceptable, and that is why we've prioritized. We've worked very collaboratively through our Investing in Canada program with our federal counterparts and with our municipal counterparts and coming to an agreement that this is a priority that can no longer be ignored.

Now, I'll quote my colleague and my friend, City Councillor Brian Mayes, who a few years ago was saying in the paper when he was asked, why didn't the

NDP prioritize this project? He said, I don't know, I guess water and sewer is not a sexy initiative and it was never prioritized before.

Well, we don't—we're not interested whether or not it's a sexy issue or not. If water and sewer is going to lead to the cleanup of Lake Winnipeg, then our government is going to act on that, and we're very, very pleased to be working with our counterparts on the cleanup of Lake Winnipeg, starting with the North End Water Pollution Control Centre investments.

When it comes to funding for municipalities, at the outset of the pandemic, I had reached out to all municipal leaders and I said, I can assure you that our budgets will remain intact. When I became the Minister of Municipal Relations, I had a collaborative conversation with the mayor, and he asked if I could provide for him certainty for his budgets as he was moving into a four-year budgeting cycle, if I could provide him that certainty that he would know what kind of operating and infrastructure funding that he would receive.

And for this first time—for the first time, the City of Winnipeg got that certainty, as did all other municipalities throughout the province, that they would have their operating baskets and their infrastructure baskets maintained for the mandate of this government.

* (15:50)

And after we went into a pandemic all the municipal leaders, including the City of Winnipeg, had asked me, does that commitment hold? And our response was, absolutely. In fact, not only does it hold, I will flow 75 per cent of the operating dollars to you immediately so that they can help with your cash flow problems.

And we were very pleased that in the—in spring, at the early onset of this pandemic, we flowed that money out the door so that municipalities wouldn't have the cash flow problems. And then, just recently, we flowed the other 25 per cent of all their operating funding commitments to them, regardless of the fact that many of our municipalities, thanks to our ongoing stable funding that we've provided them and the federal restart money that we recently flowed to them, will be in a surplus position and—

Mr. Chairperson: One minute remaining.

Ms. Squires: —and despite that, we've said to—and despite the fact that our provincial budgets have taken a significant impact due to the pandemic, we are still

committed to working with our municipal leaders, flowing that money.

In addition, we've also provided an extra \$50 million in water services projects throughout this pandemic. This is helping taking places off boil-water advisories, like The Pas. They have not been able to expand and do proper land-use planning because they do not have the ability with their lagoon. That lagoon has been overflowing at capacity since 2012, and it was ignored by the NDP government.

Our government, through this \$50-million enhanced investment to the Water Services Board, is helping expand The Pas lagoon and many other projects throughout the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Chairperson: Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions. *[interjection]* Order.

At this point we will allow virtual members to unmute their mics so they can respond to the question.

Resolution 13.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$46,993,000 for Municipal Relations, Community Planning and Development, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 13.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$11,524,000 for Municipal Relations, Municipal Capacity and Assessment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 13.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$313,951,000 for Municipal Relations, Financial Assistance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 13.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,725,000 for Municipal Relations, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 13.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$67,263,000 for Municipal Relations, Loans and Guarantees Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for these Estimates is item 1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 13.1.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wiebe: No, I'm sorry. I'm calling for the—I don't have a question.

Mr. Chairperson: Resolution 13.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$6,443,000 for Municipal Relations, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes the Estimates of the Department of Municipal Relations.

CONSERVATION AND CLIMATE

Mr. Chairperson (Greg Nesbitt): The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is the Department of Conservation and Climate.

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Concordia, on a point of order.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I'd like to simply ask a leave, once again, as the minister of municipal affairs was so gracious to do, that the minister of Conservation simply forgo her opening statement, as well as the critic's opening statement, so we can move straight to questions. I believe we only have about five minutes left.

Mr. Chairperson: I would like to indicate to the member for Concordia that that is not a point of order, but he is asking for leave.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Is there leave to forgo the opening statement by the honourable minister?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: Leave has been denied.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate): I do.

I am very pleased to participate today as we review the 2020-2021 Estimates of the Department of Conservation and Climate.

At this time, I would like to introduce the staff that are here with me today, including Jan Forrester, Deputy Minister of Conservation and Climate; Matt Wiebe, our ADM, Finance and Shared Services; Cordella Friesen, our ADM, Environmental Stewardship; Neil Cunningham, acting ADM, Climate and Green Plan Implementation Office; Blair McTavish, ADM for Parks and Resource Protection.

The Department of Conservation and Climate has been diligently working to protect our environment and promote sustainable development. Our dedicated staff, who work as conservation officers throughout Manitoba, have been working incredibly hard protecting and conserving our wildlife and addressing illegal hunting practices.

Since October 10th our conservation officers, with support from aerial patrol and K-9 support, have charged or given appearance notices to 22 individuals for serious wildlife offences. They have been giving warnings to 13 individuals for night hunting or for hunting in moose closures. Our conservation officers have charged four individuals for possessing illegally taken wildlife. They have seized six individuals, as well as eight firearms, and they have issued restitution orders totalling \$6,500.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to these hard-working civil servants, who are working around the clock. Our staff are being recognized as leaders in their field. The National Association for Interpretation has recently awarded two of our staff with important accolades.

This year, Lindsey Mitton, the senior park interpreter at Birds Hill Park, was given out the award of Master Frontline Interpreter for her exceptional work. She builds an appreciation for the park's natural, cultural and historic resources; personally connecting with over 10,000 visitors every year. She builds in—oh, sorry—during COVID-19, Lindsey is now pursuing ways to connect virtually with students and all Manitobans to promote the values of Birds Hill and the provincial park system.

Rob Nedotiafko, our director of parks, has also been recognized with the award for excellence in interpretive support. Rob champions the work of our park-park interpreters, actively promotes our program and sees how important this work is in developing experiences in our provincial parks and promoting visitor appreciation and care of our provincial, natural, cultural and historical resources.

Our provincial parks remain treasures for Manitoba and I am proud that we are moving forward with significant investments in parks in order to have them remain cherished, sustained provincial public assets.

We are focused on park modernization to improve the experience for all park visitors. This year, with COVID-19 affecting all of our lives, it was more clear than ever before that our citizens need our provincial parks as a place for experiencing nature, health and wellness, as well as family memories. We have focused on transparency as we explore ways to modernize our parks; to enhance the experience and make our parks even greater for all to enjoy.

We have always, and we will continue to engage Manitobans and park cottage residents—

* (16:00)

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

For the information of all members, our rule 2(1) provides in part that where all required actions for the business of Supply and the Committee of Supply have not been completed 60 minutes prior to the usual adjournment hour on the last Thursday sitting prior to the Remembrance Day week, the provisions outlined in rule 2(24) are to apply. Therefore, the hour being 4 p.m., I am interrupting proceedings to put the question without debate or amendment on all remaining resolutions before this selection-section of the Committee of Supply.

I am therefore going to call in sequence the resolutions on the following matters: Conservation and Climate, Indigenous and Northern Relations, Civil Service Commission, Tax Credits, Enabling Appropriations and Emergency and Other Appropriations. Legislative Assembly, Employee Pensions and Other Costs.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Conservation and Climate.

I will now call resolution 12.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$6,511,000 for Conservation and Climate, Finance and Shared Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$45,855,000 for Conservation and Climate, Parks and Resource Protection, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$29,418,000 for Conservation and Climate, Environmental Stewardship, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,431,000 for Conservation and Climate, Climate and Green Plan Implementation Office, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$49,602,000 for Conservation and Climate, Wildfire Service, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$5,425,000 for Conservation and Climate, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Conservation and Climate.

INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN RELATIONS

Mr. Chairperson (Greg Nesbitt): The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Indigenous and Northern Relations.

I will now call resolution 19.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,344,000 for Indigenous and Northern Relations, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 19.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$29,125,000 for Indigenous and Northern Relations, Indigenous and Northern Relations, for the fiscal year March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Indigenous and Northern Relations.

CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

Mr. Chairperson (Greg Nesbitt): The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Civil Service Commission.

I will now call resolution 17.1.

Resolution 17.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$24,658,000 for Civil Service Commission, Civil Service Commission, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of the Civil Service Commission.

TAX CREDITS

Mr. Chairperson (Greg Nesbitt): The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Tax Credits.

I will now call resolution 33.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$221,559,000 for Tax Credits, Tax Rebates and Fees, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Tax Credits.

ENABLING APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. Chairperson (Greg Nesbitt): The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Enabling Appropriations.

I will now call resolution 26.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$9,556,000 for Enabling Appropriations, Enabling Vote, for the fiscal year March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 26.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$221,676,000 for Enabling Appropriations, Internal Service Adjustments, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 26.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$40,000,000 for Enabling Appropriations, Green and Carbon Reduction Fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 26.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$135,000,000 for Enabling Appropriations, Capital Assets, Internal Service Adjustments, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Enabling Appropriations.

EMERGENCY AND OTHER APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. Chairperson (Greg Nesbitt): The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Emergency and Other Appropriations.

I will now call resolution 27.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$100,000,000 for Emergency and Other Appropriations, Emergency Expenditures, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 27.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$500,000 for Emergency and Other Appropriations, Allowance for Losses and Expenditures Incurred by Crown Corporations and Other Provincial Entities, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Emergency and Other Appropriations.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Chairperson (Greg Nesbitt): The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the department of Legislative Assembly.

I will now call resolution 1.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,729,000 for Legislative Assembly, Other Assembly Expenditures, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 1.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$7,338,000 for Legislative Assembly, Office of the Auditor General, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 1.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,043,000 for Legislative Assembly, Office of the Ombudsman, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 1.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,700,000 for Legislative Assembly, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 1.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$5,606,000 for Legislative Assembly, Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

* (16:10)

This completes the Estimates for the department of Legislative Assembly.

EMPLOYEE PENSIONS AND OTHER COSTS

Mr. Chairperson (Greg Nesbitt): The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Employee Pensions and Other Costs.

I will now call resolution 6.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$24,113,000 for Employee Pensions and Other Costs, Employee Pensions and Other Costs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Employee Pensions and Other Costs.

This also concludes our considerations of the Estimates in this section of the Committee of Supply meeting in room 254.

I would like to thank the ministers, critics and all honourable members for their hard work and dedication during this process. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all hard-working Assembly staff behind the scenes who made it possible for the committee to sit virtually this year.

Committee rise.

FAMILIES

* (15:10)

Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. We will resume Estimates for the Department of Families.

And the minister has the floor.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Families): I will just finish off with my opening comments.

First of all, I just—a check—can you hear me?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, loud and clear.

Mrs. Stefanson: Into Child and Family Services area, our top priority as a government is protecting the safety of our children.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have provided Child and Family Services employees with over 670,000 individual PPE items and over \$3.1 million from Manitoba Risk Recognition Program to show our support for everything they do to keep our children safe.

Our government has put a moratorium on children aging out of care, ensuring that youth continue to receive needed supports during this challenging time. We've also collaborated with Telus to provide tablets to school-aged children in group homes and with resource assistance for youth to provide housing to at-risk youth.

But while our COVID-19 efforts have been significant, I'm also very proud of everything we have done to reduce the number of children in CFS care and keep families together.

Budget 2020 includes over \$400 million for CFS agencies and authorities as part of our single-envelope

funding approach, which has proven to reduce the number of children in CFS care. And the previous NDP government doubled the number of children in care; we are turning the corner.

In fact, there are now 865 fewer children in care than there were in 2017. That is the third year in a row that we have reduced the number of children in CFS care in our province. For years, leaders in our Indigenous community have called for the end of birth alerts. I'm proud to say that, as of July 1st, our government ended the practice of birth alerts by investing in community-based preventative supports.

In community living and disability services our government's commitment to vulnerable people also extends to the thousands of Manitobans who are supported every day through our community living and disability services program. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have invested \$1.9 million to provide over 2.3 million individual PPE items to those serving vulnerable adults and children with disabilities. We have also provided those same staff with over \$4.9 million from the Manitoba risk recognition pay program in recognition of their extraordinary sacrifices for vulnerable Manitobans.

We continue to work with Abilities Manitoba and other key stakeholders every day to ensure that our community services workers are properly supported during this challenging time. This year alone our government is investing \$461 million in the community living and disability services program—\$21 million more than last year's budget.

Our government is committed to empowering Manitobans with disabilities to lead lives of dignity and independence in the community. We also continue to invest record levels in employment programs for Manitobans with disabilities. This year we established an advisory group on employment opportunities for Manitobans with disabilities, and a task force to review Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Act.

Early on in the pandemic, we invested \$4.6 million in the Disability Economic Support Program, providing 43,000 Manitobans with disabilities with a \$200 one-time payment that they could use for their COVID-19-related expenses. And we continue to move forward on our plan to create a new dignified income support program for Manitobans with severe and prolonged disabilities, ensuring that our most vulnerable citizens can lead lives of independence and dignity.

In the area of housing, our government believes that all Manitobans deserve access to a safe and affordable place to call home, which is why we are making record investments in housing.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have invested nearly \$3.5 million in expanded shelter capacity, supporting additional shelter space at the Main Street Project, Siloam Mission, and the Salvation Army in Winnipeg, as well as Samaritan House in Brandon. Recognizing the need to turn the corner on \$1 billion in deferred maintenance by the previous NDP government, this summer we announced \$31 million for maintenance and repair of Manitoba Housing properties, allowing us to make 800 otherwise vacant units available to new tenants.

Since 2016, our government has invested over \$108 million in new social and affordable housing rental units, creating 713 new units for Manitobans who need them. We've also nearly tripled the budget for Rent Assist, providing support to 3,500 more Manitobans than the previous NDP government ever did.

We inherited a mess in Manitoba Housing from the previous government. We will continue to clean it up through strategic investments that will improve housing for Manitoba families.

In closing, I would like to thank all of the staff, the Department of Families, for everything they have done to support vulnerable Manitobans during this challenging time. And most of all, I'd like to thank Manitobans for their quiet resolve, their patience and their perseverance as we work to overcome this pandemic together.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the critic from the official opposition have an opening statement?

*(15:20)

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): No.

Thank you for taking the time, Minister, to come and answer some questions.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the member.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now

defer consideration of line item 9.1.(a), contained in resolution 9.1.

Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or have a global discussion?

An Honourable Member: Global.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. It is agreed, then, that questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Adams: Could the minister please inform the committee when the KPMG report will be publicized and why was the report contract doubled? *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister.

Mrs. Stefanson: Oh, right, have to wait for that. Okay.

I thank the member for the question regarding the KPMG report.

I will advise the member that we are in the process of going through a very significant change to child care in the province of Manitoba. I think it was very clear to us, especially during the pandemic, where we didn't have—where some of the challenges were within the child-care sector itself and some of the changes that need to take place. And, in particular, we realized that, you know, parents who need child care—maybe, you know, they're working at different hours and the—when child-care facilities are open and things of that nature; there was definitely a need to change the system that—so that it works more for Manitoba families.

So, of course, we did put out an RFP. KPMG has come up with a report. The report is simply just a tool that we're using. We are going to continue forward and speak with Manitoba families and parents out there to see what they need. So it's really just one part of the changes that will take place within the system, and so I don't want to overemphasize or, you know, the—what that report is; it's simply just one tool.

And, it—and certainly, we have to go out and we will be speaking with the child-care sector more closely over the course of the next number of months, and also with Manitoba families, because I think what we all need to do in all of this is create a child-care system that is there for Manitoba families when they need it. And right now we don't have—we need to make

some changes to the system in order to achieve that goal.

Ms. Adams: Could the minister explain why the contract for KPMG doubled, and who approved it?

Mrs. Stefanson: So there's some significant work that needed to be done with respect to this, and it happens with other contracts as well. Sometimes the deadlines are not met and there needs to be—you find out things in the middle where you need to maybe change the scope of the contract a little bit.

And so that was what transpired with this as well. And so there's a process that takes place with respect to how that works, and we felt that there was a need to go to another phase with KPMG, and so we worked with them on that and we moved forward on that.

Ms. Adams: Could I get a copy of the contract?

Mrs. Stefanson: The reason for the extension of the contract is that it was COVID-related.

Obviously, there were some challenges during the—those times of meeting certain deadlines and so on. So we extended the contract, and those were—it was specifically for COVID reasons.

Ms. Adams: I'll ask again: Is it possible for me to get a copy of the contract?

Mrs. Stefanson: Just to clarify there, it's—sorry, just a second.

Yes, the reason also for the extension was because of the need to—because of a number of changes that took place as a result of COVID, we needed to take in other considerations within the scope of the KPMG report as well.

But, again, I don't want to—you know, that's just one part of, you know, a tool that we'll use in terms of guiding us in some of the changes that will take place. I think, again, it's very important that this be driven by Manitoba families and that we're providing a child-care system for them and we need to make sure it's there for them when they need it.

I think in the past—certainly pre-COVID and during the previous administration—we didn't simply have a system and we knew that it wasn't the ideal system. So we need to work with all those stakeholders out there to ensure that we have a system that works best for all Manitoba families.

Mr. Chairperson: Just on a matter of procedure. Minister, if you need some time to get your answer, I won't necessarily recognize you right away. Just wave

or something like that, I'll watch the screen, and that'll be the signal for me to recognize you. Hansard's requested we do it that way, so.

Further questions?

Ms. Adams: So, the minister has indicated several times that there was a change in scope of the KPMG contract due to COVID. So I was wondering if I could get a copy of the contract before COVID and then a change—the contract after COVID, after it was deemed that they needed to have a change in contract.

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the member for the question and I believe there was a FIPPA request that came through. I was just getting my staff to look into that and that has been fulfilled, that FIPPA request.

But, again, I will say to the member that the reason for the, you know the change in the scope is because we're in the middle of a worldwide COVID pandemic and, you know, so when these things are put into place, we need to ensure that changes take place as a result of that.

So, this all happened in the middle of this and so, obviously, we had to move in that direction to ensure that we're providing a system that is there for Manitobans when they need it. So, obviously, that scope had to change because of COVID.

*(15:30)

Ms. Adams: Who approved the extra funding and—for KPMG, and how were they—how was that accounted for?

An Honourable Member: Sorry, again—oh, sorry.

Mr. Chair?

Mr. Chairperson: No problem.

Honourable Minister, go ahead.

Mrs. Stefanson: We'll get used to this new way of doing things, I'm sure.

Mr. Chairperson: By 4 o'clock.

Mrs. Stefanson: So Treasury Board authorized the Treasury Board's secretariat—secretary to provide authorization because we're in the middle of a COVID pandemic. So decisions around—that were related to COVID—COVID-related decisions could be approved by that.

I believe that that was in the information that was sent out to the member already, but, you know, we're happy to answer that for her again.

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Thompson—member for Thompson, I don't know if you are muted or if you're not speaking. It's a small screen, and you're a small square. So if you did want to ask something, please go ahead and make sure you're not on mute.

Ms. Adams: Could the minister please provide some expanded details on the change in scope for KPMG?

An Honourable Member: Mr. Chair? Sorry.

Mr. Chairperson: Go ahead, Minister.

Mrs. Stefanson: I think I already provided the member the answer to that question. And, again, these were COVID-related changes that needed to take place. So that's the change in the scope.

Ms. Adams: And when will the KPMG report be tabled?

Mrs. Stefanson: I believe I've already answered that question as well.

This is a tool that is being used to formulate a much broader change in the child-care system itself. Again, we will be consulting with Manitoba families to ensure that, you know, we get a child-care system that's there for parents as they need it.

