

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

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Myrna Driedger
Speaker*

Vol. LXXV No. 18A - 10 a.m., Thursday, November 19, 2020

ISSN 0542-5492

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
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
MOSES, Jamie	St. Vital	NDP
NAYLOR, Lisa	Woleseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
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 19, 2020

The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Please be seated.

Good morning, everybody.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

House Business

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): First, on House business. Pursuant to rule 33(8), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Notre Dame (Ms. Marcelino). The title of the resolution is Recognizing April 17th, 2021, as the 500th Anniversary of the Philippines.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the private members' resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Notre Dame. The title of the resolution is Recognizing April 17th, 2021, as the 500th Anniversary of the Philippines.

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Ms. Fontaine: Can we resume debate on the second reading of Bill 202?

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS— PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 202—The Health Services Insurance Amendment Act (Personal Care Home Staffing Guidelines)

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider debate on second reading of Bill 202, The Health Services Insurance

Amendment Act, personal-care home staffing, standing in the name of the honourable member for La Vérendrye (Mr. Smook), who has two minutes remaining.

Apparently, the member for La Vérendrye, who has two minutes remaining, is having some difficulty connecting, and we would ask is—he would like to speak to it and finish his speech. Would there be leave to go on to the next speaker? *[Agreed]*

Then, debate is open.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): It's my pleasure to put some words to the House this morning on Bill 202. The health and well-being of Manitobans has always been our government's No. 1 priority. And since the COVID-19 virus first arrived in the province in March, or at least was first identified in March, that priority has been even heightened.

Manitoba seniors, who have contributed so much to our way of life raising their families and building our communities, deserve the best in their later years. Many of us here in the House have family members or friends who are residents of personal-care homes across the province, and have a personal, vested interest in their health and well-being.

With the onset of COVID-19, Manitoba Health instituted steps to keep seniors in PCHs safe, and among these steps was strict visitor restrictions, enhanced screening for staff, enhanced cleaning and disinfection protocols and the implementation of the one-site staffing model designed to stop the spread of the virus among residents.

We know the risk of COVID-19 is very much present and will likely remain for some time. Manitoba's response to COVID-19 has been led by scientific evidence and the advice of our public health professionals.

In my family, my sister works in a personal-care home in Shoal Lake and has nothing but good things to say about the precautions that are being taken to ensure that staff and residents are safe. She has never indicated to me that there has been a lack of PPE or safety precautions.

Our government recognizes the necessity of personal visits to personal-care homes to visit loved ones for the mental well-being of residents and their

families, and we have worked diligently to support increased visitation at personal-care and long-term-care facilities, while keeping health and safety at the forefront of any decision we've made.

We were the first province to introduce and fund the construction of outdoor, all-season visitation shelters, which permit residents to visit with loved ones in a safe, sanitary environment, no matter the weather conditions outside. We have delivered, currently, 160 shelters across Manitoba. There's 105 external units and 55 internal units. I'm pleased to tell this House, Madam Speaker, that five of the external units have been deployed in my constituency of Riding Mountain, including one in my hometown of Shoal Lake.

In June, our government announced \$280 million in safety and capital upgrades at PCs in Manitoba. These investments build on our government's commitment to ensure health-care facilities are in line with revised Manitoba Fire Code requirements, including provision of fire suppression systems and increased fire separation enhancements to better protect residents, staff and the public.

Much has been made of the inspection of PCHs in Manitoba, Madam Speaker. All PCHs in this province are routinely inspected. The department conducts standards reviews at all Manitoba PCHs at least once every two years to ensure monitor—to ensure compliance with existing legislation and regulations.

Our government has increased PCH inspections due to the pandemic, and despite a pause caused earlier in the pandemic, we will have completed a record number of PCH inspections this year. To date, inspectors have completed 115 reviews. From 2010 to 2015, the former NDP government averaged 79.5 inspections per year. Since April 2016, our government has built 257 PCH beds, with another 253 in facilities in Steinbach and Carman currently under construction. That's 510 beds in total and a \$156-million investment.