We know that people right now, or eventually people—you know, as people are getting back to work, we've set up a matchmaking system that matches Manitoba families who are in need of child care with centres who are—have openings and space available for them. So we know that that system is working well right now, and so we're trying to move that into a more permanent way of dealing with those who need to get the child care when they need it.

So those are some of the examples of what we will be doing. And, over the course of the next few months, we will be consulting, again, with Manitoba families, with stakeholders in the child-care sector, the Manitoba Child Care Association and others to formulate what I think will be significant changes to the child-care system that will be, you know, to make it a system that is there for families when they need it.

Ms. Adams: It is concerning because not only is the minister bringing forward legislation changes for child care that she is refusing to publicly reveal, she is also doing so without releasing the KPMG report prior. So I ask the minister again, when will the report be released and when will the bill be made public?

Mrs. Stefanson: The member will know, certainly, the significant, you know, blockade that they put in place back in the spring session preventing bills from

going through at that time, and so because of their, you know, political wranglings, you know, we were in a position that we had to introduce this when we did.

We will be going out and significantly consulting with people in a sector who are working in a sector. We are—we will be consulting with Manitoba families. Moving forward, there will be lots of consultation towards that end goal.

But I will remind the member again that this—we're in the middle of a pandemic and those political, you know, wranglings, and the blockade that took place in the spring, you know, has forced us to have to look at different ways of doing things, and so we think that this is a great opportunity, you know, for families in Manitoba to have even more input into what, you know, what will be significant legislation moving forward.

Ms. Adams: I do find it interesting that they've introduced—you've introduced legislation and then saying you're going to consult, but we will move on.

Could the minister please provide the current child-care wait-list?

Mrs. Stefanson: What I will say to the member is that we don't—actually for the first time in the history of the province of Manitoba, certainly, in the last decade or two—we do not have a wait-list in the province of Manitoba. In fact, we have 6,000—more than 6,000 vacant spaces for Manitoba families that, again, through that match-making system that we put in place during the pandemic, something we learned to do during the pandemic—it's been very positive for Manitoba families being able to have access.

So now it's very transparent for Manitoba families as to where those vacancies are, and as they continue to get back to work, they'll have those opportunities to be able to reach out to those child-care centres, to home-based centres, to others to be able to access the child care that they need, when they need it.

Ms. Adams: Thank you for that information, Minister.

The \$22 million the government announced, up to \$4 million for workplaces to offer on-site child-care services for their employees, and—how much of that money has been spent?

* (15:40)

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the member for the question.

And certainly, these investments that we're making through the Manitoba chambers, the chamber

of—Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, as well as the sustainability trust, which is through The Winnipeg Foundation, along with our child-care development tax credit—these are all mechanisms we put in place to ensure that, when Manitobans do get back to work after COVID, that we are creating that long-term sustainability of the child-care sector by ensuring that there's more spaces available for those families who need it.

So already in that process, we have created more than 130 spaces this year. We know that in past years in—under the previous government, there were sometimes maybe less than 50 new spaces created a year. So we did this in the middle of a pandemic. We did it with our partnerships with the chambers and the child-care development tax credit.

So this particular one was done for the temporary child-care grant for home-based centres, which created 130 spaces. Through the rest of the money for the—with the chambers—\$8.5 million—we're looking to create over 800 new child-care spaces within the system and also through the child-care development tax credit, we're looking at creating an extra 682 spaces there.

So recognize that there's more work to be done, but we're continuing to work with those partners out there. And the sustainability trust, which is managed by The Winnipeg Foundation, provides that long-term sustainability for those existing child-care centres now for things that they need within their centres—supplies and so on, upgrades to certain things, that they need within those centres.

So we take a long-term sustainability approach, and this, of course, is over and above the investments that we already made within the child-care sector, you know, again, providing risk recognition pay, \$1.4 million for over 1,000 eligible child-care workers; over \$60 million in provincial operating grants flowed to those centres; over \$15 million through a one-year extension of the bilateral agreement with the federal government; \$2.4 million in COVID-19 response grants to help child-care centres with COVID-related costs; and I've already talked about the chambers and the sustainability trust fund as well as the child-care development tax credit.

So these are all tools that we've put in place to ensure that—the long-term sustainability of the child-care sector in the province of Manitoba, and we know, as Manitobans get back to work, that we need to

ensure that we've got a system that's there for Manitoba families when they need it.

Ms. Adams: I'm going to be handing questioning over to the member for The Pas-Kameesak.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): My first question to the Minister of Families is, could the minister please explain the reasoning for including sections 231 to 232 regarding the children's special allowance in BITSA and not its own bill, which could have allowed for public committed—for public committees and debate at large?

Mrs. Stefanson: I just want to thank the member for The Pas for the question. I think it's an important one.

Certainly, we have taken a different approach by moving to the—our child—in our child-welfare system by moving to—from a system that depended on individual—the number of children in care to determine the amount of funding that goes into the system, and we felt that was backwards. That creates a system of—that it—that provides sort of perverse incentivization of the apprehension of children, and so we got away from that. We heard loud and clear that we—and we feel very strongly that we want to, you know, keep Manitoba families together and keep those children with their families.

And so we took away that sort of perverse incentivization and we moved to a model of single-envelope funding. And what that has provided to those child care—or sorry, the CFS agencies and the authorities is the funds needed where they can actually spend it more on prevention initiatives to ensure that families—we give the families the support that they need to keep their children with them. And so we made that change because we wanted to reduce the number of kids in care, and we're seeing some good positive results from that so far.

* (15:50)

The member opposite knows that in the last three years, we have reduced the number of children in care each of the last three years. We've made, you know, significant improvements there. We know, of course, that there is still much more work to be done but we think we're going in the right direction with this.

What the member opposite is referring to was the historical practice that was—of the previous NDP governments, and we've ended that. We're moving on from that, and we need to move on from that to ensure that, you know, we continue on the path of keeping families together.

So that's our approach to this, that's why we're moving in this direction and we think it's—that that's in the best interest of Manitoba families.

Mr. Chairperson: The member for The Pas-Kameesak.

I'd just say to the honourable member that I believe you're on mute. And I would also ask, if I may, I hope that I'm pronouncing the name of your constituency correctly.

Ms. Lathlin: The Pas-Kameesak.

Mr. Chairperson: The Pas-Kameesak. Is that right?

Ms. Lathlin: Yes.

Mr. Chairperson: You do have the floor, go ahead.

Ms. Lathlin: Again, why in BITSA and not in its own legislation where they will require committees such as this and a debate on its own?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I thank the member for the question. And certainly, it does offer a debate within the BITSA bill as well, and those questions could be asked under the minister who is responsible for that bill.

But certainly, you know, we're here, we're having that discussion now. And the reason for it, I mean, I think it's really important to note that that children's special allowance now fund—is goes directly to those agencies for those children within those agencies.

You know, before, it came back through the provincial government, we've ended that practice. So the agencies are now keeping that funding from the federal government, plus we are giving—and so they're actually having access to \$15 million more than they were under the previous regime.

And so I think what's really important here is that this is about reducing the number of kids in care, it's about keeping families together, and so we'll continue to move in that direction. And I'm happy to have this debate here today, debate on the floor of the Legislature in question period. I'm happy to have that debate. The member can ask and members had the opportunity to ask in the BITSA bill debate as well. And so we'll continue to have that debate moving forward.

Again, it was a practice under the previous NDP government, and we ended that practice. And this is a way that we can now, I think, move on so we can all work together towards, I think, what we want to do—all of us—is to ensure that we provide a system that's

there for children when they need it—the safety for those children, but also to keep those families together. And I think, that's what we all want to achieve in the end.

Ms. Lathlin: My next question for the Minister of Families is: Could the minister explain how she thinks it's democratic to retroactively legislate this measure and to remove the ability for legal action?

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable minister, go ahead.

Mrs. Stefanson: You know, I—this is again, I mean, a practice under the previous NDP government that took place where they took that children's special allowance. We ended that practice.

You know, I will remind the member opposite that, under the previous NDP government, they doubled the number of children in care. That is not the direction we're going in.

We're making the necessary changes and moving on towards creating a system that's there for Manitoba families when they need it. And so, you know, we're moving and we've put a system together in place which has actually seen a reduction in the number of children in care in the last three years alone.

We think we're moving in the right direction. We'll continue to move in the right direction, and I, really, you know, with all due respect, will not take lessons from the members opposite. I do believe that went in the wrong direction when we doubled—when they doubled the number of kids in care.

We'll continue to work with those stakeholders in the community, with those workers, with those families to ensure that we are providing a system that is keeping families together.

Ms. Lathlin: I have a question about the Province's role and what's upcoming for—it's in regards to what Bill C-92 that was finally—January, by 2020, I believe.

OCN is currently once again being a trailblazer with our First Nations in Manitoba. We're going to be the first, I believe, to have our own Cree laws based on family structure in regards to Bill C-92. And, in fact, it's going to be ready in October of 2021. And the Cree word that we have is *wahkohtowin*, which is basically just all about family structure.

And I heard Sonny—Harold "Sonny" Cochrane do an amazing and very informative presentation in regards to this bill and how it's going to look like, and there's three fundamentals.

And one—the first one is connection, keeping the families together.

The second fundamental is of culture, make sure it's culturally appropriate, if you will, where our children are placed, hopefully, within our own communities.

And a third one is leadership in regards to chief and council and a special committee of elders, if you will, in regards to decisions with our children.

I'm really curious, what is your role going to be while this is all changing? I know we're—the goal is to get rid of the provincial act in regards to CFS so we can 'implemate' our own Cree laws, but what is your role going to be, and how is it going to play out while this process is taking place, and how is it going to look for the rest of the First Nations that are going to be moving towards this? *[interjection]*

An Honourable Member: Anytime you're ready, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Sorry, Minister, you moved around on the screen there. You're now—

Mrs. Stefanson: Sorry, okay.

Mr. Chairperson: —in the top corner instead of the middle on the other side.

So, anyway, Minister, please go ahead.

Mrs. Stefanson: I can't control those things, I know.

But, you know what, I just want to thank the member for her very impassioned, you know, question. I know she's very passionate about these issues and she's done so much for her community, and I thank her for what she's done.

C-92 has been a real challenge for us. One of the challenges is that we don't know even though the federal government has proclaimed this legislation.

We have sent several requests to the federal minister and the previous minister, two requests to the existing minister, and we have not received a respond—we—response from them.

We outlined some concerns for Manitobans, and, obviously, the No. 1 concern is the safety of the children going through these transition periods; we need to ensure that.

There's a number of factors that, again, we've gone through it, this issue of devolution in the province of Manitoba where I think we learned some pretty important lessons back in that day that I think

we can offer for the federal government, but they won't pick up the phone, they won't respond to the letters, and so it's very difficult for us to work around that.

But what I will say is that until those changes do take place, we will continue on the path that we are. We have a focus on ensuring that children remain with their families or remain in their communities with their loved ones. We will continue to focus on the safety of those children, which is paramount in all of this.

And so I thank the member for the question, and that's where we're at with this issue, unfortunately.

* (16:00)

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. For the information of all members, our rule 2(1) provides, in part, that where all required actions for the business of Supply in the Committee of Supply have not been completed 60 minutes prior to the usual adjournment hour on the last Thursday sitting prior to the Remembrance Day week, the provisions outlined in rule 2(24) are to apply—2(24), that is.

Therefore, the hour being 4 p.m., I am interrupting proceedings to put the question without debate or amendment on all remaining resolutions before this section of the Committee of Supply.

I will therefore call in sequence the resolutions of the following departments: Families, Justice, Infrastructure.

At this time, I invite virtual members to unmute themselves so they can respond to the question on the resolutions. Please unmute yourselves.

Okay, there's a lot here, and I've been asked to read slowly so that we get it all right. So I will try and keep a reasonable pace.

Starting with resolution 9.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$8,285,000 for Families, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,273,277,000 for Families, Community Service Delivery, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,313,000 for Families, Corporate Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$686,435,000 for Families, Child and Youth Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$128,798,000 for Families, Housing, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$56,000 for Families, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$14,927,000 for Families, Loans and Guarantees programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$77,731,000 for Families, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

JUSTICE

Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield): Resolution 4.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$49,119,000 for Justice, Corporate and Strategic Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$65,807,000 for Justice, Crown Law, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,340,000 for Justice, Legislative Counsel, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$475,346,000 for Justice, Community Safety, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$62,914,000 for Justice, Courts, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 4.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,090,000 for Justice, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield): Resolution 15.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,271,000 for Infrastructure, Corporate Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$30,999,000 for Infrastructure, Highways, Transportation and Water Management Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$147,783,000 for Infrastructure, Infrastructure Works, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$16,732,000 for Infrastructure, Emergency Management and Public Safety, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 15.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$516,159,000 for Infrastructure, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes our consideration of the Estimates in this section of the Committee of Supply meeting in room 255.

I hope you've enjoyed it as much as I have.

EDUCATION

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Piwniuk): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of committee supply will resume consideration for the Estimates of the Department of Education.

Under the Manitoba practice, debate—the ministry salary is the last item considered in the department of the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we are—shall now defer consideration for line item No. 16.1.(a), contained in the resolution 16.1.

Does the committee wish to proceed through an Estimates of this department on a chronologically or have a global discussion?

An Honourable Member: Global discussion.

Mr. Chairperson: And the critic? The honourable member from Transcona, on a global discussion?

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): Yes, we would like to have a global discussion.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, thank you. It's agreed that the questioning of this department will be proceeded on a global manner with all the resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Altomare: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to ask questions in Estimates. This is my first time doing so, and so because we have limited time, I'm just going to get right to it.

I just want to advise the minister I'm just looking at our—the annual report from 2019-2020, and on page 14, under the Manitoba School for the Deaf, we have salaries and employee benefits that have—that are underestimated in the actual funds that were expended. Why was this appropriation lower than estimated?

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. I just want to just make everything clear here that we're just waiting for the staff to come in from the—from the—for the Department of Education. So we'll be right with you with the answer from the minister.

Mr. Altomare: Can I—is the minister present?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, he is, but he's just waiting for his staff to come in.

Mr. Altomare: Okay. Can I just move on to another question because we have limited time?

Mr. Chairperson: Sure, go ahead.

Mr. Altomare: I'll—I won't get into some of the specific pieces, pieces around some of this piece, but as we know, COVID is in our schools now and parents, caregivers, are requiring the latest test results, and, you know, it's one thing to ramp up testing, but it's quite another to have the actual contact tracing, right? Because it's all about the contact tracing and getting that information into teachers' hands in a timely manner.

Can the minister provide an update as to, you know, what are the plans for that, getting that information, and is there even talk around creating some kind of separate piece for schools and teachers, too, and other employees in the system to get quicker access to that information?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Education): I thank the member for the question.

* (15:10)

There has been discussion around that and in coordination with the federal government who had been procuring the rapid testing for Canada, I understand, and the procuring doesn't happen out of Education, it happens out of Central Services.

But I do understand that there has been that discussion about if we get an allotment that's sufficient in Manitoba for rapid testing, would we be able to include education officials in the use of that? Of course, you know, health-care workers and others would be on that as well, but there certainly has been that discussion.

Do recognize, you know, contact tracing is a challenge. Contact tracing, as the member will know, doesn't happen by the Department of Education; it happens with public health, and there's been significant efforts to try to get more capacity, I think, for contact tracing. We've seen some of those announcements, whether it was Red Cross and others,

I believe, who might be involved in that. Those might be more appropriately put in another Estimates, Supply. But I do take the member's point as an important one, and I can assure him that there have been those discussions regarding rapid testing and then the challenges with contact tracing.

Mr. Altomare: I know some of the updates regarding some of the COVID pieces for schools have been somewhat delayed, and this is causing a little bit of frustration and a little bit of uneasiness in parents, especially when it comes to their own local schools.

How—yes, I guess what I want to know is: if—can the minister use some of his department's influence on getting more timely data released to the public regarding not only infections in schools but also if the transmission itself has occurred in schools?

Mr. Goertzen: I appreciate the comment from the member, and I do want to assure him that, you know, our officials—our deputy minister, Dana Rudy, who joins me here in the Chamber, and I'll introduce Matthew Penner, our special assistant who joins us as well—have constant contact with public health and regular meetings. And so they raise these concerns and these issues that we're hearing as well, so there is that communication and that effort to ensure that things can be improved. But I also know that there are lots of challenges that public health, of course, is dealing with, but they're not unaware of the desire to have that information to come out as quickly as possible.

It's also important to remember that sometimes there are other reasons and other factors in terms of why information might be slower coming than either the member or myself would want, and some of those are case specific in terms of when an individual ended up getting tested. And so it's not always the case that an individual goes and gets tested as soon as they feel symptoms or as soon as they have a other reason to get tested.

So there could be individual-specific factors in why there's delays, but I do take the member's point as it is an issue and one that is constantly raised as something to be looked at with officials from my department and public health, who I know are doing, you know, difficult work.

Mr. Altomare: I just want to talk about the transmission piece a little bit. It—that particular information would be particularly important to parents and people that work in the schools as to

whether or not the case or is—COVID is—was spread by transmission within the building.

The City of Ottawa has a great dashboard that displays pertinent daily information that is updated almost to the last second, and I do realize I'm getting into a bit of a different department piece here, but I just want to ask the minister again in the department: Have we looked into a similar sort of dashboard that parents can access quickly when it comes to schools in the province?

Mr. Goertzen: The member will know, I mean, public health information is provided by public health, and while I, along with him, are often looking for, you know, pieces of information generally on different sorts of things, we have to rely on the individual officials who are responsible for providing that.

And there's often been a criticism about why isn't everything reported in a bulletin, and public health has always said that where there is a community reason and a public health reason to provide that information, they would do that. And I believe that they have been doing that.

But I take the member's point, the transmission is clearly—even though there's been, you know, relatively little transmission in our schools—that is obviously the factor that the people would most want to know about, including myself as a parent.

And so, absolutely, those discussions happen with public health officials from our department on a daily basis.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Transcona. Oh—the honourable member for Transcona, can you unmute your speaker?

Mr. Altomare: You know, for summary I just want to say quickly, some reason sometimes we get muted and we don't realize that we're beep, because we're not the ones muting ourselves. So I'll just carry on.

Some of the pieces, I'll just come at it now, is what I used to do is working in schools and working in education. As a school principal, you know, I was responsible for the budget pieces in the school, and right now I'd just like to, you know, inform the minister because of COVID—and I know he knows this, but—there's been a tremendous amount of pressure on school-based budgets simply because of all the adjustments and alterations teachers have had to make to their teaching and what they're providing students.

You know, where we used to sit at tables and we used to be able to, you know, have those true cohorts in classrooms, we can't do that anymore. We have to have physical distancing. And this puts pressure on teachers to create new learning pieces that, for example, I can talk about, you know, the literacy labs that used to be in many early year schools now, I mean, have to be put into individualized kits. And this puts tremendous pressure on school-based budgets.

And, you know, principals are worried because what happens is that we, as school leaders, want to support that teaching and learning process so that when a teacher does come to us with budget requests we want to fulfill most of them because they're coming at it from a pedagogical standpoint and a standpoint of expertise.

Can I ask the minister and his department, how quickly can school boards and schools access money when they need it for these types of extenuating circumstances that we're in now?

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for the question. It's a good one.

And I recognize that the process for everything these days in society is different, and it's cumbersome. And it's not always worse, but sometimes it is, and it is more challenging in a lot of scenarios. And he's raised that.

Principals and school divisions, you know, in talking to officials, can access the required funding when they need it now. Now there are categories that have already been approved in terms of the expenditures.

So school board officials and administration officials are aware of what those categories are and what the approved expenditures are for COVID related. In fact I think they've been broadened since the beginning of the school year. And so they know what the approved expenditures are and they can certainly get them, they can do the acquisition—what they're asking for as they need it. And on a monthly basis they are being reimbursed for those costs.

Mr. Altomare: I just want to ask a question about the federal funding that's available to schools in Manitoba.

* (15:20)

Alberta has directly published how this money—and this money's already out despite the fact that it's coming in two separate payments. And what they did is transfer it directly to school boards, and they're

using it for staffing and PPE. In Quebec, the government there is using it for staffing and ventilation improvements, online learning and even free daycare support for teachers. In Ontario, they're having a particular focus on ventilation and connectivity to online learning. Right next door in Saskatchewan, we're looking at them using it for additional cleaning, PPE and, again, tech to support online learning.

I just want to ask the minister, why the reluctance in wanting to release these funds and get them into the schools, and right now when they really need them?

Mr. Goertzen: I don't think the description of reluctance is accurate. And it's difficult, I know, when comparing across provinces because while some provinces might be doing, you know, certain allocation with federal funding; they might not have provided the initial support from their own provincial treasury. So I'm not sure that in every case that the member references that it's a perfect apples-to-apples comparison.

I do know that we indicated early on that savings that were accrued from the school divisions, which ended up being about \$48 million, should be kept by the school divisions and used in the fall when reopened schools, and I believe that's happening. An additional \$52 million was made available from the provincial government. An allocation of that was made clear to the different divisions in terms of what their allocation would be, and that's where the reimbursement at this point has been coming from, from the different expenses including savings that the individual school divisions had accrued. And so, you know, as the need is happening, the—there's been, you know, approval for that need. So I think that there's a mischaracterization in terms of the reluctance.

But I do appreciate the member noting that the federal funding has not entirely flowed. In fact, we've been told that at least half of that funding won't be available until next year. Having said that, as we've indicated previously and, I think, indicated yesterday in the House or in committee, that a good portion of that initial allocation from the federal government will be used for supporting remote learning, and that will include staff and the hiring of teachers and others to support remote learning because we know that this remote-learning environment will go on for a little while, certainly for the duration of the worst of the pandemic.

And so we have—there's no reluctance. We've indicated that that is where, you know, millions of the

dollars will be spent and—but that isn't stopping the provincial government and the school divisions from providing funding where it's needed; fifteen and a half million dollars in September and likely a similar, if not greater, amount in October. And that'll continue in November and December and January and February.

But I don't know that spending, you know, \$100 million in September—first of all, I wouldn't assume that that was a need because we haven't heard that from school divisions, that they wanted the whole \$100 million spent in one month and then to have left none of that for the remainder of the school year. So it's got to be based on need. And that seems to be happening, and it's being spent at about, I think, the rate we might have expected, maybe a little bit more, but that's understandable.

In terms of the federal funding, though, millions of dollars will be spent on hiring staff for remote learning support.

Mr. Altomare: Can I ask a quick procedural question?

Mr. Chairperson: Go ahead.

Mr. Altomare: The member from Tyndall Park would like to ask a question before we move into the actual passing of—I don't know, I think we do the minister's salary and some appropriations next; is that correct?

Mr. Chairperson: Well, yes, we will go on to doing resolutions first, to passing the resolutions of the department. But, yes, that person can ask questions to the minister before we conclude. *[interjection]* Okay, one more question for the honourable member for Transcona.

Mr. Altomare: Will the minister leave at 3:30 is what I'm asking, I guess.

Mr. Chairperson: The thing is, he would be—let him answer it.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, my expectation is it might be 3:30 in the morning, depending on how today goes, so I'm here to serve at the will of the Legislature.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Transcona, do you have another question?

Mr. Altomare: No. What I'll do now is I'll cede the floor to the member from Tyndall Park for one question in Education Estimates.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Thank you, Mr. Chairperson, and I'd like to thank the Minister of Education (Mr. Goertzen) for answering my questions. I have quite a few but I'm going to try my best to combine them into one question and whatever you can share with me, Minister, would be greatly appreciated.

One of the questions we were just talking about—additional substitute teachers—how many have been hired for this school year?

And we know that substitutes get a lower rate of pay than full-time teachers. Will the government be supporting paying substitutes more to ensure that we have this supply?

Mr. Goertzen: So the member will know that the Province generally isn't the employer of teachers, that it's the individual school divisions. So we do know, in our discussions that are essentially daily with school divisions, that millions of dollars have been spent for hiring substitute teachers and teachers.

I will commit to collecting the most recent data for the member and providing it, hopefully within the next week. It's ever-changing and there are new hires happening all the time, but it's certainly within the millions of dollars that school divisions have spent, and they certainly are allowed to spend money from the funds that have been provided both with—internally for their savings and from the Province to spend that on additional staff and space and a variety of other things, as they see fit; and remembering that that's really driven at the local level.

So while we're not the employer directly, the Province of Manitoba isn't, we certainly have given the authority to spend that money that's been allocated on additional staff, and we'll endeavour to get the member a more precise up-to-date answer, as of today, in a short period of time.

Ms. Lamoureux: If I'm allowed to continue with my line of questioning, I would like to proceed.

Mr. Altomare: I would like to close this now.

Mr. Chairperson: If—the thing was, if the honourable member from Tyndall Park has questions, she can still ask some questions.

Ms. Lamoureux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What steps has the government taken in recruiting French language teachers?

Mr. Goertzen: So the member will know that the recruitment for French language teachers happens at

the school division level, but we have been working together with the federal government to look at what the barriers are for the recruitment of French language teachers.

And so I believe that there has been some work done on looking at particularly rural or outside of Winnipeg, maybe remote communities, and what are the barriers to having French language teachers there. What support can be provided to ensure that those who are doing their practicum teaching—French language teachers—can do so in underserved areas, particularly in rural or remote areas and then also potentially expanding the capacity at Université de Saint-Boniface for the graduation of French language teachers?

So there's a number of different initiatives that the Province has a role in but, of course, the individual recruitment happens at the school and division level.

Mr. Chairperson: Any further questions?

Ms. Lamoureux: For the Manitoba school of the deaf, why does other costs and benefits for salaries and employee benefits increase 68,000?

* (15:30)

Mr. Goertzen: Just for the sake of time, the member will know we're on a very limited staff basis here because of COVID-19 restrictions but we'll take that question as notice and provide the answer back to her because it's a particular part of the department that is represented here by staff today.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Tyndall Park, do you have any further questions?

Ms. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I'm having some confusion here because I have in an email from the member for St. James (Mr. Sala), I believe, that I get 10 minutes to ask questions, but there's a side chat happening and I'm being accused by the member from Point Douglas of ambushing this question portion when—after I've been given permission for 10 minutes.

An Honourable Member: Can I respond to that?

An Honourable Member: And can I respond to that after?

Mr. Chairperson: Everyone, just stay tuned. As the Chair, it's not to the Chair to actually—there should be an agreement between both with the opposition party and the independents to have an agreement of how much time is allowed for questioning. So that's something that is arranged by yourselves, not from this—at the Estimates here as the Chair.

Does the honourable member for Tyndall Park have any more questions?

Ms. Lamoureux: I have many questions but I'm trying my best to abide by the agreement that we had made. My—I'm not here to intentionally step on toes. I don't appreciate being accused of ambushing the committee and being told that I'm abusing the committee by the member of Point Douglas there. But if I could seek some clarity, I'm happy to ask more questions.

Mr. Chairperson: Does the honourable member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare) have a comment?

Mr. Altomare: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did have—I did speak with the member from Tyndall Park briefly and I did say to her that she had 10 minutes from the time that she started.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. So do you want to continue, because already we've probably wasted five minutes.

Mr. Altomare: It's already—it's getting close to that.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. We'll have the member for Tyndall Park have one more question.

Ms. Lamoureux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for that clarification.

What are the department's plans with regards to the \$5 million allocated for education K-to-12 transformation?

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the member for Tyndall Park and, by the way, I'm more than happy to answer her questions as long as the time allows.

The K-to-12 report, as the member will know, is scheduled to be released in March and that was delayed because of COVID-19 and the desire to allow the system to focus more fully on the response to the pandemic and not to be focused on other things. So there is an allocation set aside to support the implementation and roll out of the K-to-12 commission.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing that we discussed that there are no further questions, we will now turn to the resolutions beginning with the second resolution as we deferred consideration for the first resolution containing the minister's salary. At this point, we will allow virtual members to unmute their mics so that they can respond to questions on each resolution.

Okay, the first resolution that I'll read is:

Resolution 16.2: RESOLVE that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$46,297,000 for Education, K-12 Education, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 16.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$5,119,000 for Education, Corporate and Education Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 16.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum exceeding 1 billion—a sum not exceeding \$1,500,967,000 for Education, Support to Schools, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 16.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$87,622,000 for Education, Capital Funding, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 16.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$160,385,000 for Education, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

And resolution 16.1: RESOLVED that there be granted—[interjection]—sorry.

The last item to be considered in the Estimates for the department is the item 16.1.(a), the minister's salary, contained in 16.1. At this point, we require all ministerial and opposition staff to leave the Chamber for the consideration of this last item.

Okay, the floor is open for questions. The honourable member for Transcona, do you have a question?

Mr. Altomare: No.

Mr. Chairperson: No.

Resolution 16.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$817,000 for Education, Executive, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Education.

CENTRAL SERVICES

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Piwniuk): The next set of Estimates will be considered for the section of the Committee of Supply in the Department of Central Services.

Shall we recess to allow the ministers and critics the opportunity to prepare for comments for the next department? No?

An Honourable Member: No. I believe the minister is online. I'm here. We're ready to go.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, you both are ready to go?

An Honourable Member: I'm sorry, I have to bring my staff with me and get them to the Chamber, that's where we set up to answer the critic's questions, so if he gives us time to do that, I'd ask for a small recess so that we can gather in the Chamber to get ready to answer the questions—is that acceptable to the members of the Chamber?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes. Whatever—you can be answering the question wherever you prefer, in the Chamber or at the—

An Honourable Member: Then I ask for a brief recess so we can assemble with the staff in the Chamber.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, it has to be a very brief recess to get down here, and we'll get started in a couple minutes, then. Is that agreed to the committee, two minutes? *[Agreed]*

The committee recessed at 3:39 p.m.

The committee resumed at 3:42 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: We'll start now because we'll have to invite them in later, after statements.

Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates for the Department of Central Services.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Central Services): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. It is my pleasure to be here today to discuss Budget 2020 as it pertains to the Department of Central Services.

Central Services was established in October of 2019 to focus on the modernization of government services, including procurement, information technology and capital management, with the mandate to be the service delivery organization for the Manitoba government.

Part of Central Services' mandate is to execute duties and functions related to capital management and delivery. The new redesign is expected to efficiently expend capital allocations on approved capital projects, consistently apply risk management to capital funding and projects and improve asset management for all government assets.

The decision to centralize these functions will increase government's ability to forecast capital investment, demand, shift resources to meet capital demand across government and continuously improve and provide innovative capital processes.

Through the central capital program areas, the department is responsible for but not limited to: managing negotiations of bi- and tri-lateral capital funding agreements and partnerships; supporting the management of Manitoba's capital framework and the annual capital allocation plan; delivering and managing departments' capital projects, including the use of innovative project delivery and project financing methodologies; and managing government's current capital assets providing property services to owned capital assets, providing real estate services to government and overseeing real estate and property asset disposal.

Business Transformation and Technology—better known as BTT—is responsible for the delivery of the centralized corporate Information and Communications Technology environment and support services. Provision of strategic leadership to continuously improve Manitoba government service delivery by planning and implementing corporate ICT solutions and policies to meet current and future needs. Consolidation and strengthening of Manitoba's technology investments and providing ICT risk-management capabilities, business-continuity capabilities and mitigation strategies, along with disaster-recovery strategies.

The procurement and supply chain, PSC, business area provides strategic direction, policies and processes for procurement and supply-chain-related functions across government. The department also represents the Province in negotiations and participates in meetings related to digital service delivery and data analytics. As part of its mandate, the

department will continue its efforts to save taxpayers' dollars by shopping smarter and working with stakeholders to expand Manitoba's procurement strategy across the public sector.

The establishment of the central capital program areas seeks to ensure predictable delivery of government's commitment to annual strategic infrastructure investments and expediting capital planning and project delivery through innovative project delivery approaches, including design build and P3s.

Central Services is also working with federal and municipal partners to deliver funding for worthy infrastructure projects within the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, ICIP, and future bi- or tri-lateral programs.

Central Services provides strategic leadership to continuously improve the Manitoba government's information and communication technology environment through planning and implementation, implementing solutions to meet current and future ICT needs.

The provision of central co-ordination, negotiation and delivery of strategic capital infrastructure, and federal-provincial infrastructure programs and projects, as well as the 'provision'—provision of central 'agecy' implementation and administrative support in the delivery of intergovernmental and non-governmental infrastructure funding initiatives are key strategic priorities of the department.

Providing strategic procurement services to Manitoba government departments, agencies and the broader public sector to obtain the best value for taxpayers is also a strategic priority of the Department of Central Services. Central Services is also entrusted with the mandate to develop a provincial broadband strategy, including expanded coverage.

So, with respect to COVID response, Central Services continues to implement plans and take precautions to ensure the health and safety of employees, business continuity and provision of COVID-19-related support to government, including the broader public sector during the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Procurement and supply chain, PSC, continues to engage in pandemic-related procurement and logistic support, including the procurement of personal protective equipment.

BTT expanded Manitoba's network bandwidth. The virtual private network, VPN, capacity was increased to 10,000 concurrent users and the roll-out of Microsoft 365 is being expedited in order to enable more people to work from home. All business areas within the department continue to provide critical services and support the government's response throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Personal protective equipment, or PPE, was a major focus, and continues to be a major focus, of Central Services as we entered the pandemic. The procurement and supply chain has enhanced sourcing critical PPE equipment for Manitobans, including medical masks, gloves, gowns and face shields, as well as critical equipment, including testing kits and ventilators, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We engaged in a massive procurement operation, 'purching'—purchasing millions of PPE and other necessary products and services.

PSC, as a leader in public sector procurement, has focused on meeting Manitobans' pandemic requirements to ensure that Manitoba has the equipment and supplies required to meet our commitment to protecting Manitobans. We have led efforts to engage local experts in health care and manufacturing. Many local businesses have retooled their operations and shifted their focus to produce life-saving supplies. Others have provided access to their own supplies and supply channels to PPE. This approach has also ensured as much money as possible has stayed within our province supporting local employers, and we thank all those individuals and companies that stepped up to either produce PPE or help us to access it throughout the world.

* (15:50)

These investments are intended to support outbreak planning, prevention, mitigation efforts and allow the Province to secure the supplies and resources needed. Manitoba's approach to collaborate with local businesses in its pandemic response has also ensured as much money as possible has stayed within our province supporting local employers.

To date, the Manitoban government has invested more than \$150 million with 50 Manitoba-based companies to produce or procure medical equipment to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

When the pandemic hit Manitoba last March, Manitoba businesses and organizations stepped up both through donations and through the Province's procurement process. We will continue to work with

these local companies to address the needs of our health-care system and ensure we have the supplies and equipment we need to ensure continued quality and quantity.

So I have a long list of manufacturers that have stepped up for us and I don't know that I have time to go through it; perhaps we can cover that in some of the questions. But I do want to say that one of the companies, our decision to procure PPE locally has enabled precision ATM to create 80 new jobs, as well as innovate and manufacture domestically when international resources were not available.

We've been able to create, develop and deliver different types of equipment, including the CANSWAB testing device, the precision air medical reusable respirator and medical procedure masks, which are being tested locally at the orthopedic innovation-innovation centre, which is a partnership with the federal government.

Partnerships in-with local businesses have been crucial in the work to care for Manitobans during the pandemic. Front-line staff require high-quality personal protective equipment to ensure they and their patients are safe in our health-care facilities.

Our government is grateful for the hard work and dedication of so many Manitoba companies and the front-line staff who have all stepped up to help their fellow citizens during this difficult time. The Manitoba government will make it a priority to continue to work with local companies as the pandemic continues, in order to meet our commitment to protecting Manitoba-Manitobans.

Mr. Chairperson: We want to thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): No, we don't have any opening comments. I just want to point out, we lost sound and visuals for almost the entirety of the minister's opening comments. We didn't—we weren't part of that.

But we're ready to proceed to questioning, and we're asking it be in a global fashion.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, well, we'll continue, okay?

So if the—if the opposition critic doesn't have any opening statements, under the Manitoba practice, the debate for the ministry's salary is the last item to consider for the Department of Committee of Supply.

Accordingly, we shall now defer to consideration for item 8.1.(a), contained in the resolution 8.1.

Does the committee wishes to proceed in a—of the Estimates in this department of contralogically or a global discussion?

Mr. Wasyliv: Global, please.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. Is that agreed to the committee? *[Agreed]*

So now we'll—thank you for the agreeing for this question for the department that will proceed in a global matter, we will—all resolutions will be passed once the question has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wasyliv: Minister, I'm wondering if you can explain the rationale for extending the Bell MTS contract without tender?

Mr. Chairperson: Just one—just one second—one moment—the honourable member for Fort Garry?

Mr. Wasyliv: Sorry?

Mr. Chairperson: Just one second. We just have to invite the staff to come in for the minister. So we'll get them—we'll call in the staff for the minister of Department of Central Services.

Sorry, the member for Fort Garry, you can continue.

Mr. Wasyliv: I'm wondering if the minister could explain the rational for extending the Bell MTS contract without tender this year, for another two and half years, and would the minister commit to providing a copy of the contract as an undertaking?

Mr. Helwer: Thank you for the question, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So the Bell MTS agreement for the Manitoba Network was a sole-source agreement that was signed by the previous NDP government. I believe at that time, Minister Chomiak was the individual in charge and it has been running for 10 years.

Given that we are in uncertain times with COVID-19, it was determined that we needed to ensure that we had continuity of the network and security. And since we had, at one time, several thousand civil servants working from home, we needed to ensure that our VPNs were available and expandable. So we currently, I believe, have about 3,000 civil servants in the core civil service still working from home, using our VPN network. So it

was critical that we made sure that that was available and continued in this—in time of uncertainty.

So it was decided at that time, through Treasury Board, to extend the contract and we, I understand, from listening to the Committee of Supply Estimates with the Premier (Mr. Pallister), that he did endeavour to ensure the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) that he would see if he could find an opportunity to release the contract to the opposition. We do have to have discussions with Bell to ensure that they are okay with that and we would, undoubtedly, have to redact some portions of the agreement because they will be proprietary to Bell and to the network. So we'll endeavour to do that, if we get agreement from Bell MTS or Bell.

Mr. Wasyliw: So why was the contract extended for two-and-a-half years? Why not just a year, if it was because of COVID-19?

Mr. Helwer: Thank you for the question.

Well, if the member opposite is able to tell us when COVID-19 will end, then we can certainly determine what the end of the contract needs to be. We also do need to have time to go to tender and to specify what a new network services contract would look like and that usually takes around a year of work to do that.