The new beds will provide community care closer to home as part of our commitment to ensure better health care sooner. These investments support our PC government's commitment to increase the number of personal-care-home beds by 1,200 in Manitoba by 2025.

In our first two years in government, we built almost twice as many PCH beds in Winnipeg as the former NDP government did over a seven-year span. From 2010 to 2016, the NDP built a total

of 160 PCH beds in all of Manitoba. We've built 157 new PCH beds in Winnipeg alone.

Our government will continue to take the necessary steps to protect our most vulnerable Manitobans. We've increased annual home-care funding by over \$50 million, or 16 per cent more than the NDP did. We invested \$395 million in the 2019-20 fiscal year, versus \$332 million in the last year of the NDP government in 2015-16.

Under the previous government, Manitoba spent the most on health care of any province and received the worst outcomes and wait times in the country. Manitobans expect a system that improves their health and provides quality care. Members opposite failed to deliver results in health care for 17 years.

* (10:10)

Madam Speaker, we have a \$2-billion health-care funding guarantee that we announced prior to last fall's election. This guarantee increased the record level of investment our PC government provides to health care, which is already \$648 million more than the last NDP budget. In 2019-20, Manitoba spent \$6.873 billion on health care. That's billion—6.873—an increase from \$6.225 billion in 2015-16, which was the last year of the previous NDP government.

Our health-care funding guarantee, the first of its kind in Manitoba, began—began immediately after we were elected with our commitment to build a new state-of-the-art emergency department in St. Boniface general hospital. This new ER, along with the bigger and better ERs at the Health Sciences Centre and Grace Hospital, will help to ensure better patient-focused care and more of what they've been asking for. And Madam Speaker, what they've been asking for is more doctors, more nurses, more paramedics, expanded and upgraded hospitals and health centres.

Our government continues to make lasting investments to provide care sooner for all Manitobans. Since 2016, the Manitoba government has invested significantly to improve diagnostic services. Recent investments that became operational include: a \$3.4-million investment in 2017 for a replacement MRI machine in Brandon; launch of the echocardiography services at the Selkirk Regional Health Centre; general-duty X-ray machines at the Bethesda Regional Health Centre in Steinbach and the Altona Community Memorial Health Centre; a CT scanner replacement at the Portage District General Hospital; installations of several angiography suites at the Health Sciences Centre's—Winnipeg's Diagnostic

Centre of Excellence, including a replacement neuro-angio, replacement pediatric cardio cath lab and two vascular angios—one replacement and one additional; and the replacement of multiple ultrasound scanners at facilities throughout the province.

Other diagnostic equipment purchases and installations in progress include: a general duty X-ray machine, liquid chromatography system and nuclear medicine gamma camera replacement at the Health Sciences Centre; CT scanners at the Victoria General Hospital and the Health Sciences Centre; interventional radiology unit at St. Boniface Hospital in Winnipeg and general duty X-ray machine and mobile C-arm at St. Anthony's General Hospital in The Pas.

Madam Speaker, we're proud of our record in health care since being elected. I think all members know that health care is the largest spending item by the provincial government, and rightly so. The health and well-being of Manitobans are certainly in the forefront minds of this government, and I think in the minds of most Manitobans.

Under the previous government, Manitoba spent the most on health care of any province and, like I said before, received the worst outcomes and wait times in the country. That had to change. And maintaining the status quo was not an option for us. Now, careful consideration must always be given when making changes to our health-care system, and that's why we take advice of our system leaders, and we're currently working on the provincial Clinical and Preventative Services Plan, which is going to provide health care closer to home in the right areas of Manitoba so people don't have to drive to the city for a lot of those services.

The NDP government, Madam Speaker, in the past failed to deliver on health care. We will deliver. Hallway medicine is not a mantra of this PC government. And Manitobans deserve quality health care, and that's what they get under the direction of our minister and our colleagues in the PC government.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: As agreed to, we will now revert back to the honourable member for La Vérendrye, who has two minutes remaining.