So that would be, if we look at COVID-19 lasting at least another year, we have a buffer of a year-and-a-half to determine what we would specify for and issue an RFP for a replacement for that network, but I don't know when COVID-19 is going to end. I don't think any of us do. So we have that flex time in the contract. We hope that we certainly don't see the pandemic last that long but we do have the opportunity to specify again what the new RFP is going to look like.

Mr. Wasyliw: It appears that the service extension is on terms that pay more than previously. I'm wondering if you can explain what the increase in monetary value covers that the previous contract did not?

Mr. Helwer: Thank you for the question. So it is a consumption-based contract. It does not increase the rates at all, but since we are seeing considerably more use of the network, we are paying more for that usage.

As I said, we have a considerable amount of VPNs, up to 10,000, that we're able to run with the central services help, with BTT and at this time, up to around 3,000 civil servants working from home.

So it is the volume-based increase that we are looking at through that contract.

Mr. Wasyliw: I want to go back to the work that had been done in preparation to tender a new contract in 2020. Manitoba Hydro International—[*interjection*]

* (16:00)

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Order.

It's 4 o'clock. Please come to order.

For the information for all members, our rule 2.1 provides the part where all required actions for business of supply in the Committee of Supply have not been completed 60 minutes prior to the usual adjournment hour on the last Thursday sitting prior to Remembrance Day week.

The provisions outlined in rules 2-24 are to apply.

Therefore, the hour being 4 p.m., I'm interrupting proceedings to put the questions without debate or amendment and all remaining resolutions before this section of Committee of Supply.

I am there—going through—going to call the sequence of resolutions on the following departments: Central Services; Sports, Culture and Heritage.

At this point we will allow virtual members to unmute their mics so that we can respond to the questions of the resolutions.

And now we'll consider the resolution for the Department of Central Services. And we'll ask the—okay.

Resolution 8.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,446,000 for Central Services, Corporate Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 8.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$114,138,000 for Central Services, Capital Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 8.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$43,812,000 for Central Services, Business Transformation and Technology, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 8.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,708,000 for Central Services, Procurement and Supply Chain, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 8.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$56,200,000 for Central Services, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 8.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty not—a sum not exceeding \$19,737,000 for Central Services, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Central Services.

SPORT, CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Piwniuk): Now—we'll now consider the resolutions for the Department of Sport, Culture and Heritage.

First resolution—now we're back to Sport, Culture and Heritage and resolution 14.1: RESOLVED that be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$15,473,000 for Sport, Culture and Heritage, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 14.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$54,617,000 for Sport, Culture and Heritage, Culture and Sport Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 14.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,658,000 for Sport, Culture and Heritage, Information Resources, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Resolution agreed to.

That competes the Estimates for the Department of Sports, Culture and Heritage.

This also concludes our consideration for the Estimates in the section of the Committee of Supply meeting in the Chamber.

I would like to thank the ministers, critics and all honourable members for their hard work and dedication during this process. I would also like to take an opportunity to thank all the hard-working Assembly staff behind the scenes who made this possible for the committee to visit virtually this year, and that's a lot of hard work you guys done.

We're just paused now waiting for the other committees from the other rooms to finish up.

* (16:10)

IN SESSION

Committee Report

Madam Speaker: The House will now resume its business.

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has considered and adopted certain resolutions.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Madam Speaker: The hour being after 4 p.m., I must pause the business of the House in accordance with rule 2(1), which requires certain actions to take place.

Rural—rule 2(1) states, on the last Thursday sitting prior to the Remembrance Day week, the House will not adjourn until the questions have been put and royal assent granted for the following items: (a) the designated bills, (b) the business of Supply set out in subrule 76(1), including the loan act and the appropriation act and (c) the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act.

Any remaining steps for these items not dealt with 60 minutes prior to the usual adjournment hour will have all remaining questions put to a vote following the provisions outlined in subrules 21, 23 and 24.

What this means is that the House will not adjourn until the questions have been put and royal assent has been granted to conclude the financial business, including the completion of adoption of the Capital Supply resolution in the Committee of Supply, adoption of the concurrence motions in the Committee of Supply and in the House, adoption of the motions regarding the loan act and the appropriation act,

passage of all stages of the loan act and the appropriation act and completion of the remaining stages of Bill 2, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act.

All points of order and matters of privilege are deferred until all of these items have been dealt with and divisions on these items cannot be deferred.

I would ask the House to bear with me while I provide a detailed breakdown of how each item is to be handled.

If the required actions for completion of the business of Supply has not been completed 60 minutes prior to the usual adjournment hour, the Chairperson or Speaker will interrupt debate and put the question on all remaining items with no further debate or amendment on the remaining departmental Estimates, the Capital Supply resolution, the concurrence motions and the motions regarding the loan and appropriation acts.

The first reading motions for the loan act and the appropriation act will each need to be moved separately and the the questions put on the motions.

The bills will be distributed after first reading.

With regard to the second reading stages for the loan act and the appropriation act, the same process is followed for each bill in that the minister responsible moves a second reading motion and has up to 10 minutes to speak and debate.

A question period of up to 15 minutes may be held on the bill and then a limited second reading debate is held where the critic and each independent member gets to speak for up to 10 minutes each before the question is put on the second reading motion.

Once the second reading motions for these two bills have been completed, they are then considered in Committee of the Whole without further debate or amendment.

For the concurrence and third reading stages of these bills, the minister responsible moves the motion for concurrence and third reading with the minister, the critic and each independent member receiving up to 10 minutes each for speaking in debate before the question is put on the concurrence and third reading motion.

Concerning Bill 2, The Budget and Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, the Minister of Finance already moved and spoke to the second reading motion. A question period was held on the bill, and the official opposition critic and the honourable member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont) have also spoken to the bill. The only other members who are eligible to speak to the second reading of the bill are the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) and the honourable member for Tyndall Park (Ms. Lamoureux), who can speak for up to 10 minutes each, following which the question must be put.

The bill will then be considered in the Committee of the Whole without further debate or amendment, however voting can still be done.

For concurrence and third reading, the honourable Minister of Finance moves the motion, and he along with the official opposition critic and the three independent members would each be entitled to speak in debate for up to 10 minutes each.

Following those remarks, the question would be put on the concurrence and third reading motion.

Upon conclusion of all of this business, the House will then be ready for royal assent.

* (16:20)

Messages

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I have a message for Her Honour Lieutenant Governor that I would like to table.

Madam Speaker: Please stand for the reading of the message.

To the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the Lieutenant Governor transmits to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba an Estimate of the sum required for the authority to borrow for the services of the Province and recommends that Estimate to the Legislative Assembly, and that is signed by the Lieutenant Governor.

Please be seated.

The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply to consider the resolution respecting the loan act.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Capital Supply

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Pivniuk): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

We have before the—before us our consideration for resolution read—respecting the loan act. The resolution respecting the loan act reads as follows:

RESOLVED that there be granted to the authority to borrow for Supply purposes—*[interjection]* Okay.

RESOLVED that there be granted the authority to borrow for Supply purposes the sum—three—a sum of \$3,455,000,000, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Shall the resolution pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour of the resolution, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed to the resolution, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion, the Yeas have it.

Recorded Vote

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Miigwech, a recorded vote, please.

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

Order. The one hour provided for ringing of the vision bells has expired. I am directing the bells to be turned off and the committee proceed to the vote.

For the information for all members, the virtual sitting of the House, we are required to conduct votes in a different manner than during normal sitting of the House. This includes recorded votes of the Committee of the Whole.

For members in the Chamber, the vote will conduct in the manner similar to the previous practice.

For this part of the vote, those in favour of the—stand to be counted first, followed by those against.

I will note that members that we have modified the system in one respect: once the page states the name of the member standing in the—to be counted, the clerk with acknowledge the member by—has voted by repeating the member's name rather than saying yea.

Once the count in the Chamber is complete, we will now conduct alphabetical roll call for members participating virtually. For this part of the process, the pages will call each remote member's name alphabetically, and then each virtual member might audibly state their vote, responding clearly with either I vote yes or I vote no.

The Clerk will then respond with the member's name by following by yes or no.

Finally, all bells stop ringing for any vote, the moderator and the table will need to take a modify—moment to modify—verify that the members listed in the virtual are actually present on screen, and they're in their seats and therefore eligible to vote.

This delay will be brief, but the necessary confirm who can vote because for virtual members, being in their—being seated before the camera is equivalent that members are being in their assigned seats in the Chamber when the bells are stopped ringing.

The question before the committee is the resolution respecting the loan act reading as follows: RESOLVED that there be granted to authority to borrow for supplies purposes for the sum of \$3,455,000,000 for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

* (17:30)

Division

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

Yeas

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

Nays

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

Deputy Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): Yeas 32, Nays 21.

Mr. Chairperson: The resolution is accordingly passed.

Committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION**Committee Report**

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has considered and adopted a resolution respecting the loan at—the loan act.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Madam Speaker: The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY**Concurrence Motion**

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Piwniuk): Would the Committee of Supply please come to order.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Education): I move that the Committee of Supply concur in all Supply resolutions relating to the Estimates of expenditure for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021, which have been adopted at this session whether by a section of the Committee of Supply or by the full committee.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Chairperson: This concludes the business before us.

Committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION**Committee Report**

Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has adopted a motion regarding concurrence in Supply.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for Rossmere (Mr. Micklefield), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Concurrence Motion

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Education): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, that this House concur in the report of the Committee of Supply respecting concurrence in all Supply resolutions relating to the Estimates of expenditures for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Motion agreed to.

Supply Motions

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, that there be granted the authority to borrow for Supply purposes the sum of \$3,455,000,000 for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

Motion agreed to.

* (17:40)

Mr. Fielding: I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, that there should be granted to Her Majesty for the public service of the Province, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021, out of the Consolidated Fund, the sum of \$13,653,509,000, as set out in part A, Operating Expenditure, and \$722,210,000, as set out in part B, Capital Investment, and \$369,480,000, as set out in part C, Loans and Guarantees, and \$2,175,885,000, as set out in part D, Capital Investments by Other Reporting Entities of the Estimates. *[interjection]*

I'll start out—and \$2,177,885,000, as set out in part D, Capital Investments by Other Reporting Entities of the Estimates.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance, seconded by the honourable Minister of Education, that there be granted to Her Majesty for the public service of the Province, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021, out of the Consolidated Fund, the sum of \$13,653,509,000, as set out in part A, Operating

Expenditure, and \$722,210,000, as set out in part B, Capital Investment, and \$369,480,000 as set out in part C, Loans and Guarantees, and \$2,177,885,000, as set out in part D, Capital Investments by Other Reporting Entities of the Estimates.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 65—The Appropriation Act, 2020

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 65, The Appropriation Act, 2020, be now read a first time and be ordered for second reading immediately.

Motion agreed to.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 65—The Appropriation Act, 2020

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 65, The Appropriation Act, 2020, be now read a second time and be referred to the Committee of the Whole.

Motion presented.

Madam Speaker: Just as a reminder: the honourable minister, official opposition critic and the three independent Liberals can speak in debate for up to ten minutes each.

Mr. Fielding: The bill provides provides the government of Manitoba with borrowing authority required for the current fiscal year. The amount of borrowing authority being requested is the amount required to fund the government's estimated operating deficit, capital investment loans and loan guarantees during the fiscal year. The bill also provides authority for various government agencies to borrow in accordance with the legislation. These amounts are set out in the schedule of the bill.

When the bill reaches the committee stage, my colleagues and I can provide any necessary explanations for the information of the members.

Madam Speaker: Do members wish to ask questions of the bill?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Questions

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

The honourable member for Fort Garry.

Can the member unmute? We cannot hear him.

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): All right. How's that?

Budget 2020 cuts public health by thousands of dollars. These are people now leading our province's fight in COVID-19.

Why did the minister decrease the budget for public health?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): The member is completely inaccurate in that. This government is very proud of the fact that since coming into office, we've invested more than \$648 million in the health-care system.

In fact, Madam Speaker, in Public Accounts what it showed even last year there was over \$303 million more invested in health care, and one thing that our government is very proud of is the fact that we're seeing results for Manitobans. That includes reductions of 30 per cent in terms of wait times, and increase in hip and knee and cataract surgeries have gone up by upwards of 23 to 28 per cent.

Mr. Wasyliv: Year after year we've seen this government underspend on their health-care budget. If you factor out their funds for consolidations, there would be no new investments in our health-care system in budget 2020-21.

Will the minister agree that if his government had made the necessary investment in health care in the past years and not closed ICU beds, we wouldn't in a bad—in as bad a situation as we are now?

Mr. Fielding: Our government is very proud of the investments we've made—in fact—in things like health care, education and social services. We've invested more than \$1.3 billion more in these priority areas—again \$303 million. We're making good progress on these items that we think makes sense for Manitobans

and getting better results. That's something that we're very proud of. We're going to continue to do that work for Manitobans.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): The minister started out by saying that this bill provides the borrowing authority for the present fiscal year, but we know we have a COVID pandemic. We know that the minister has already requested some supplemental authority, which I believe is above and beyond the dollars which are in this request, so I'd like clarification on that.

And I would also ask the minister: Does he expect to have to come back to the House for additional supplementary money to complete the work of looking after the COVID pandemic?

Mr. Fielding: The COVID bill that everyone allocated, there's addition of \$5 billion for COVID-related relief. This bill before—so rather this loan act before takes care of everything that was in the budget document that was tabled in March, which seems like a long time ago now.

* (17:50)

So that is—this is completely related to the budget-related document that was there. What we passed was a \$5-billion appropriation for future costs for COVID. So it's two separate bills or two separate loan—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fielding:—authorities, in itself.

Mr. Wasyliv: I wonder if the minister can explain why he's frozen child-care operating funding for a fourth year in a row.

Mr. Fielding: We're not going to make the mistakes of the past, what the NDP did. The NDP took an ideological approach to child care. What this government has done is looked at how we deliver child care and how things are done. We know that the NDP, because they didn't like home-based child care, drove that out of this province. There was over a 27 per cent reduction in home-based child care. We've made agreements—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fielding:—with the federal government to make investments in child care. We want the opposition to come on board to support parents. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Come on.

Mr. Wasyliv: Why is the minister bringing in tax cuts that overwhelmingly benefit wealthy Manitobans while at the same time raising tuition on Manitoba students, raising hydro rates for Manitoba businesses and for everyday Manitobans and raising the rent on over 22,000 Manitoba rental units?

Mr. Fielding: Our government is very proud of the fact that we put \$700 million of tax relief to Manitobans over the four-year period of government. We committed to doing things like reducing the PST that all Manitobans will benefit from.

We've reduced or enhanced the basic personal exemption, raised the levels that the NDP refused to do, that all Manitobans will be support of. We've also made commitments in terms of education property taxes and other tax measures that all Manitobans will support.

Mr. Wasyliv: I'm wondering if the minister can tell us whether he thinks it's prudent fiscal management to be borrowing billions of dollars of new taxpayer dollars while at the same time cutting taxes for wealthy Manitobans.

Why should middle-class Manitobans play for wealthy tax breaks?

Mr. Fielding: Madam Speaker, we all listen to the member from Fort Garry and his class warfare, and we don't think that's right. We think that providing \$700 million of tax relief to all Manitobans is important.

We know what the NDP did in terms of their expenditures and the dams they didn't need with Hydro that's jacked up the hydro rates because of the \$10 billion of other expenditures. We know that the NDP decided to jack up the PST after they promised not to in the election. We're not going to take any lectures from an individual and a party that has so much disrespect for Manitoba taxpayers.

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, my question for the minister has to do with the rainy day fund. I'd like to know what the minister's planning in terms of the rainy day fund, whether he will be drawing that down or whether he will be building it up on the basis of the circumstances of today.

Mr. Fielding: The first thing—we came to office, one of the first things that our Treasury Board officials said to us and we noted was the fact that the rainy day fund under the NDP had been drained from over \$800 million to about \$110 million. That was one of the major platform items and items that we wanted to

work on as Manitobans and as a government. We're very proud of the fact that we replenished the rainy day fund to over \$800 million.

To answer the member's question specifically, there was a time in March where we thought we'd have to tap into the rainy day fund because the capital markets were frozen out. With some of the leadership that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) took in terms of advice to the federal government, the Bank of Canada made some changes, and we were able to go to the capital markets and borrow money at a more effective—of spreads.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister can confirm for the House that not one dollar of the 800-million-plus in the rainy day fund has been allocated for COVID relief and absolutely none of that money has been earmarked to save businesses in Manitoba that are about to go under.

Mr. Fielding: Our government is very proud of the fact that the Parliamentary Budget Office has suggested that Manitoba supports for people during COVID, individuals and businesses, is one of the highest in the country, about 3.2 per cent of our GDP.

We're very proud of those supports that are there. You know, what I can tell the member is we did an analysis of the rainy day fund under the NDP government. We know, in better financial times, they had drained the rainy day fund, Madam Speaker, from over \$800 million to \$110 million.

That was a priority for our government, to make sure that we have an appropriate amount of money in the rainy day fund that best practices suggest we had, and we're very proud of the fact that we've been able to do that.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister can explain to the House why no money from the rainy day fund is being elevate—allocated for the COVID crisis.

Mr. Fielding: We're very proud, as a government, that we passed two budget bills to support beyond what our initial budget was. There is one for over a billion dollars that consisted of \$500 million for health care, \$400 million in what we call our ISA to support programs and services, as well as \$100 million for relief.

Our second budgetary bill was \$577 million that supported municipalities, over \$106 million to municipalities. Our commitment for things like education, \$40 million above and beyond our

commitments of over \$100 million for education, money for workforce development and other monies for capital projects.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Yes, and my question for the minister is that if this isn't a rainy day, if this is a hundred-year crisis, are we waiting for an asteroid strike to actually spend some money from the rainy day fund to help anybody?

Mr. Fielding: Madam Speaker, I think the member was in the House. The two subsequent budget bills that we introduced: one for a billion dollars—a billion dollars. I'll go through the numbers again, as well as \$577 million. Our government has committed over 2.2—almost \$2.3 billion in supports for this year, as well as capital-related costs that are there.

We're also seeing about a \$1.5 billion reduction in our revenues because of the COVID situation. Our government is second to none or one of the highest of all the country, in terms of our investments and COVID-19 supports.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister can explain or confirm how much of the \$577 million of ear-marked federal money for COVID relief has been spent and is he willing to commit today that every single one of those dollars will go to where they're intended and will actually get spent on COVID relief?

Mr. Fielding: Very proud of the fact that Premier Pallister and other premiers across the country—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fielding: —premier—I apologize, Madam Speaker. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) of this province, as well as other premiers in the country, negotiated an agreement with the federal government to bring important initiatives to Manitoba. We're very supportive of that. That money will be used and/or were committed to over \$2.3 billion in supports for individuals and businesses for COVID this year and future years.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I'd like to ask the minister whether he's done any accurate assessment of return on investment and of dollars spent and also looking at the costs of not spending.

For example, the fact that the government got way behind on the second wave, didn't spend adequately on contact tracing and on making sure that results came quickly, is costing huge amounts of money right now: millions and millions and millions and millions

of dollars extra that they wouldn't have had to spend because they were frugal a month ago.

Mr. Fielding: Well, Madam Speaker, we can either believe members of the NDP and the members of the Liberal Party or we can believe the Parliamentary Budget Office that says that Manitoba has spent some of the highest amounts to support people for supports during COVID, as well as businesses, as well as investments in health care.

So if the member—that's really the members of the House can have that decision. Who is more credible: other members, other politicians or the Parliamentary Budget Office? I'm going to choose the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Madam Speaker.

*(18:00)

Mr. Wasyliw: The minister is probably well aware that many other Canadian provincial jurisdictions have referred their COVID spending and programs for review to their public accounts committees in order to maintain the confidence of the public and to ensure that there is adequate transparency and accountability.

Will the minister commit today to ensuring that he will refer all that spending to be reviewed by the Public Accounts Committee?

Mr. Fielding: Well, Madam Speaker, isn't it like the NDP? They want to spend all the money all at once.

Madam Speaker, we're more than—we're—hopefully, we're through a vast majority this—of this virus. My sense is that there's going to be additional supports that are needed for a very long time after this, even when you get a vaccine that's in place.

Our government is very open and transparent. In fact, I would refer the member to the first-quarter report that identifies all our expenditures in Health and other related items. That's well-documented in the Q1 public report.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister can explain why he is reluctant or resistant to allowing Manitobans to see what's been spent for COVID and the effectiveness of the programs at the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr. Fielding: Well, our government is very committed to transparency and openness. We learned a lesson from the previous government, the 17 years of the previous government, where they decided to hide things and put things away and not be transparent with Manitobans.

In fact, probably the best way to be transparent with Manitobans is, if you're going to jack up taxes and really have an impact on affordability for Manitobans, be honest about it. Tell individuals in the election that you're going to jack up taxes. But they didn't do that. That's not open and transparent.

Our government is open and transparent. We're going to continue to do that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The time for the question period of this bill is over.

Debate

Madam Speaker: Are there any members wishing to debate the bill?

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): I guess we need to start with the history about prior to COVID.

We knew that this government had already begun to mismanage the Manitoba economy well before COVID. They had slowed down our economy to the point where we were heading towards a recession in any event. Years of cuts, austerity, basically slowed down the Manitoba economy.

We used to be the second-fastest growing economy in Canada and prior to COVID that—we had slipped to seventh. And I suspect that we would've slipped even further without the full-on recession from COVID. And this is what happens when you reduce your civil service by 14 per cent. Those are good, middle-class, family-sustaining jobs that you can build a life on in Manitoba, and we know that this government simply doesn't value those types of jobs.

We had Bill 28; this is the wage-theft law that our courts have found to be unconstitutional. That kept millions of dollars off the kitchen tables of Manitobans: hard-working teachers and nurses, people that we refer to as heroes now. This government felt that they got paid too much. They felt that they didn't deserve their incomes and felt that they had to make sure that their wages were cut year over year.

Well, the reality is that that's tens of millions of dollars that didn't go to middle-class Manitobans. It didn't go to help them support local businesses, and all that lack of spending slowed down our economy. And if the businesses don't have business, they're not hiring people, they're not ordering products from suppliers, and there's a spinoff effect, and our economy slows down over and over again. It's a vicious cycle.

We know that this government doesn't believe in a living wage. We had gone from sort of middle of the pack, which Manitobans are very comfortable with, to being at the bottom with having one of the lowest minimum wages in Canada. That's kept Manitobans artificially poor and has done nothing to our economy. If anything, it's been a drag on our economy.

If you're a low-wage worker, you spent every single dollar that you have on necessities. And if you don't have that money, you're not spending it in the economy, you're not creating jobs, it's not circulating, and it drags our economy.

And we know that all of these policies and more have resulted in our economy slowing down, and our businesses were already struggling. Well, then we have the pandemic that hits us. Manitoba all of a sudden finds itself in a full-on recession. And the first reaction of the this government, their go-to plan when we are in a crisis, is to double down and make things worse.

And you heard bizarre statements from the government about how, you know, certain groups of Manitobans weren't suffering enough. So this government stepped in because they see their role is to make other people suffer who weren't. And, of course, they got rid of 10,000 middle-class, good paying, family supporting jobs and that, basically, we have not recovered from.

I think Statistics Canada, in one of the latest statistics before the second wave, we've got 30,000 Manitobans who were still out of work. I suspect that number has grown since the second shutdown.

And we have seen businesses closing. I get a lot of calls from residents in Fort Richmond and Waverley. They feel abandoned by their MLAs, especially the local business communities there, so I've been spending a lot of time in those constituencies. And if you go to, you know, Bridgwater Centre, it's a ghost town. The stores—and a lot of them are newcomer businesses—have been shut down. They just couldn't survive it.

And the government has just been absent. And they've taken this approach that somehow if you get sick in Manitoba because of COVID, it's your fault. And somehow they don't see any responsibility for this government to actually do something and to have a plan and to mitigate this and protect Manitobans and to protect our economy.

And, you know, my friend talks about an ideological approach. It doesn't get more ideological with that. And that's fine, you know, if they're sitting around the Manitoba Club and talking with their friends. It's absolutely devastating to Manitobans who are being absolutely hurt by this willful neglect.

We know now that this government has abandoned small businesses. If you are not a large, multinational agribusiness, you know, from France, they have no time for you, you know, they don't want to listen to you. They, I believe, have—in question period have called them, you know, interest groups.

They're Manitobans, and they're struggling and they hurt, and they need leadership from this government and they're not getting it. To dismiss them as interest groups, that goes beyond unfair to the point of being cruel.

And then we know more people in Manitoba are leaving, and more people are emigrating out of the province than are coming in. One of the strengths, and sort of one of the canaries in the coal mine, is that we had strong immigration here. Well, we used to, until this government's policies, and then people are voting with their feet. They see no future in Manitoba and they're leaving.

So now we have the Province borrowing a further \$1.6 billion this year than they originally intended. We have to be cautious because this government has a history of playing accounting games and cooking the books. At one time they were claiming \$5-billion deficit. Now it's been reduced to \$2.9 billion. The minister in Finance admitted in Estimates that it's probably lower than that.

We know that they've received \$577-million federal funding. Most of it has not been spent, and what we are concerned about is that they have no intention to spend it, and they are going to hold onto it, and they are going to put it into general revenue, and they are going to use it for more tax cuts to wealthy Manitobans while they shift the tax burden onto working- and middle-class Manitobans.

And despite being in a recession, despite having the worst COVID numbers in Canada, despite having some of the worst restrictions impacting our businesses, this government refuses to touch the rainy day fund, refuses to put any meaningful supports for small businesses, which will prolong the misery, prolong the recession.

So what do we know from this government? They will announce big numbers in a health budget and then

not spend it. They will take federal money, gleefully, and then just throw it into general revenue and not spend it on the earmarking that they're required.

* (18:10)

They do not keep up with the rate of inflation for education or health. That results in a cut, and it's been—for every year they've been in government there have been cuts to the health-care and education system and then they turn around and, of course, gaslight us and tell us that somehow we should be proud of them for all their hard work.

They freeze funding for everybody else and, of course, with inflation, that results in a cut. They download responsibility for costs to school boards and RHAs, municipalities and they don't ensure that they have the funds to actually provide the services that they need.

We know that school boards are running massive deficits. Part of it is because of the wage theft bill. Here, this government forced school boards not to pay cost of living increases. Well, it's unconstitutional, there's now a day of reckoning, the school boards owe 10–millions of dollars that they now have to pay back the money that they owe teachers and nurses and whoever else.

And where is the government? They're the absentee landlord, the deadbeat father that is nowhere to be found when the actual bill comes due, and it's going to result in job losses for teachers in our schools. Our schools are in chaos right now and this government is doubling down on that. And, as a parent, I can't tell you how concerning that is.

But at the same time, they're raising taxes on everyday Manitobans. Rent—sometimes upwards of 50 per cent is been happening. The 2.9 per cent for Hydro rates on businesses going up and—then everyday Manitobans without any sort of democratic oversight. And, of course, we see tuition going up year after year, and all the extra fees in schools and daycares because they have to make up for the lack of funding that they have. They're privatizing money-making industries that actually contribute to keeping rates low for Manitoba Hydro.

So, there's no plan here. They're borrowing this money with no intention to actually use it and Manitobans need help now, not in some distant future. It's not like they can't go and borrow money if we need to again. But right now they're just going to hold onto it and say, yes, help is coming. But help never comes, Madam Speaker.

And we cannot, in any good conscience, support this bill.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights.

Can the honourable member please unmute his mic?

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I want to put a few words on the record about the appalling fiscal management of this government.

There are times when, if you've got a good approach to preventing problems, then you can save huge amounts of money. And what we've seen with this government is that in July and August and September, they just wasted time. They didn't prepare. They didn't spend on what was needed to be ready for the contact tracing and the testing that is needed if you're going to keep control of a COVID pandemic.

We've seen around the world, leaders elsewhere talking about the critical importance of being right on top of contact tracing and of testing. You should have the reports from testing available within 24 hours of testing. You need to have the contact tracing done within 24 hours because, beyond that, if you haven't got it done, this fire spreads exponentially and you just lose control.

And what happened was this government was—they did not invest the few dollars that they needed to invest in July and August and September to be ready. And if they had had the readiness there, the preparedness so that when we started to go up in numbers, that we were able to have the testing done without these huge, long, terrible wait lines which dissuaded a lot of people from being tested and without the delays in getting the results in the testing.

The problem is that if you delay for seven days, as was very common in terms of getting results, people are not only frustrated, they're not sure they're going to get—go in and get tested again, but what happens is that that seven days is basically two cycles of the virus spreading exponentially.

And when the virus takes off—and we've seen it here in Manitoba because of the disastrous fiscal management of this government over the past few months—we've got a viral outbreak which is out of control. The hundreds of doctors are telling us we are in a very grave, perilous situation.

We are in extreme emergency, and all because this government did not do its job because it tried to save a few dollars instead of spending a few dollars early, and now it's costing people lots and lots and lots of money.

And it's not just costing the government money. It's costing businesses money. I've got every day emails coming in from people running restaurants: how are we going to manage now that we're going into this huge second wave—one of the biggest second waves in all of Canada, as big as some of the really worst places in the United States?

It's terrible what's happened under this government. It's just almost unbelievable how badly this government could have performed. And the result is, we've got businesses which are having trouble operating because there's got to be a strict lockdown because of the failure to look after this epidemic and to take care of it and get the testing and the contract tracing done really quickly early on.

So we had exponential growth. We still have exponential growth. And we have just an incredibly bad government, which has not spent well, which doesn't look after how to spend wisely and has made a mess of this second wave of the pandemic.

I think this government has a lot to learn and it's really sad because what we're seeing now is hundreds of doctors coming forward and saying we've got a disastrous situation, and instead of a situation which could have been controlled, which we would have been able to keep the economy open, which we would have been able to operate schools in a better way than now.

We may have to close schools just because of the disastrous way that this government managed things early on. And we have a situation where there's going to be need for lots and lots and lots of extra expenditures on ICU, on personnel and on various other things just because this government failed to spend early on in the smaller amounts that clearly could have made a big, big difference.

And I think that this government has got to be held to account. We need a public inquiry into what this government—how badly they mismanaged the second wave of the pandemic. We are going to see lots of inquests. There's just no doubt of it.

Looking at the—you know, when we've got death after death after death which is preventable happening at personal-care homes—people who are our elders, who have contributed to this province, who have done

a great deal all their lives, who are highly respected people, even though they may be, you know, having some problems with dementia and other things as they get older.

We should have been looking after them. We should have had the plan there. We did not have the plan. And this government let us down, and experts from across the country are saying that this government messed up, this government wasn't ready for personal-care homes, didn't protect older people, and I'm sure that that's we're going to find when we have that public inquiry and when we have those inquests.

It's just appalling what this government has let happen, and it's terrible. And I think the government needs to understand it, and this government needs to have a much better approach to money management, and a much better approach to prevention of health problems before they get way out of control, as is happening at the moment.

Madam Speaker, that's my few words that I wanted to contribute on this bill, and I think it's important that the government knows that they're making a mess of a lot of things.

Thank you.

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

Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance, seconded by the honourable Minister of Education, that Bill 65, The Appropriation Act, 2020, be now read a second time and be referred to the Committee of the Whole.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS *(Continued)*

Bill 66—The Loan Act, 2020-2021

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, second by the Minister of Education (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 66, The Loan Act, 2020-21, now be read a first time and be ordered for second reading immediately.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance, seconded by the honourable Minister of Education, that Bill 66, The

Loan Act, 2020-2021, be now read a first time and ordered for second reading immediately.

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

Can I ask the member that is clicking their pen to cease with that?

Mr. Fielding: No opening statement. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Oh. Oh, I thought it was. Sorry.

The honourable minister—oh.

Mr. Fielding: No opening comment. *[interjection]*
Oh.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Sorry, late in the day.

SECOND READINGS

(Continued)

Bill 66—The Loan Act, 2020-2021

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 66, The Loan Act, 2020-2021, be now read a second time and be referred to the Committee of the Whole.

Motion presented.

Madam Speaker: Just as a reminder, the honourable minister, official opposition critic and the three independent Liberals can speak in debate for up to 10 minutes each.

Did the—was the honourable Minister of Finance going to make any comments?

Mr. Fielding: The Loan Act, 2020-21, is made up of a number of sections.

Section No. 1 of the act provides definitions. It defines the government agency as those listed in schedule A of the act. The schedule details total authority to be used only the current fiscal year, the definition of the government borrowing authorizes clarities that unused authorities provided in the prior loan acts to borrow does not expire with the passing of each new loan act.

Section 2 of the act increases the amount a government is authorized to borrow by over three billion dollars and fifty-five million.

Section 3 of the act deals with the borrowing authority of government agencies specifically by placing a limit on the borrowing authority of the government agency which has its own legislative

borrowing power to be equal to the total amount of authority provided to the corporation in the schedule of the loan act 2021. And the government's used authority under section 2 of the—of this and prior loan acts, whichever's less, by reducing the total government borrowing authority in section 2 to the extent the government agency draws down authority granted to it in the schedule.

By recognizing that the government agency has the authority to refinance it's maturing debt and clarifies that any borrowing in the guarantee of the corporation also reduces the government's total borrowing authority under section 2 of this and prior loans.

Section 4 provides for the lapse of authority provided in the schedule of The Loan Act, 2019 that is not required in loan act, 2020-21.

Section 5, Madam Speaker, it sets out the amount of supplement loan and guarantee authority to the limit of \$400 million in addition to borrowing authority provided by the schedule. The 'subselment'—supplemental amount is for any unanticipated requirements within the fiscal year, subject to Lieutenant Governor-in-Council approval. This is an increase for the past year's loan act.

The previous limit is additional authority—has been \$200 million, which is a limit set in two thousand—or, I'm sorry, 1989. In light of this inflation and the fiscal uncertainties this year, we are increasing the total amount to \$400 million in the loan act, Madam Speaker.

And finally, in—section 6 provides the loan act 2021 to take effect retroactively to April 1st, 2020.

Thank you.

Questions

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

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): We don't have any questions on this bill.

Madam Speaker: Are there any other questions?

Is the House ready for the—

An Honourable Member: A question.

Madam Speaker: Oh, the honourable member for River Heights.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I talked a little bit ago about the need to spend in areas where we can actually save a lot of money, and this has been a problem when we were under the NDP that they failed to do this in areas like diabetes, as an example.

And, you know, a modest amount of spending and a targeted approach to reduce diabetes would have saved us hundreds of millions of dollars, and so we lost that opportunity. And we are now losing that again under this Conservative government because they're not paying attention to the other epidemic which is going on at the moment.

And I just wanted to point this out, that, you know, this government has a record of really poor fiscal management in that there are many areas where they could be saving and at the same time improving people's health and keeping people healthier and keeping people more productive, because when people get diabetes—

Madam Speaker: The member's time for the question has expired.

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Our government is very proud of the fact that we've made important investments in things like mental health and addictions; that's some partnerships with the federal government. Obviously, we think that there is—really important to invest in these particular areas, and that has a long-term impact on individuals. So we think that's important investments.

Our government has also done a number of things on the financial basis, something called the Idea Fund. That really helps—takes a look at a long-term approach for government. There's some initial dollars that you invest right off the bat, where there's hundreds of millions of dollars that are saved, which we have been able to invest in things like health care and education and social services, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further questions?

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Yes. I know that the Finance Minister was just talking about the PBO estimates. Now, it's interesting. The actual document produced by his department states—has a footnote that Manitoba's spend of \$2.1 billion is lower than the PBO estimate of \$2.5 billion.

So, is the—does the Finance Minister agree with the Parliamentary Budget Office or with his own department, which disagrees with the Parliamentary Budget Office?

Mr. Fielding: Well, we're going to believe the Parliamentary Budget Office before we believe the Liberal leader in terms of the supports. I can tell you that we're spending some of the most important money right now to support people when they need it, and businesses, through COVID.

As mentioned, we're investing close to about 2.2 to 2.3 billion dollars, which is some of the highest levels. We've made investments for individuals, for businesses. We made some long-term investments in things like capital restarts. We've done two budget bills that I believe the member voted on, one for a billion-dollar additional subsequent budget passed when the budget came in and a second one for \$587 million that provided supports for municipalities and education, other important mechanisms.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further questions?

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. I just want to follow up on the minister's comments about their investments in mental health.

One of the problems that we've found under this government is the lack of reporting of meaningful results and outcomes, and there seems to be a major problem with this government spending here and there without actually measuring the results.

And I tried, on a number of occasions, to get some of these results in mental health and I was told that, you know, the government doesn't actually measure what it's doing.

And so I would ask the minister: When is he actually going to start measuring the results of what he's doing in terms of areas like mental health and diabetes?

Mr. Fielding: We have made important investments with partnerships from the federal government on mental health and addictions. I can identify certain areas in health care, which I think is the most important area, where we have seen some good results. That's things like wait times. We know under the NDP government they had the longest wait times in the country. We've dropped that by upwards of 30 per cent.

* (18:30)

We've also increased the amount of hip and knee and cataract surgeries by 28 per cent and 23 per cent respectively, so I would suggest that there is good measurements. We want to continue to do good measurements. You want to make sure that the dollars are invested in the right areas.

Mr. Lamont: Yes, it was—again, when it comes to the PBO, I will repeat what the minister's own department said, that Manitoba spend of \$2.1 billion is lower than the PBO estimate of \$2.5 billion.

So why is it that he's claiming to believe in a PBO estimate that his own government, that his own documents, says is exaggerated by \$400 million?

Mr. Fielding: Well, I've heard the member talk about finance matters in the House for, I guess, two, two and a half years. I can tell you I'm going to believe the Parliamentary Budget Office before I believe the Liberal leader in terms of the finance. This is an individual that talked about the government writing off all debts with a continuation of tax-and-spend policies for the government.

I don't think that's the right approach, but I do think that our government has made important investments in priority areas, things like health care, education, social services. We're spending upwards of \$3.4 billion more than the NDP collectively, and even last year, about \$1.3 billion. Our supports for people during COVID is one of the highest in the country.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further questions?

Mr. Gerrard: I want to follow that up, but I'll first make a comment. I'll challenge the minister on one of his earlier statements that the COVID pandemic is just about over in Manitoba. I don't think anybody who's got a professional understanding of what's happening would agree with that.