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Vérendrye): The wonderful world of technology, and I was not able to log on. But—I know I only have a few minutes—or, a couple of minutes left in my time to speak, but I still have a few things that I would like to say.

COVID-19 is here and will likely be here for a while. Listening to the news, a vaccine sounds like it's just around the corner, but we all know what that means: most of us probably won't see it 'til spring or early summer if we are lucky.

If we are going to stop this virus, we need to listen to Dr. Roussin and our health-care professionals; we need to stop the community spread; we need to lower our case numbers. As the case numbers increase, the number of people needing our hospital and ICU beds increases and is overwhelming our health-care system.

I have been part of the International Legislators Forum for a number of years. This organization has legislators from North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. We have held two Zoom conference calls, one in September and one in October. Saskatchewan did not participate as they were in an election, but I believe they will be participating in our November call.

The last two calls, of course, have been on issues of COVID-19. In talking with those legislators, we are all facing many of the same problems: overwhelmed health-care system, shortage of nurses, shortage of staff and community transmission of the virus. But, Madam Speaker, I am glad to say that I'm happy to be living in Manitoba. In Manitoba we have a great team of health-care professionals that are leading us through this pandemic, and I must say, using scientific evidence, Dr. Roussin and his team have done a great job and deserve recognition for all they are doing.

I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I'm pleased to put a few words on the record on this bill.

Looking after our seniors is clearly one of the most important things and one of the most important responsibilities we have as legislators, we have as citizens of Manitoba.

And yet—I quote now from a Shining a Light, a message from the Long Term & Continuing Care Association of Manitoba talking about seniors care and long-term and continuing care. And this was released earlier this year.

And in this message it talks about 15 years of funding freezes. This is 10 years of funding freezes under the NDP and five years of funding freezes under the Conservatives, and these funding freezes have clearly put our personal-care-home funding in a very difficult position, to the point that many homes are

understaffed. And when you have homes which are understaffed, and you have people trying to look after high-acuity people, people in personal-care homes who need more care, not less, then it becomes very difficult and people are not able to be looked after properly.

We've seen this routinely. I raised this issue back in 2011 with regards to Parkview Place, which I think at that point was under a different name, central care, or something like that. And I raised this issue in 2017 when we had a whole series of concerns raised about a personal-care home in Portage la Prairie.

These are ongoing issues, as Jan Legeros in the Long Term & Continuing Care Association of Manitoba pointed out, and they've not been addressed.

We are now at the point where, in Manitoba, we are about 30 per cent lower in terms of funding per capita for personal-care homes than the OECD average. That's rather striking, and it shows where we are in terms of—under the NDP and the Conservatives—the priority that's been put on personal-care homes and on our seniors, and it has left all our personal-care homes in a difficult situation.

And it is not just Long Term & Continuing Care Association of Manitoba, but the Manitoba Association of Residential and Community Care Homes for the Elderly, which represents another group of care homes, and they report also that there has been consistent—consistent underfunding for many years, and they also report that when you underfund, as NDP and Conservative governments have done for so many years, that the quality of care has to suffer, that people are not being looked after as well as the people in the long-term-care homes want to do this.

* (10:20)

This is not a fault of the staff. We have staff who are excellent, who are trying very, very hard to do their best and to help our seniors, but the result has been with underfunding and understaffing, this situation has not been addressed.

Ontario has recently committed to moving to 4.0 staff—hours of staff per day per resident, and they have realized that they had made a very bad mistake in underfunding personal-care homes in Ontario, and they are now bringing it up to standard.

That's why we in the Manitoba Liberal Party support this resolution. It is timely. It is badly needed. It should have been done a year or two,

maybe even five or 10, years ago, recognizing the changes that were taking place in personal-care homes.

The result of the underfunding has been that we have had a lot of people dying in personal-care homes. This is tragic for so many families, for so many people in our province, and it is just heartbreaking what has been happening.

It is not just the underfunding. There has been government neglect in terms of what has been done, in terms of oversight. That became very clear in the situation of Parkview Place and in The Maples. And although there is a great temptation to blame Revera for every problem, the government has a very important role in oversight and making sure that things are being looked after properly.