But let's get back to the question of mental health and the outcomes that he's measuring. I mean, the outcomes that we really need to measure are whether we're able to decrease the number of people who have depression, whether we're able to get better results from the treatment of depression. These are outcomes that, for example, are being now measured very effectively—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Fielding: I want to correct the record. That's not at all what I said. What I said was that my hope and my concern is that this supports are going to be needed much past when a vaccine is needed. So I want to make sure that's—the record is corrected. That isn't at

all what I said. Our government is—wants to commit as much money as we can for supports, and we're going to continue to do that as long as people and businesses need.

In terms of measurement, our government always wants to make sure money is being spent. We're always doing measurement as it relates to mental health and addictions. We've made it—a number of important investments with partnerships—the federal government. We're going to continue to do that, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Lamont: Just for the record, Madam Speaker—the Finance Minister referred to my—the debt. He's also been boasting about what the Bank of Canada has done. Fact, the Bank of Canada has done exactly what I proposed, which is to engage in quantitative easing and is buying provincial and federal debt in order to help.

But I have a question about alleged support to safety upgrades in personal-care homes. The minister said it's \$280 million, but LTCAM said in August that the RHAs have completely ignored their responsibility to fund their public health orders and directions.

So why were personal-care homes denied any funding to actually improve infection controls prior to the second wave?

Mr. Fielding: Our government's very proud of our commitment to personal-care homes during this crisis. We've invested millions of dollars for visitation areas, whether it be inside or outside of the personal-care homes. There is support for the operations of these types of things, and that's the agreement with the federal government in terms of a Safe Restart Agreement.

We as a government want to support people—specifically vulnerable people—during the pandemic. We're going to continue to do this.

To mention that the—what we had reported, to address the financial piece that the member had talked about, we reported \$2.3 billion in Public Accounts. So I'm not sure what the member's talking about in terms of the financial supports difference.

Mr. Gerrard: Just a step forward in terms of the measuring of outcomes. The minister—maybe a finance minister measures outcomes only in dollars, but most of us think of the quality of life and the number of people who are infected and the number of

people who die or the number of people who live, but these are pretty important outcomes.

And, in this area, we are seeing measurements and those measurements are actually pretty negative in terms of the government's record. The number of outbreaks, the number of cases, the number of deaths in personal-care homes in the last three months has been, you know, pretty startling and pretty unsettling—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Fielding: Yes, I do agree with the member that making sure that programs are measurable and impactful is really important, and although health isn't my day-to-day functions with things, we do appropriate the dollars for it and I can tell you the fact that we have seen some pretty important results on things like wait times which is, obviously, a big factor that national organizations look at, as well as wait times for things like hip and knee and cataract.

And I have quoted some stats of reductions in wait times and also the amount of surgeries that are done on hip and knee and replacement at 28 and 23 per cent. So there is some good results, and I would suggest that is a quality that I think, for individuals.

Mr. Lamont: Again, the Finance Minister's completely wrong. Hip—replacements for hips and knees—wait times for hips and knees and cataracts have all gotten worse considerably under this government.

But I'll re-read from the LTCAM: The COVID-19 costs are in addition to the PCH situation in terms of 15 years of funding freezes, no funding for increased supplies around infection prevention and control, and zero annual inflationary operational increases.

So, why was that the case in August when the Finance Minister—and I think there are a lot of people who would disagree that they've done anything like a good job in Parkview Place where there's been a cockroach infestation for—since 2006.

Why is it that none of this investment happened in August when it needed to happen?

Mr. Fielding: Well, the member is completely wrong again. He doesn't understand finance so let me explain it a little bit to him. Number 1, we've invested \$648 million more in health care every year, \$303 million more. We passed two budget bills beyond that, one for \$1 billion that had \$500 million investments for health care, for PPE, these types of things, and other important investments that are there. So these are important investments.

Our government's committed to enhancing and making sure there are supports in place for people and businesses during COVID-19.

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, I just want to continue. It is not just a matter of dollars spent, not a matter of the minister giving us wrong information in terms of what's happening with wait times which, I understand, are ballooning at the moment because of the poor control of the epidemic and people having to cancel surgeries.

But it's a matter when we get to mental health of comparing how we're doing here in measuring real, measurable outcomes whether things are working and what they're doing in the United Kingdom. Will they move to what's happening in the United Kingdom where they get 98 per cent success in evaluating outcomes from individual—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Fielding: I didn't talk about wait times for hip, knee and cataract. What I said was they're an increase in the amount of surgeries that are happening for hip and knee and cataract to the tune of 28 and 23 per cent. That is a fact.

In terms of the point that the member brings up in terms of mental health and addictions, absolutely we want to make sure that these are measurable types of programs. I think everyone can be proud of the fact that there has been a lot of investments from the federal and provincial levels in mental health and addictions. We did the VIRGO report; we did a number of supports, whether it be housing and other types of items that the Minister of Health could probably list off better than I.

But it is important investments that will help Manitobans in the long run.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further questions?

Debate

Madam Speaker: If not, debate is open.

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): This government talks a lot about us being all in this together. The problem with that is they don't act like it.

* (18:40)

They have a transparency and accountability problem, and it's significant in a crisis like this because if the Manitoba people do not have confidence in their government, they will not follow public health orders. And if they see that the

government's not there for them in their time of need, then they're going to stop basically assisting or helping the government and we break down as a province.

If we were all in this together, it means the government has to change the way they are. They can't gaslight Manitobans. They have to be honest with them and just lay out the facts, even if they're unflattering to the government. They have to listen to Manitobans, like the hundreds—literally hundreds—of doctors that are giving them warning signals that things are not okay. And instead of doubling down and putting their hands on their ears and saying they can't hear them, they need to start listening and actually following consultation.

It means taking a less adversarial approach in the Legislature. It means reaching out to the opposition and being completely open and transparent and saying, here are the numbers, let's come to some consensus ideas, we're going to put aside our partisan differences for the sake of Manitoba, for the sake of the crisis, and we will want to partner with you and actually work with you to come out with joint consensus ideas that we can bring to the Manitoba people to get us through that. But instead the government is doubling down and, you know, going back to their gaslighting and their cheap partisan attacks and their lack of listening to people.

And it is measurably different in other jurisdictions. In other jurisdictions, they've been dialing down the political rhetoric, they've been reaching across the aisle, and the opposition and the government actually have been working together.

And one of the examples of that is other jurisdictions are very open with the money, and they're saying this is what we're spending, this is how we're spending it, and they're open to actually reviewing the efficacy of their programs. And they're open to criticism, and they're open to changing these programs to make them work.

We're all in this building because we believe in Manitoba and we want to see Manitobans succeed, and we're all united by that. And—but the government isn't acting like it.

And one of the first places this government can start is being transparent and open with all the money, and to send the books, basically, 'unadulterated' to the Public Accounts Committee. Let's sit down as a group of caring adults and work through this and actually respond to the second wave.

This cannot be about people's egos anymore. It cannot be about people's misstated, you know, political legacies. People are dying daily. Things are getting out of hand. And this government needs to actually take a step back and say, you know what, we'll get back to, you know, fighting the opposition another day, right now we actually need their help, and actually act like it.

And I know this is falling on deaf ears and, you know—but it's a plea to this government that we sort of need to take a time out here on partisanship and work together. And that's my lament.

And so, thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Yes, it's a pleasure to put some facts on the record.

I just want to mention when we—I'm referring to the Parliamentary Budget Officer and I'm looking right here on my screen over here at the fiscal update from June where it says—where it claims COVID spending per province is \$2.1 billion—source Parliamentary Budget Officer—it says Manitoba spent of \$2.1 billion is lower than the PBO estimate of \$2.5 billion.

So really I'm really very tired of Manitobans being misled and this sort of creative accounting to make things look better than they are at a time when we are looking at thousands of bankruptcies. We are—there—we had a record number of COVID cases today. We are headed into a break week where we are not going to see any new legislation, and we keep hearing things that just simply do not jive with the government's own documents and numbers.

So I'll just go through some of these issues—these, again, from the fiscal and economic update from June. Safety upgrades in personal-care homes, they claim that it was \$280 million. I will read from the long-term-care association's brief, seniors cannot wait, from August.

The Manitoba government and the regional health authorities have not committed funding—to funding—any COVID-19-related incremental costs incurred to the guidelines, directives and public health orders that we have been mandated to follow, as other jurisdictions have.

Unsustainable reductions are being made in significant areas of each personal-care home in support of housing operations to ensure sufficient cash flow is available for other items such as payroll-related items, repairs and maintenance.

For more than 50 years, appeals for operational infrastructure funding to upgrade and improve the physical-care environment, especially for dementia care, infection prevention and control and safety, have been submitted and largely ignored.

So that's \$280 million that was in the fiscal update that never made it into personal-care homes. That's just one example. You want to talk about the amount of PPE that was—that's been bought. In the last two days, we found out there were millions of dollars of masks that can't be used. The Deputy Minister of Central Services is being sued because of more than \$13 million in US of masks that are—cannot be used in Manitoba.

Over \$1.2 million of useless hand sanitizer that was made with fuel-grade ethanol; it's a health hazard. So when I hear about the amount of money that's being spent on PPE that cannot be used—and just today, early learning and child-care education centres are not able to use the PPE that was provided to them by the government because it is not medical grade.

So, the idea that this government has been doing a lot when lots of this stuff is simply not the case. Of that \$2.1 billion, \$1.24 billion was going to happen anyway. And they've just rebranded them as COVID-19 measures. The actual amount of spending is less than \$1 billion, over a third of which is on PPE, where we still have massive shortages.

The other thing about it: there are hundreds of millions of dollars that were going to be announced as new spending, but the other more than a hundred million dollars in Crown corporation rebates that are supposed to be independent of government. MPI is supposed to be independent of government. It's not taxes. The same thing with the Workers Compensation Board.

But why did, for years, the—and there's a continual problem with the Auditor General saying that this government has not been straight about how they define the deficits and surpluses of this—of its books because they said, well, it's pretty clear that the Manitoba government controls the Workers Compensation Board.

How is it that when the government puts out a fiscal update and says we don't—and wants to take credit for the Workers Compensation Board, putting out hundreds of millions of—more than a hundred million dollars, and at the same time they want to pretend that it's not part of the books. It's unbelievable.

So, the idea that where they're spending the most, it's clear that this is something that the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business all disagree that this government is doing the most, and there are lots of documents, when it comes to helping small business, there's lots of documents to back that up.

Most other jurisdictions are doing more. Most other jurisdictions have been more organized. And there's a reason why we're seeing the worst outbreak in Canada, and why we're facing a small-business apocalypse: because this government won't—will not recognize what the problem is or admit that they've made a mistake.

I'll add to that: the government also put out in April a really incredible Treasury Board document that was widely criticized for its distortions. And it should have been. The idea, for example—and this has been repeated a number of times in the past few days—the idea that Manitoba is the most vulnerable and has the highest debt. There are a lot economists who criticize this and say, look, this just simply is not accurate.

In April, the Finance Minister said that Manitoba had the most emergency-ready budget in history, and then in April they were panicking and saying, we have the highest debt and we need cuts of 10, 20 and 30 per cent, which would completely shut down universities, would completely undermine and crush many public institutions and close them for good.

But it's worth talking about, why this claim of Manitoba being vulnerable because its debt is so high, is so false. It combines Manitoba's debt with Manitoba Hydro's debt and pretends that both are completely paid for with taxes. And Manitoba Hydro, as this government knows, because it's in the budget, charges money. It has rate-payers. It isn't paid for with taxes.

* (18:50)

The per capita debt claim is false. All claims that any public debt can be divided equally between every man, woman and child is false. Not all taxes are paid by all people. Companies and corporations pay taxes, as well, and people pay different amounts of taxes, paid on their income.

The idea that somehow this is a huge burden that's going to be passed onto future generations, exclusively to taxpayers, is false because a whole bunch of this is going to be paid for by ratepayers, including ratepayers in Minnesota or Saskatchewan.

So we need to stop gaslighting Manitobans and fear mongering, and being honest about the actual fiscal state of this province.

If we accept the argument that Manitoba has the worst revenue-to-debt ratio, it is because the NDP and the PCs both borrowed billions of dollars to pay for tax cuts that undermined the public treasury, exploded the deficit, while failing to stimulate the economy.

And this is also a document that demanded massive cuts. I'll give an example: they said that PPE expenses alone could be close to a billion dollars—or \$80 million a month. Why are PPE expenses so high? Because this government did nothing to prepare for a pandemic, despite the fact that there are documents showing—everyone knew that there's—that a pandemic is inevitable and the Finance Minister himself tried to portray a PPE stockpile as big government. It's ridiculous.

And I'll go on. The PCs have added more than \$150 million in tax revenues and added to the deficit—have cut more than \$150 million in tax revenues and added to the deficit while doing it. They spent \$200 million bailing out a stadium.

A hundred and fifty million dollars is 0.5 per cent of the PST, so we need to ask why is it okay to add billions to the deficit to pay for tax cuts that help people with huge houses save money on their insurance but not to make sure that thousands of businesses and institutions are still around to generate revenue a year from now.

The idea that this is a very bad time for government to be borrowing is nonsense when interest rates are at record lows. And why are here—we here today? It's because this government has spent four years freezing and cutting government expenditures while borrowing to finance tax cuts that have done nothing to stimulate the economy.

So we have a government that has less revenue, fewer services and is more dependent on debt than ever to try and finance its operations. This is all about starving the beast and the idea that—do we have to slash the public sector to make this work? This crisis was not caused by public sector workers, and laying them off or slashing their incomes is not going to make it better.

This is a disastrous budget. The idea that there are no options through increased revenues. We know that there are plenty of people who don't pay their taxes. We know that there are people who avoid taxes through international deals. There are all sorts of—they

set up phoney companies. We know that there is something called snow washing but is there is any attempt at all to try to recover from people who don't pay their taxes and should be? None. The idea that there is no other source of revenue is simply untrue. And the government then lets—the private sector and other governments are controlling their expenses. We must do the same.

This is just—this is a—an economic suicide pact, and we're paying for it. The idea that we can cut our way out of this in the worst crisis in a century is absolutely disastrous, and we need to be honest with Manitobans about what we're spending and we need to commit to actually helping people to make them safe and so the businesses survive.

It should be obvious that Manitoba Liberals are not going to support this.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, Madam Speaker, I want to take what the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont) has talked about in terms of the big level down to the local situation in River Heights, where I'm getting many people writing in for one reason or another. But let me start with our local restaurants in River Heights. And I'm sure many other constituencies have similar situations.

As Manitoba continues to endure the second wave of COVID-19, restaurants are being singled out and are struggling. There have been a lot more restrictions placed on restaurants, yet no data has been provided and there has been no help offered to restaurants to help them get through this very difficult time.

I'm told that the average restaurant has invested almost \$20,000 in new procedures and training, personal protective equipment, sanitizer stations, air purification systems and other means to ensure that the highest levels of safety happen for staff and patrons. And there's some national research indicating that 87 per cent of consumers agree that restaurants are doing a good job of keeping people safe.

But one of the problems at the moment is that in the data that's being collected, which is not being shared very openly in many respects, we don't know to what extent there are any infections being spread in restaurants because we're not being shown any data on one side or another. And we're not, in circumstances, for example, where people are investing, as one restaurant has in River Heights, in a highly sophisticated air purification system in order to decrease the amount of COVID spread—we're not

assessing, measuring the results. Restaurants like that, whether they, in fact, they are maybe much better in terms of not having any spread, or maybe the average restaurant with all the measures that they've taken are not having a lot of spread.

I mean, we're hearing lots and lots about spread at personal-care homes, at hospitals, at correctional institutions, but we're not hearing the evidence that the government is accumulating in terms of what's happening in relation to restaurants. And it's really important when you've got restaurants, you know, looking at the second wave and looking at the potential for sales losses, as much as 80 per cent for full-service restaurants, more than 40 per cent for quick-service restaurants, and thousands of jobs being lost.

Now, it's important not only that we know what's safe and we're managing things well in terms of spread of COVID, but it's also really important that we're supporting financially restaurants which are struggling. And clearly, what we've seen so far is that the present government is hopelessly inadequate in terms of the financial support for restaurants and many other businesses.

We want our restaurants to pull through the pandemic. We want them there afterwards. They do a great job. They serve wonderful food. Some restaurants go out of their way to make sure that they have particularly healthy food, which is really important. They've been looking at the quality of the food. And we need this government to have the clear and transparent data. We need the government to be working with industries as well as working with health professionals, and it looks, at this point, because the government has not been doing a good job of preventing this second wave and it is really at a crisis point at the moment that, you know, we may, and are right now, in a situation where restaurants are not able to operate anywhere near what they were even a few weeks ago.

So there's a great concern among businesses like restaurants, and there really is a lot of work that the government has to do because right now there's not a lot of trust in this government in terms of their helping with ensuring health care is there and ensuring prevention is there and ensuring the support for business is there.

And this sort of thing should have been much there in this budget. The government should have presented a much better plan of how it's going to enable everybody to get through a very difficult

circumstance at the moment and enable to come out the other side and have people surviving and their businesses surviving and doing well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding), seconded by the honourable Minister of Education (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 66, The Loan Act, 2020-2021, be now read a second time and be referred to Committee of the Whole.

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

Madam Speaker: The House will now resolve into Committee of the Whole to consider and report on Bill 65, the Appropriation Act, 2020, and Bill 66, The Loan Act, 2020-2021, for concurrence and third reading.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

* (19:00)

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Piwniuk): The Committee of the Whole will come to order to consider Bill 65, The Appropriation Act, 2020; and Bill 66, The Loan Act, 2020-2021.

During the consideration of these bills, the enacting clause and the titles are postponed until all other clauses have been considered in their proper order.

Bill 65—The Appropriation Act, 2020

Mr. Chairperson: Now we'll be considering Bill 65, The Appropriation Act, 2020.

The first bill for our consideration is Bill 65, The Appropriation Act, 2020. We will now begin clause-by-clause considering for—of the bill.

Clause 1—pass; clause 2—pass; clause 3—pass; clause 4—pass; clause 5—pass; clause 6—pass; clause 7—pass; clause 8—pass; schedule—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

Bill 66—The Loan Act, 2020-2021

Now we'll consider Bill 66, The Loan Act, 2020-2021.

The last bill will be Bill 26, The Loan Act, 2020-2021. We will now begin clause-by-clause considering of the bill.

Clause 1—pass; clause 2—pass; clause 3—pass; clause 4—pass; clause 5—pass; clause 6—pass; schedule—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported.

That concludes the business before us.

Committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Committee Report

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has considered the following: Bill 65, The Appropriation Act, 2020; and Bill 66, The Loan Act, 2020-2021, and reports the same without amendments.

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

Motion agreed to.

CONCURRENCE AND THIRD READINGS

Bill 66—The Loan Act, 2020-2021

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 66, The Loan Act 2020-2021, recorded from the Committee of the Whole, be concurred in and now be read for a third time and passed.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance, seconded by the honourable Minister of Education, that Bill 66, The Loan Act, 2020-2021, reported from the Committee of the Whole, be concurred in and be now read for a third time and passed.

Just as a reminder, the honourable minister, official opposition critic and the three independent Liberals can speak in debate for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. Fielding: The bill speaks for itself.

Madam Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak in debate?

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, I—Madam Speaker, I just want to put on the record that the Manitoba Liberal Party disagrees very strongly with the current fiscal policy of this government, and we will be voting against this bill. We just feel that the government has not had a good sense of fiscal

management, has had very poor planning and for the pandemic and particularly for the second wave and that we will not be supporting this bill.

Madam Speaker: Were there any other members wishing to speak in debate?