And interestingly enough, we called, back in May, for a rapid response team to be put in place. And that rapid response 'team' would be a group of highly trained people, staffed well so that as soon as there was a case in a personal-care home, the rapid 'response' team could do an assessment, and if there were indications that there were staffing problems—as expected, because whenever you have an outbreak in a personal-care home, you often have to lay off a lot of the staff who have to isolate or quarantine.

So, without this rapid response team in place to assess and monitor and add staff—bring in staff from the rapid response team who are highly trained and knowledgeable about looking after seniors in personal-care homes, we missed being on top of the outbreaks in The Maples and in Parkview Place and in other places.

And it's not just the rapid response team. One of the things that has been more and more realized is that there is a significant proportion of people who are infected who are asymptomatic. And it turns out that, probably for a number of reasons, this is a particular problem in personal-care homes. It's a problem.

You have young staff, perhaps, who are more likely to be asymptomatic, but you have seniors, residents, who are less able to point out that they have symptoms. If a resident has a sore throat and they have a degree of dementia or incapacity, then they may not be able to speak up and say, look, I have a sore throat, I need to be tested.

And so you have in various reports anywhere from 30 up to 70 per cent of people in personal-care homes who are asymptomatic who test positive. That's a huge rate and it points to the need, as other

jurisdictions have recognized, that as soon as you have a case in a personal-care home, you have to test all the staff or all—and all the residents.

Now, there may be some instances where you have two separated units, unit A and B, where there's no overlap of staff and you can only need to test A, but for the most part, we're really talking about having to test everybody in the whole personal-care home.

Now, I raised this the first time that there was an indication that there might be an infection at a personal-care home back in April. I've raised this repeatedly over the last month as an objective that needs to be achieved, and sadly, it is still not being done.

And I am told, on good authority, that Parkview Place—Revera had actually approached the provincial government to do such testing and the provincial government said no. And so, Parkview Place—the—Revera had to hire their own private testing lab to do the testing, which they did, but it was very late in the game, and it should've been done much earlier right at the top of things.

And because we have had underfunded personal-care homes, because we have had a government which is not ready to prepare for the second wave adequately, we've had a complete disaster in the situation in personal-care homes to the point where we have outbreaks in a surprisingly high proportion of personal-care homes in Manitoba. It's a tragedy.

The government needs to act fast to correct their mistakes to make sure that they have—as they now have—a rapid response team that is actually working and doing its job effectively, it has the appropriate people there with infection control experience, and that the government 'newsds' to move right away to test everybody in a personal-care home, including staff and residents, as soon as there is an outbreak. So there are a lot of deficiencies that need to be addressed, that we agree one of these is to increase the staffing levels in personal-care homes. It's badly needed and it should be done now.

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Thank you for the opportunity to put a few words on the record regarding Bill 202, The Health Services Insurance Amendment Act (Personal Care Home Staffing Guidelines).

Madam Speaker, we all have a part to play in caring for one another. My family has always cared for one another, and I have seen this first-hand in how my uncle cared for my grandmother at home until her death. I'm not saying that PCHs are bad—my other

grandmother had actually been placed in a PCH in the city, and this only happened when it was no longer safe for our family to care for her. And I do hope one day, when it comes time for my parents to be placed in a PCH or they're at that stage of care, that we would care for them in our home until it's possible—or, impossible for us to care for them any further.

Madam Speaker, I touched on my [*inaudible*] grandmother who was in a PCH, and we did have a chance to honour her through a private members' statement that I had done shortly before she celebrated—or, after she celebrated her 100th birthday.

Madam Speaker, you know, our government is committed to ensuring the health and well-being of seniors and their loved ones, especially during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Our government, Madam Speaker, at the onset of COVID-19, we instituted steps to keep seniors in PCHs safe, including strict visitor restrictions, enhanced screening for staff, enhanced cleaning and disinfecting—disinfection protocols and the implementation of one-site staffing model, designed to stop the spread of the virus to and among residents.