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

Bill 65—The Appropriation Act, 2020

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 65, The Appropriation Act, 2020, reported from the Committee of the Whole, be concurred in and now be read for a third time and passed.

Motion presented.

Madam Speaker: Just as a reminder, the honourable minister, official opposition critic and the three independent Liberals can speak in debate for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. Fielding: The bill speaks for itself.

Madam Speaker: Are there any other members?

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, just a few words on the record here. We've had a government which has had poor fiscal policy, and we have had a government which has not spent very wisely so that we have a major second wave, which is the worst in Canada and is severely affecting people and causing a lot of deaths. And so we disagree with the approach that the government has taken, both in terms of health care and in terms of finance, and we'll be voting against this bill.

Madam Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak in debate?

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Just to put a few words on the record as well. One of the things, actually, even before being elected as MLA, we met with the previous Finance minister to discuss some of our issues in the budget consultation, and we made it clear one of our issues was a question of honesty in accounting, that one of the things that has happened continually under this government is that they will refer to what they've spent when really what they mean is that they promised—what they committed to in the budget—with no real intention of actually spending that amount of money. In a previous Throne Speech, the government has actually had so much trouble spending the federal money that it was being offered

that it had to make a commitment in a throne speech that it would actually match federal funding.

So one of the things that's happened over the past few years is that even though federal health-care funds have gone up year after year, there have been a special \$400-million fund that was for mental health care, home care and other supports. That's an agreement that was supposed to have been signed more than a couple of years ago, and yet there are many programs that have never been enacted, that have yet to be up and running, including a maternal-care program. The same is true for the guns—the so called guns-and-crime fund, which was massively undersubscribed even though we were in a meth crisis. And the list goes on.

Despite the—and we keep hearing from the government about how much more money they spent than the NDP; the fact is that if they'd spent even a dollar more than the NDP, they would've spent more than the NDP. This is not really anything to be proud of.

But the other is the fact that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) himself used to say a couple of years ago that he was—they were spending \$700 million more than the NDP ever did, and this year we hear that they are spending less than \$700 million more. The fact is that what they did is in the first year of the PC government, spending went up, and then it was frozen for two years straight. This has also happened with infrastructure, which actually declined, cuts to municipalities and so on.

* (19:10)

So the idea—and then people wonder, well, where has all this money gone? The fact is that a lot of this money went straight to the rainy day fund, which is now sitting as a massive—being hoarded, really, that the—and I don't—honestly, at Estimates last year I asked the Premier what defines a rainy day. He said he would get back to me and he never did.

The fact is is that if we're talking in any serious way about this being a hundred-year crisis, one of the worst crises that we've every seen, that it's unprecedented, the idea that we're supposed to sit on hundreds of millions of dollars while businesses go under, which will inevitably make things worse for the government revenue while COVID 'clases'—COVID cases are doubling every 10 days, which means massive health-care expenditures and people being unable to work.

The fact is we have a massive crisis and this government is pretending—I don't—if this is not a rainy

day, I don't know what is. If we are not willing to invest at this period of crisis in order to even just stem or reduce the crisis, I don't know when we are supposed to be doing it. So it is really, to me, quite shocking.

The other issue is that I know that the federal—that this government went through some theatre trying to claim that the—asking the federal government for more health-care funds, the proclamation itself had a number of things which were factually completely inaccurate and my caucus colleagues and I are not willing to put our names next to something that is so false.

So, but the fact is that we need—have—do we need—the major problem here is that we absolutely need more funding; we need to put money into all sorts of things in Manitoba, but it hasn't been happening even though the provincial government is getting more money.

So, unless that money, unless the Premier and the Finance Minister and his government are will to commit absolutely for that money to flow through to where it's supposed to go, whether it's Health or Education or Infrastructure, it's pretty hard to ask the federal government, to ask for that money, because instead it's being used for things like tax cuts for personal—tax cuts for insurance on mansions or tax cuts for the—for people who have bars of gold, platinum and silver, or other taxes which overwhelmingly are regressive which benefit people at the very top because—at a time when the people who are really struggling aren't getting the help they need.

I would add one other thing, is that the government is very fond of talking about what bad shape the NDP left the books in and how they drained the rainy day fund. Look, I'm not a great defender of the NDP, but the fact is that a lot of the reasons the NDP had financial problems: one was that the federal government flat-lined all federal funding for six years straight to catastrophic effect. The Premier himself voted for a health-care measure that cut funding to Manitoba where the health-care funding used to be calculated based on how many seniors there were, how poor people were, how sick people were and the fact that Manitoba is—has a large rural and northern population.

All the extra funds that would have been flowing to Manitoba for health care were opposed and voted against by the Premier (Mr. Pallister) when he was a member of Parliament in 2007.

So, the fact is that we're in a position where Manitoba's fiscal state is really a problem. It was a joint creation not just of the NDP, but a joint creation of the NDP and the Conservative government that was in power for years prior to 2015. And since then the federal government has increased the funding per year to this government by over \$1 billion.

So, the idea that we're short on money is not true, and the fact is that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has been doing what he does so often which is to pretend he's much poorer and has less money than he actually has.

So, I wanted to put those words on the record. This is not a good budget; this is a budget that continues to give people who have more than they need while depriving people in desperate straights of the help they really need.

So, with that I'll close.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 2—The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

Madam Speaker: The House will now resume consideration of second reading of Bill 2, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2020.

As a reminder, the minister has already moved the second reading motion. A question period was already held on the bill, and the official opposition critic and the honourable member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont) have already spoken to the bill.

At this point, the honourable member for River Heights and the honourable member for Tyndall Park (Ms. Lamoureux) can each speak to the bill for 10 minutes each.

And, I'm just—the honourable member for River Heights.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I would like to speak to this bill. We have major problems with particular elements of this bill. One is the action of this government in this bill to make it impossible, according to the legislation, for people to go to the government, to sue the government, to collect money which really belonged

to children who were in the care of Child and Family Services.

And I want to—in looking at this, I'm going to go back to the fall of 2015 and this early winter, mid-winter, in February of 2016, and I'm going to point out that when the current Premier was leader of the opposition—and we know that then as now, the Premier micro-manages things and is on top of what's being asked in question period and so on. And so we had questions, a series of nine questions which were raised by the MLA for Portage la Prairie, who is still a part of the government. And in these questions, this—the MLA for Portage la Prairie points out that these—taking this money was illegal and immoral and it left children and agencies very vulnerable.

Now, I'll just review this because it's worthwhile that people remember this and recognize what the situation is and was. November 23rd of 2015, the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart) asked the fact—about the fact that the government was taking away the Children's Special Allowances. He said: "Can the minister tell this House whether children in care benefit directly from the Children's Special Allowances, or does it just disappear into general revenue?" Well, the NDP minister at the time didn't ask—didn't answer the question very well, and we now know that that money went into general revenue. So the MLA for Portage la Prairie then asked: "Why did the NDP government end the practice of directly benefiting the child in care?" which the NDP had done. And the minister of the day, the NDP minister, goes on but doesn't provide an explanation of why the NDP ended this practice of directly funding and benefiting children in care.

Then, in his third question, the MLA for Portage la Prairie says this: Before 2012, CFS agencies often ran deficits due to ever-increasing numbers of children in care. This NDP government decided to take the money held in trust for CFS children when they turned 18 and use this money to pay off the deficit in that agency. There were no agreements in place to allow them to do this; the government took money which was held in trust for children when they aged out of care at age 18. The MLA for Portage goes on to say: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government stole this money from the trust fund of the children in care, and in doing, stole their good start in life. And what we now know, from the reports of many people, is that a lot of these children, when they aged out of care, end up in homeless shelters because they had no other resources and because those resources had been taken

away from them by the provincial government of the day.

* (19:20)

And then the MLA for Portage la Prairie continued—I think it was December the 1st of that same year, 2015—again under the supervision of the current Premier (Mr. Pallister), and the MLA asked why is this federal transfer intended for the care and maintenance of nearly 11,000 children not going to the benefit of these children? Again, there was not a good answer.

So the MLA for Portage asked a second question. Mr. Speaker, this is a minister who's responsible for nearly 11,000 children in care and has risen that to a new high across Canada. I'd be ashamed if I was her. And he asks why did the NDP government end the practice of directly benefitting the child in care with this federal transfer money? And it is clear, as we now know from a lot of work that has been done since then, that is exactly what the government of that day did.

The MLA for Portage went on to talk about certain agencies which were doing a great job—Nelson House was one—and he talks about how can an agency that's shown such positive results in reductions of children in care be a target for clawbacks of funding by this government.

He continued with another question: How does this government steal the future of these most vulnerable children and call that fair?

Madam Speaker, the government of the day, 2015 and 2016, was clearly not behaving very well toward children in care. And the MLA for Portage—who's a current member of this government and a close friend, I understand, of the Premier and who was working with the Premier—the MLA for Portage and the Premier, recognized that the NDP government of the day was stealing the future of these most vulnerable children and that was not fair.

And then on February 25th of 2016, we have a situation where what was happening was this line of questioning continued and on this occasion, the MLA for Portage says this: Mr. Speaker, this House may recall in the fall session that we asked about this government's clawback of the Children's Special Allowance paid by the federal government to the First Nations agencies. Despite having no agreements in place with the First Nations agencies, this government continues to claw back these federal dollars, whose purpose, and I quote, whose exclusive purpose is the care, maintenance and advancement of children in

care. This money goes into general revenue when it's clawed back.

And he asks, Mr. Speaker, have these illegal, immoral clawbacks impacted these agencies and left them vulnerable? And obviously this, in fact, was the case.

And the fact is that the Premier and the MLA for Portage la Prairie, back in 2015 and 2016, knew that what was happening was illegal and immoral, and now the Premier and the MLA for Portage la Prairie and all the members of Conservative Party, who are in this Legislature, have brought forward a bill to double down on taking this money away and never giving it back.

It is incredible that the government, when in opposition, could have cause—called this process that was being undertaken by the NDP as illegal and immoral and stealing from children. And now the government is doubling down and it is legalizing theft. It is legalizing the taking of money from children in this bill and that is why we are so strongly opposed.

We also don't like the part of this bill which deals with breaking a contract that the government has had for a home that was being used to help children. This is a home at 800 Adele and it was being used to help children to do better, it was being helped children who were being looked after by Marymount. And this government, in the middle of the night, took the children out of there and has not found a use for this home, which could have continued to benefit children in this province and children who were marginalized and children who were having difficulties.

So that, Madam Speaker, is a second reason why we Manitoba Liberals are opposed to this bill.

We don't like a government which is engaging in immoral and illegal theft. We don't like a government which is breaking contracts. We will vote against this bill.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 2, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2020.

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

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: No.

Voice Vote

Madam Speaker: All those in favour, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Madam Speaker: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Madam Speaker: In my opinion, the Yeas have it.

The motion is accordingly carried.

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, on division.

Madam Speaker: The motion is carried on division.

* * *

Madam Speaker: We will now resolve into Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 2, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill 2—The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Pivniuk): Will the Committee of the Whole please come to order. This committee will consider the following bill, Bill 2, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2020.

During the consideration of the bill, the enacting clause and the title are postponed until all other clauses have been considered in their proper order. Also, if they're in agreement from the committee, the Chair will call clauses in blocks that are conformed to pages which is understanding that we will stop at any particular clause or clauses where numbers have—if any members have any comments, questions or amendments to propose? *[Agreed]*

We shall now proceed by clause by clause.

* (19:30)

Clauses 1 and 2—pass; clauses 3 through 7—pass; clause 8—pass; clauses 9 and 10—pass; clauses 11 through 13—pass; clauses 14 through 17—pass; clauses 18 through 20—pass; clause 21—pass.

Is there a—there's no debate. Okay, 21.

Clause 21—pass; clause 22—pass; clause 23—pass; clauses 24 and 25—pass; clause 26—pass; clauses 27

and 28—pass; clauses 29 through 33—pass; clauses 34 through 36—pass; clauses 37 and 38—pass; clauses 39 through 42—pass; clauses 43 through 49—pass; clauses 50 through 53—pass; clauses 54 and 55—pass; clauses 56 through 58—pass; clause 59—pass; clause 60—pass; clause 61—pass; clauses 62 through 64—pass; clauses 65 and 66—pass; clauses 67 and 68—pass; clauses 69 through 72—pass; clauses 73 and 74—pass; clause 75—pass; clauses 76 through 78—pass; clauses 79 through 81—pass; clauses 82 through 84—pass; clauses 85 through 88—pass; clauses 89 through 91—pass; clause 92—pass; clause 93—pass; clauses 94 through 96—pass; clauses 97 through 99—pass; clauses 100 through 107—pass; clauses 108 and 109—pass; clause 110—pass; clauses 111 through 117—pass; clauses 118 through 122—pass; clauses 123 and 124—pass; clauses 125 through 127—pass; clauses 128 through 131—pass; clauses 132 and 133—pass; clauses 134 and 135—pass; clauses 136 through 139—pass; clauses 140 through 145—pass; clauses 146 through 149—pass; clauses 150 through 152—pass; clauses 153 through 155—pass; clauses 156 through 158—pass; clauses 159 through 163—pass; clauses 164 through 166—pass; clause 167—pass; clauses 168 through 170—pass; clauses 171 and 172—pass; clauses 173 through 176—pass; clauses 177 through 181—pass; clauses 182 through 184—pass; clauses 185 and 186—pass; clauses 187 and 188—pass; clause 189—pass; clauses 190 through 194—pass; clauses 195 through 199—pass; clause 200—pass; clauses 201 and 202—pass; clauses 203 through 206—pass; clauses 207 and 208—pass; clauses 209 and 210—pass; clauses 211 through 213—pass; clauses 214 through 217—pass; clauses 218 through 221—pass; clauses 222 through 226—pass; clauses 227 through 229—pass.

Shall clause 230 pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no.

An Honourable Member: I would ask leave of members, if we could introduce an amendment at this clause.

Mr. Chairperson: There's no amendments, and there's no speaking in this—there's no debate on this clause-by-clause on this bill.

An Honourable Member: I mean, that is correct, but I can still ask leave of the House to introduce an amendment.

Mr. Chairperson: We're in committee. We can't ask leave for—in the—for the House.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour of the clause 230, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion, the Yeas have it.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Clause 230—pass.

Shall clause 231 pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour of the clause 231, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion, the Yeas have it.

Recorded Vote

Mr. Chairperson: The Official Opposition—*[interjection]*—order, order.

The Official Opposition House Leader has request—or stood up. The honourable member for—the honourable House—Opposition House Leader.

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

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

* (20:40)

Order. The one hour provided for the ringing of the division bells has expired. I am directing the bells to be turned off and the committee proceed with the vote.

As a reminder of all members for this—these votes—this will be first view for the row-by-row count

for the Chamber followed by the alphabet roll call of virtual members.

The question before the committee is clause 231.

Division

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

Yeas

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

Nays

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

Deputy Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): Yeas 32, Nays 19.

Mr. Chairperson: Clause 231 is accordingly passed.

* * *

* (20:50)

Mr. Chairperson: Shall clause 232 pass?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion, the Yeas have it.

Recorded Vote

Ms. Fontaine: A recorded vote, please.

Mr. Chairperson: A recorded having been called, call in the members.

* (21:50)

Order. The one hour provided for the ringing of the division bells is expired. I am directing the bells to be turned off and the committee proceed with the vote.

As a reminder to all members, for all these votes, will be first done by row by row count in the Chamber, following by alphabetical roll call by virtual members.

The question before the committee is clause 232.

Division

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

Yeas

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

Nays

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

Deputy Clerk: Yeas 32, Nays 19.

Mr. Chairperson: Clause 232 is accordingly passed.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Shall clause 233 pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no.

* (22:00)

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion, the Yeas have it.

Recorded Vote

Ms. Fontaine: A recorded vote, please.

Mr. Chairperson: A recorded vote has been declared. Call in the members.

* (23:00)

Order. Order. The one hour provided for the ringing of the division bells has expired. I am directing the bells to be turned off and the committee proceed with the vote.

As reminded to all members, for these votes will be first by done row-by-row count in the Chamber followed by the alphabetical roll-call in the virtual-with virtual members.

The question before the committee is clause 233.

Division

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

Yeas

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

Nays

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

Deputy Clerk: Yeas 32, Nays 19.

Mr. Chairperson: Clause 233 is accordingly passed.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Shall clause 34 pass—234 pass?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear no.

The clause—clause 234 is accordingly defeated.

Shall clauses 234—

Recorded Vote

An Honourable Member: Sorry, a recorded vote, please.

Mr. Chairperson: The Official Opposition House Leader, on a recorded vote—the Official Opposition House Leader, on—

Ms. Fontaine: A recorded vote, please, on 234.

Mr. Chairperson: A recorded vote on 234—a recorded vote has been requested. Call in the members.

* (00:00)

Okay. The question before the committee is clause 234.

Division

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

Yeas

Nays

Adams, Altomare, Asagwara, Brar, Bushie, Cox, Cullen, Eichler, Ewasko, Fielding, Fontaine, Friesen, Gerrard, Goertzen, Gordon, Guenter, Guillemard, Helwer, Isleifson, Johnson, Johnston, Kinew, Lagassé, Lagimodiere, Lamont, Lamoureux, Lathlin, Lindsey, Maloway, Marcelino, Martin, Michaleski, Micklefield, Morley-Lecomte, Moses, Naylor, Nesbitt, Pallister, Pedersen, Reyes, Sala, Sandhu, Schuler, Smith (Lagimodière), Smith (Point Douglas), Smook, Squires, Stefanson, Teitsma, Wowchuk, Wiebe, Wharton.

Deputy Clerk: Yeas 0, Nays 52.

Mr. Chairperson: Clause 234 is accordingly defeated.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Just one moment, we'll have a break here just to check out some technology.

Is it the will of the Committee to have a 10-minute recess? And then we'll have ringing the bells for one minute after, okay? *[Agreed]*

The committee recessed at 12:18 a.m.

The committee resumed at 12:27 a.m.

Mr. Chairperson: The 10 minutes provided to ringing the division bells has expired. I am now directing the bells to be turned off and the committee to proceed.

Shall clauses 23 and 20–

Clauses 235 and 236–pass.

Shall clauses 237 through 241 pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear no.

All–okay, should we go back to–shall clause 237 pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion, the Yeas have it.

Recorded Vote

Ms. Fontaine: A recorded vote, please.

Mr. Chairperson: A recorded vote having been called, call in the members.

* (01:30)

Order. The one hour provided for the ringing of the division bells has expired. I am directing the–that the bells be turned off and the committee proceed with the vote.

As a reminder to all members, for those–these votes we will first do row-by-row count in the Chamber followed by the alphabetical order roll-call for the virtual members.

We're just going to take a member–moment to confirm all the members that–virtual members.

The question before the committee is clause 237.

Division

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

Yeas

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

Nays

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

Deputy Clerk: Yeas 32, Nays 20.

Mr. Chairperson: Clause 237 is accordingly passed.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Clause 238—pass; clauses 239 to 241—pass; clause 242—pass; clauses 243 and 244—pass; clauses 245 through 247—pass; clauses 248 through 250—pass; clauses 251 and 252—pass; clauses 253 and 254—pass; clauses 255 through 257—pass; clauses 258 through 262—pass; clauses 263 and 264—pass; clauses 265 through 268—pass; clauses 269 through 271—pass; clauses 272 through 277—pass; clauses 278 through 282—pass; clause 283—pass; clauses 284 through 286—pass; clauses 287 through 290—pass.