Madam Speaker, I was alarmed the other day to hear of an actual outbreak in one of my PCHs in my riding, but relieved to learn that actually the information was that it was not amongst our most vulnerable in the PCH, but rather the staff.

Madam Speaker, our government introduced virtual chronic-care visits for PCH residents, which permitted a physician to have an appointment with the patient virtually as an alternative to an in-person visit.

Madam Speaker, the health and well-being of Manitobans is our top priority and as we move forward through this pandemic, Manitoba seniors who have committed so much to our way of life, raising their families and building our communities, deserve the best in their later years.

The goal of our Manitoba government is to support the health and well-being of seniors and their loved ones. Although the member tries to discredit this in their introduction of Bill 202, we know the risk of COVID-19 is still present and will likely remain for some time.

Manitoba's response to COVID-19 has been led by scientific evidence and the advice of our public health professionals. Under the Pandemic Response System, we have the tools to take targeted action

to prevent wild-widespread social and economic isolation and closures.

* (10:30)

We have always adjusted, where required, based on public feedback and the advice and health—and on the advice of health experts. And we have placed PCHs at red-critical levels to protect our most valuable seniors and staff and their loved ones.

With the recent public orders in-patient visitation to hospitals or health centres, now have all been suspended, with exceptions made on a case-by-case basis for patients receiving end-of-life care, in labour and delivery, as well as pediatrics. Designated family caregivers may continue to visit personal-care homes, which is incredibly important. General visitation may be suspended with the exceptions in place for end-of-life care. General visitation outdoors has been replaced with our new shelters, and a lot of the PCHs have taken advantage of this.

Each personal-care home has developed a plan to quickly address COVID-19. These plans can quickly be put into place and updated as needed based on the advice of public health officials. When a single case—resident or staff, volunteer or visitor—of COVID-19 is identified at a personal-care home, the site works with public health officials and infection control professionals to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

In addition to the current measures in place to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks, several additional measures may be taken during the outbreak in personal-care homes, depending on the identified risk. Any measures that are put in place are done to protect the most vulnerable residents and staff while taking their well-being into consideration.

At the same time, our government recognizes the necessity of personal visits and has worked diligently to support and increase visitation at personal-care and long-term-care facilities. We were the first province to introduce and fund the construction of outdoor, all-season visitation shelters, which permit the residents to visit with loved ones in a safe, sanitary environment. Some visitation shelters are already in place, as I mentioned earlier. We have delivered 160 shelters across Manitoba: 105 external units and 55 internal units.

Our government is also prepared for flu season—which I recently got my flu shot, along with my family, recognizing that we did not want to cause, you know, more confusion and more of a problem to the system. In preparation for the fall, our government

doubled its order of these high-dose influenza vaccines to address anticipated demand and expand the criteria for who can receive it free of charge. The high-dose influenza vaccine is an immunization formulated for people aged 65 years and older. Manitoba was the first province to offer that to this age group and those living in long-term-care facilities, in the interim or transitional-care beds, respite-care clients or—you—and—sorry, excuse me—unimmunized residents admitted to long-'tare'-care homes during the flu season.

This year the Manitoba government is expanding criteria for the vaccine to allow more seniors to get the high-dose influenza vaccine for free, starting—starting this fall. Residents have supported and—assisted living housing; those who are newly incarcerated or transferred from other federal or out-of-province correctional facilities; those receiving home-care services while on a waiting list for admission to a long-term-care facility, living on First Nations or in remote communities, and living north of the 53rd parallel.

In June, our government announced \$280 million in safety and capital upgrades at PCHs in Manitoba. These build on government commitments to ensure health-care facilities are in line with the revised Manitoba Fire Code requirements—include provisions of fire suppression systems and increased suppression enhancements to better protect the residents and staff and the public.

PCHs in Manitoba are routinely inspected. The department conducts standards reviews at all Manitoba PCHs at least once every two years to ensure and monitor compliance with existing legislation and regulation. Our government has increased PCH inspections, and despite a pause caused by the pandemic, we have completed a record number of PCH inspections this year. To date, inspectors have completed 115 reviews in 2020. From 2010 to 2015, the NDP averaged 79.5 inspections per year.