* (01:40)

Clauses 291 through 293—pass; clauses 294 to 296—pass; clauses 297 to 301—pass; clauses 302 through 310—pass; clauses 311 and 312—pass; clauses 313 and 314—pass.

Shall clause 315 pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion, the Yeas have it.

Recorded Vote

Ms. Fontaine: Recorded vote.

Mr. Chairperson: On—a recorded vote, call in the members.

* (02:40)

Order. The one hour provided for ringing of the division bells has expired. I am directing the bells to be turned off and the committee proceed with—to the vote.

As a reminder of all members, these votes will be first by row-by-row count in the Chamber followed by the alphabetical role call of virtual members.

The question before the committee is clause—oh, sorry. Yes, we're just going to verify that everybody's signed in.

The question before the committee is clause 315.

Division

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

Yeas

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

Nays

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

Deputy Clerk: Yeas 32, Nays 21.

Mr. Chairperson: Clause 315 is accordingly passed.

Okay, so now we'll go on to—*[interjection]*

* (02:50)

For the information of the committee, for the previous recorded vote on clause 237, we had an issue with the camera connection for the member of St. Boniface. The member had tried to connect in the vote but, due to the connection issue, he was unable to onscreen—to be—unable to be onscreen when he—his name was called.

I will offer the member an opportunity to register now how he would have voted now. Without leave, this would not count towards that vote.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I vote no.

Mr. Chairperson: The member would have voted no.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, so now we'll go onto:

Clause 1 of schedule A—pass; clause 2 of schedule A—pass; clause 3 through 5 of schedule A—pass; clauses 6 through 8 of schedule A—pass; clause 9 of schedule A—pass; clauses 10 through 14 of schedule A—pass; clause 15 of schedule A—pass; clauses 16 and 17 of schedule A—pass; clauses 1 and 2 of schedule B—pass; clauses 3 through 6 of schedule B—pass; clauses 7 through 9 of schedule B—pass; enacting clause—pass; title—pass. Bill be reported as amended.

This concludes business before us.

Committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Committee Report

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has considered the following: Bill 2, the budget implementation tax statutes amendment act, 2020, and reports the same with amendments.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for Seine River (Ms. Morley-Lecomte), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

CONCURRENCE AND THIRD READINGS

(Continued)

Bill 2—The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2020

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education (Mr. Goertzen), that Bill 2, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, as amended and reported from the Committee of the Whole, be concurred in and be now read for a third time and passed.

Motion presented.

Madam Speaker: Just as a reminder, the honourable minister, official opposition critic and the three independent Liberals can speak in debate for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. Fielding: It truly is my pleasure to speak to Bill 2, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act; I think one of our best BITSA bills in Manitoba history, Madam Speaker.

The bill implements tax measures and other measures and accountability measures that are far too long in the making, Madam Speaker, and—very proud to pass this bill.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): As I begin my remarks at this early morning hour, I want to begin by thanking all of the tremendous staff in the Legislative Assembly, in the Legislative Precinct, who have made our early morning sitting this very long November 5th possible.

So a special shout-out to the clerks, a special shout-out to the Assembly staff, to security, to the Sergeant-at-Arms and to, of course, all the folks with

Protective Services, who are in the building and, of course, to you, Madam Speaker.

Now, when it comes to the bill at hand, there is a saying that is ringing through my head: I vote no. This bill is not only a terrible piece of legislation, which is unconstitutional in stripping the rights of people, it is also undemocratic in that it takes away the rights of Manitobans to have a fair and open public hearing before their precious utility bill payments go skyrocketing through the roof.

We are in the midst of a pandemic, Madam Speaker: a pandemic in which Manitobans are stepping up. Manitobans are stepping up and doing the right thing, even as they bear tremendous personal hardship on an economic level. And what is this government's response?

Is it to provide, in a budget bill, financial assistance for small businesses? No. Is it to provide financial assistance to individuals who are without work? No. Is it to provide financial assistance in any way that would even come close to matching the commitment of Manitobans during this one-in-a-hundred-year pandemic? No. And that's why I vote no: because instead of doing any one of those things, this government is making life more difficult.

This government is making life more expensive. This government claims to be on the side of the working person and while over the years of cuts and cuts, they may have succeeded in saving that average working person 2 cents when they go to buy a double-double at Tim Hortons, with this bill alone, they will cost that working person hundreds of dollars more each and every year. And that's just wrong.

That would be wrong on its face to make life more expensive during the worst economic crisis that any of us can remember. But the fact that we are here at 3 in the morning and the government is trying to do it in the middle of the night, using the cover of the pandemic, just makes it all the more shameful, Madam Speaker.

And they know it's true. That's why they're all speaking out now, because they know that they cannot abide by the scrutiny of the light of day, which is why they choose to pass these budget numbers through the cover of night.

But if making life less affordable for Manitobans wasn't bad enough, we know that this government is running away from the public scrutiny afforded to Manitobans, to protect them from monopoly power that is presented by the Public Utilities Board.

It's a long-standing practice—not even a practice. I think we might go so far as to say that it's a legal requirement. It's in the statutes of our province that, if Manitoba Hydro believes it's necessary to increase rates on the hard-working Manitobans out there, that they have to make their case publicly, that they have to prove the need for that increase to people's hydro bills.

* (03:00)

Has Hydro done this in this case? No. This was all worked out behind the scenes, behind closed doors between Hydro management, this Premier (Mr. Pallister), the Cabinet and the minister of Crowns.

We were at committee this summer when we asked the Hydro CEO: was there going to be a general rate application? The Hydro CEO said no, there would not be a general rate application, because they knew that legislation was coming. And so we are here, some months later, 3 a.m. in the morning, when this government sneaks through their budget bill—and it is my choice to stand up for Manitobans every opportunity that I have.

And so I'm happy to be here, at the last opportunity afforded to me to tell this government to back off passing this bill. They still have a chance to vote this bill down at third reading, to bring back a new budget bill, that way—they would actually be happy and proud to stand up and introduce during the light of day, outside the cover of a pandemic, and maybe they'd even put out a press release around this future BITSA bill, because they were so ashamed of this piece-of-trash legislation that they wouldn't even put out a press release behind it.

They dropped it on a Friday. None of them do their best work on a late Friday afternoon, Madam Speaker. Most of them aren't even in the building on a Friday afternoon. We know that.

And so, again, I'm using this rhetorical attack to extend and olive branch and, in fact, ask them to do the right thing and join us in voting no at third reading. We know that they voted no against one of the foolish provisions that they had the temerity to introduce in this budget bill. I only wish that they would've had the good sense to vote against the other 310 clauses of this bill.

Now, if this wasn't bad enough, we know that there's another provision in this bill which takes away the rights of Indigenous children to have their day in court to try and seek restitution over the terrible

practice of taking away the child special allowance. *[interjection]*

Now I hear the members opposite speaking up, the two members in particular who were responsible for administering—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —this terrible practice.

Now, we know this practice is wrong, Madam Speaker, because it is headed for the courts and, by virtue of changing the laws of Manitoba to prevent people from having their day in court, this government is de facto admitting that the practice was wrong.

Now, not only was the practice wrong, but that injustice is now being compounded. It is being compounded by a piece of legislation that will pass between 3 and 4 in the morning, in the dark of light—in the dark of night, in the midst of a pandemic Madam Speaker. It's shameful.

It used to be that leaders would stand in the light of day and win the good will of people, and win the support for ideas that they believed in. However we know that this government does not believe in this bill. The minister who introduced it could barely say one sentence with a straight face before he sat down, so ashamed was he to be introducing this terrible piece of legislation. And we know that all the members of that caucus who were here prior to the 2016 election used to speak against this practice.

But that's the difference between us and them, Madam Speaker. For them, it's just politics. It was an advantageous issue for them to talk about then, in the past, but as soon as they get into government the tune changes and they abandon any semblance of a principled position.

But I tell you what, Madam Speaker, on this side of the House we are standing up for principles. We are standing up for people to have their hearing in court. We're not even pre-deciding the outcome of that court hearing, we're just saying that people should have the ability to object and stand up for their rights against this government.

And by the way, we are standing up for keeping life a little bit cheaper in Manitoba along the way.

And so this government, you know, that's still reciting the same old lines from years and years ago, is finding new and innovative ways to make life harder in Manitoba.

After closing the emergency rooms, after failing to prepare for the second wave of the pandemic, all their new energy and ideas is devoted solely to finding an innovative way—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —to make life harder on the average ratepayer, to make life harder for the average child out there and to make life harder for the average family out there by sneaking through a budget bill that could not be blocked, that could not be delayed and doing so in the middle of the night during the second wave of COVID-19.

So again, Madam Speaker, we know what this government is going to say to this bill. They are going to say that they vote yes: they vote yes to higher Hydro rates. They vote yes to taking away the rights of children. They vote yes to a Manitoba that doesn't work for any of us.

But on this side of the House, when you ask us any of those questions, what do we say? I vote no, Madam Speaker.

Thank you for my time.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): These are historic times. This is an—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamont: —historic budget, for all the wrong reasons. [*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamont: I was thinking of the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) comments about D-Day today and my relatives who served in combat in the First and Second World War. I had a relative who played for the Blue Bombers and served at D-Day with the Winnipeg Rifles because he was an excellent athlete, he made it quite a long way up the beach.

And had he lived until last year, he might have been one of the veterans the Premier insulted by not showing up at a D-Day memorial because he was on a corporate junket with his ministers. That's the kind of respect he showed to our veterans.

I think of my great-uncle Robert, who was shot down in a training flight and crawled back into the burning wreckage to save his instructor. And I contrast that with the complete cowardice of the MLAs who are considering voting for this bill. It's legally and it's morally indefensible and they know it.

The member from Portage, a former minister, called the NDP's decision to take the special allowance illegal and immoral—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamont: —because children in CFS are vulnerable.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. There is somebody speaking in debate.

Mr. Lamont: They are vulnerable to criminal predators and gangs. They end up missing. They end up murdered. They end up in jail. They end up homeless, sleeping under bridges.

And if Manitobans and Canadians ever wonder why thousands of Indigenous people struggle in poverty, you would be poor too if the government stole \$338 million from you and gave you a bus ticket to the Salvation Army and then passed a law saying you could never go to court to get your own money back.

Now, earlier in this evening—or, this morning, I heard someone on open mic taking pleasure in how angry the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) was when a vote was called, and earlier this evening, I confronted a number of ministers, outside, who chose to pay a visit to the teepee where I spent half my weekend fasting in protest over this bill.

And I was very angry, and they were certainly taken aback because it's clear to me they have no concept that someone in this place could possibly care about anyone but themselves. But for the ministers of this government to take a happy little break to go visit the site of a peaceful protest before they had to go vote to legalize the theft of \$338 million is beyond nauseating. It is morally bankrupt. It's a bit like taking a break from the Wannsee Conference to go visit the Warsaw ghetto.

And I have said many times there are good people in every party but let's be absolutely clear: this clause crosses a very dangerous line. This is a historic injustice. This is a historic theft. This undermines the rule of law. It is the betrayal of children, First Nations and the people of this province.

You know, Hannah Arendt had an insight that evil is banal, that it is justified by people who say they're just following orders. And I watched tonight as the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) spoke of this travesty and I watched as the member for Fort

Richmond (Mrs. Guillemard) and the member for Rossmere (Mr. Micklefield) snickered and giggled and ignored it.

* (03:10)

Every member who votes for this bill—which I am sure they will—will lose any moral authority they could ever lay claim to. If you can vote for this, it means you have no moral compass. Don't talk to me about Tommy Prince. Don't talk about Peguis. Don't talk about Orange Shirt Day. Don't talk about justice and don't talk about sacrifice.

Ask yourselves: Is this what you got into politics for? Because when you talk to your family tomorrow morning and you ask why you were up so late, you can tell them that you voted to take away the right of Indigenous children to sue get—to get money that you stole from them and then, when you were given a choice to do the right thing at a historic moment, you passed on it.

We will keep fighting this. We want this to go to the Supreme Court. Not just so that those children can get the money back, but so that every single person responsible pays the price for this disgusting perversion of justice.

This is a disgusting bill. It is absolutely reprehensible that this is even being considered.

We are going to vote no.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I just wanted to have the opportunity to put a few short words on the record. Our party will not be supporting Bill 2 because it does continue to create a larger wedge in our economic recovery.

We can talk about 800 Adele and how this government continues to put false information on the record. The facts are: the Province chose to evict vulnerable children from a safe space while causing destruction and trauma. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) and some ministers are, in fact, now facing court challenges because of the comments that they have made in response to their mishandling the contract with the owners of the building.

We can also talk about the obstacles for children in care that this government continues to put in place, talk about CFS special allowance and how this government followed the NDP's lead in clawing back funds for children in care.

In essence, Madam Speaker, this negatively affects children and youth for when they age out of

care. They are left with nothing. The Province should be responsible for ensuring that children and youth are prepared to reach their full potential when they age out of care, not continue to put up more barriers for them.

Madam Speaker, we also know that this bill and the 2.9 per cent hydro rate increase completely undermines our Crown corporations. This is why we have the Public Utilities Board, to ensure fair rates.

Madam Speaker, just very quick recap: this bill negatively affects children who are in care and it completely undermines our Crown corporations, and that's why we are not going to be supporting this legislation.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Two weeks ago, my wife Naomi and I spent 24 hours fasting in the teepee which is in front of the Legislature.

We did this because we believe passionately that children who are in care deserve support, that they deserve to receive the funds that were stolen from them by two governments in a row. It was an honour for Naomi and myself to be there. We began and we concluded with a ceremony.

I want to thank the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, to thank Arlen Dumas, to thank the First Nations family advocate, Cora Morgan, to thank Jennifer Chartrand, who paid so much attention to all those who were fasting. I want to thank the others who, over the course of several weeks, fasted as part of this process.

I also want to say a thank you to the members of the Bear Clan who helped with security. They helped while we slept, keeping the fires going and they helped by telling us their experiences, sharing their knowledge and their understanding of life for children in care and the struggles they came—face when they age out of care and how 'soow' many of them 'arve' been sent straight to a homeless shelter because there was no money for them because that money in trust had been taken away.

I also want to thank Judy Klassen, former MLA for Kewatinook, who joined me for a bit in the fast and who spoke up so eloquently on so many occasions in this Chamber on behalf of children in care and against this practice of stealing money from children in care.

Let me quote from some of the signs, because they express the feelings of those children in care. My children, one of the signs says, were left behind while the foster family went on vacation. This, says another

sign, is about human rights for kids. A third sign: I wish I didn't have to rely on food banks. A fourth sign: I wish I got support for my mental health, I really struggled without supports.

A fourth sign: \$338 million meant for the benefit of children in care was stolen by Manitoba. Another sign: stealing money from kids is totally shameful. Another sign: why is the Manitoba government trying to deny me my access to justice, taking away the right to take the government to court?

Let me give you, from personal experience, two who were in care: one who started out and when he was eight or nine years old, as he was walking along a road in The Pas, was picked up by a car and taken to a group farm in the Parkland area where there was abuse. What a start to his life.

But that wasn't it. When he aged out of care—I think it was age 16, but it might have been age 18—he was given a bus ticket to Winnipeg and said, you're on your own. He got to Winnipeg. For two years—two long years—he struggled, homeless on the streets of Winnipeg until he started to get his feet a little bit.

He has a heart of gold. He learned a lot from sleeping on the street and every opportunity he has, he has gone out to meet and to care for and to help those who live on the street.

His life has continued to be a struggle. His own daughter was taken away from him and he has spent 11 years trying to get her back. I'm still working with him and hope that one day he will be able to have his daughter back.

Another: this was a boy who was extremely bright. He tested on IQ—I think it was about 150. But he had some difficulties with autism. He went through 16 foster homes. He probably should not have been put into care. In high school, he was holding down three jobs and doing remarkably well, but he was taken away.

When he graduated from care, his foster parents packed up everything he had in a small knapsack and said, no, we don't get any money for you anymore. We're no longer looking after you. You're on your own.

He, too, spent two years on the street. He has struggled his whole life, but he has had accomplishments. He produced an amazing documentary. He cares about others, but he struggles not only with his autism but with post-traumatic stress syndrome from

all the trauma he went through. I continue to do my best to try to help him.

* (03:20)

He, too, has a son, who was taken away eight years ago, and such is the justice that he has not seen his son. He has not even had a single visit. It is extraordinary. This is the sort of thing that happens when you take away the money in trust for a child in care. You put them out on the street.

That one of the signs said the Manitoba government won't silence our children's voice. We must stand together. And I believe that the clause which takes away the right of children to sue to get their money back is probably going to be written illegal.

I will quote from a piece by Bruce Feldthusen on the unique public duties of care, judicial activism in the Supreme Court of Canada. And he says: historically the government enjoyed sovereign immunity from tort liability. Liability and tort depends on whether the government has agreed to be held liable in tort for the act of omission in question. Such consent is expressed in the relative federal and provincial Crown liability legislation. The Crown has only consented to be liable if the act or omission would be tortious if done by a private party. It is not consented to unique Crown liability. The Supreme Court has either ignored or effectively eviscerated this legislation when ministers try to provide liability for the acts that they do.

I think this is going to be thrown out. I can tell you a number of years ago I raised a lot of concern about clauses being put in by the NDP to protect ministers from liability. And the MLA for Steinbach, when I raised this with him, said, oh, such clauses aren't worth anything. They're usually thrown out of court. I think the minister—the member from Steinbach is right—that this bill will not hold up.

When I was out there, I was in a not quite good enough sleeping bag. It was cold. Think tonight of all those who are homeless, those kids who are cold.

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? Agreed?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Madam Speaker: All those in favour, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Madam Speaker: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Madam Speaker: In my opinion, the Yeas have it.

Recorded Vote

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Madam Speaker, on a recorded vote, please.

Madam Speaker: A recorded vote having been called, call in the members.

The question before the House is concurrence and third reading of Bill 2, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, as amended and reported from the Committee of the Whole.

* (03:40)

Division

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

Yeas

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

Nays

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

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

Madam Speaker: The motion is accordingly passed.

* * *

Madam Speaker: The House will now prepare for royal assent.

ROYAL ASSENT

Acting Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms (Mr. David Rees): Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

Her Honour Janice C. Filmon, Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Manitoba, having entered the House and being seated on the throne, Madam Speaker addressed Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor in the following words:

Madam Speaker: Your Honour:

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba asks Your Honour to accept the following bills:

Clerk Assistant (Ms. Monique Grenier):

Bill 65—The Appropriation Act, 2020; Loi de 2020 portant affectation de crédits

Bill 66—The Loan Act, 2020-2021; Loi d'emprunt de 2020-2021

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): In Her Majesty's name, the Lieutenant Governor thanks the Legislative Assembly and assents to these bills.

Madam Speaker: Your Honour:

At this sitting, the Legislative Assembly has passed a certain bill that I ask Your Honour to give assent to.

Clerk Assistant (Ms. Monique Grenier):

Bill 2—The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2020; Loi d'exécution du budget de 2020 et modifiant diverses dispositions législatives en matière de fiscalité

Clerk: In Her Majesty's name, Her Honour assents to this bill.

Her Honour was then pleased to retire.

* (03:50)

Madam Speaker: The hour being way past 5 o'clock, this House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until Tuesday, November 17th at 10 a.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, November 5, 2020

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