Since April 2016, we've built 257 PCH beds, with another 253 in facilities at Steinbach and Carman that are currently under construction. That's 500 in beds in total and a \$156-million investment. The new beds will provide community care closer to home as part of our commitment to ensure better health care sooner. These investments support our PC government's commitment to increase the number of personal-care beds by 1,200 in Manitoba by 2025.

In our first two years in government, we built almost twice as many PCH beds in Winnipeg as the NDP did from 2010–

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

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): Good morning to all my colleagues. I first, before I even speak to this, I do want to give a huge thank-you, a huge shout-out to all health-care staff in our province, obviously, but right across Canada, right across the world.

I personally know hundreds of folks working in home care, working in long-term care, working in mental health, public health, and we cannot forget that the folks that may not appear to be on the front line, but when we look at everybody in health care and those working in dietary, those working in housekeeping, even the folks that ensure the deliveries go from the receiving area out onto the floors.

We talk about—and we've had many conversations in regards to PPE. It's one thing of getting it to the health-care facility, to the long-term-care facility, but it's another to make sure it gets from the receiving bay to the front line, to the people that need it.

So I just, again, I think we sometimes—what we thank—you know, we say thank you to those working in health care. I think sometimes we all have a habit of being narrow-minded and thinking of one particular area in health care, when I really want to make sure that we're giving a huge shout-out and thank you to all the heroes in every department.

Madam Speaker, I've had the pleasure of sitting on the provider advisory council for six years here in Prairie Mountain Health, and we had the opportunity to bring folks together from all areas of health care and discuss, you know, what is going on, what is happening and ideas to move things forward.

At the time—obviously, that's more than 10 years ago when I had the opportunity to do that—you know, we would take recommendations from the provincial government, recommendations from a number of regulatory bodies, and around the table we would have discussions on best ways to approach these issues that are coming forward.

We had some pretty lively discussions, but again, it's because it was for the right reason. Everyone that's attending this session this morning—whether you're a colleague, another MLA yourself, the Clerk's office or even people that may be watching from home—we all

rely on the health-care system. We all want what's best for the health-care system.

I struggle a bit when I hear of, you know, bills like this that come forward where, you know, sure, we support health care. We want to help build health care. That is our mantra. That is our mandate as MLAs in this province is to represent our constituencies which all have some form of health care in it, but to do what's best for all Manitobans as a team.

* (10:40)

The place I struggle, however, is when we talk about staffing. Staffing issues are not new. We have had staffing issues throughout the whole realm of health care for years. Just this morning—just before we went on here this morning, Madam Speaker, I thought, you know, let me get an update of one area. And when we talk about we need more staff—absolutely. I would ask everybody to check out the stats this morning on— for Shared Health and look at the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority alone on the job postings. We look at over 645 postings right now in all areas.

And again, I have to keep saying it's all areas because there are those on the front line, there are those who are support or assisted positions, and those who do the work that are not in direct patient care. If we did not have the people working in laundry, if we did not have the people working in nutritional services and so forth, we would not have facilities, and we need to do what we can to enhance all of those areas.

So I support the fact that we do need to continue the work, the hard work that the regional health authorities are doing, what Shared Health is doing, in recruiting, in retention and in working together to find the best people possible.

As some of the other members have said this morning already, we all have loved ones in long-term-care facilities. And when I say that, sure, we may not have an aunt or an uncle or a grandparent—I mean, I'm in a spot here where my grandparents have—are all deceased. But I do have elderly parents and, you know, my step-father—or pardon me, my father-in-law and mother-in-law, you know, they're getting up there—well, I'm getting up there in age. And we need to have a system that is in place to care for everybody as we transition. And that's what we call the aging process.

And when we look at that—and talking—and I know the member from La Vérendrye talked about the International Legislatures Forum and—you know, which I was fortunate enough to take part in two of

their meetings so far. But I also sit on the health and human resources committee for the midwest legislative conference. And our conference, as you're all aware, was cancelled this year because of COVID, but we are still meeting; we're doing it virtually. And like this here, you know, we sit on—we sit on Zoom for, you know, two hours and we talk about some of the issues that facilities are facing throughout North America, and in this case in particular the midwest.

And we look at what's happening with us; it's not different than what's happened with our counterparts in South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota and the likes, you know. So it's not a matter of what you're not doing; it's a matter of what we are doing and how we can move this forward.

Again, we talk about different things that we can do. And the previous speaker, my colleague, was right. We have visitation shelters. It's a huge step. I don't know if any of my colleagues have taken the opportunity to go out and visit them, but I have. In my role here, I've made it a point of staying in touch with folks in the industry. I recently had a meeting with the vice president of long-term care in—for Prairie Mountain Health. We had a great conversation, and I've had a number of conversations meeting with care team managers throughout the province. As part of my own personal commitment of staying in touch with those in the health-care industry, I am sure that I go out and I spend time seeing what's new, seeing where I can put in a word and be their voice from here in government.

But they also have their own avenues, right. They also have their own connections. And I know when the five regional health authorities get together, which I'm very privy to the fact that the five of them do work closely together with Shared Health on a provincial clinical network. And I do get the opportunity to hear their discussions and participate and voice my concerns in some areas, simply due to my role in the Legislature. And I encourage all of my colleagues to reach out and stay in touch with your local facilities.

And let's not just sit back and complain. Let's sit back and actually talk to them and work with them in coming up with viable solutions that enhance the health care for all of us. I mean, we need to look into the future and say, what is it going to be like? Sure, we're hitting hard right now with stages of COVID, but the lessons that we can learn, especially in our long-term-care facilities, will transition into the future as we look at other health-care regulations that will come into play in the future. You know, when we have

other issues come up, you know, such as the seasonal flu, maybe other outbreaks that come up in something that let's hope is never as serious as what we're going through right now with COVID, not just in our lifetime, but ever.

I know we sit back and say this is the second time, you know, since the Spanish flu, but let's hope that we never have to go through it again and those that follow us never have to go through it again.

I know there's a lot of opportunity for me to sit on here and use my experiences in health care to say what happened over the 21 years that I was in that business, 17 of it of the NDP. But when we look at that, does it really help us look after our seniors? Does it really help us to look at our aging—look after our aging population when we should be spending our time working together especially during this pandemic, which could so much help move Manitoba forward?

I have had the privilege of visiting a personal-care home in Ontario—in Ottawa—and they don't call them personal-care homes, they're long-term-care facilities, and there are many of them across Canada that rely on different terminology, but we're all the same. We're all looking after our seniors.

So, Madam Speaker, I could go on and on and on about this. I'm very passionate about health care. I'm very passionate about seniors in our community. I even took two years of study on it, but I know there are others that want to speak, so I thank you very kindly for the opportunity.

Let's keep working together to look out for our aging population here in Manitoba.

Thank you.

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River): Good morning, Madam Speaker. It is with great honour that I rise virtually today to put a few words on record in recognition of our health-care system, the great workers and all that they do to support our seniors.

I want to begin by stating that health and well-being of Manitobans is our top priority as we move forward through this pandemic. Ensuring that loved ones are able to receive the medical care they need is a priority.

The ability to make tough choices which support the long-term benefits to an economy are never easy. The difficult decisions necessary to ensure the protection of sustainable quality services for citizens is never easy, but it is necessary for a government to

be able to have sustainability, not just now, but for future generations.

Manitoba has always maintained a health-care standard that supports the medical needs of those who are seeking medical attention. Like other geographic areas around the world, maintaining the well-being of our most vulnerable and seniors has been a priority. Steps have been taken to keep the seniors in personal-care homes safe through strict visitor restrictions, enhanced screening for staff, enhanced cleaning and disinfection protocols and the implementation of the on-site staffing model designed to stop spread of the virus to and among residents.

Madam Speaker, we have looked at what is needed to ensure the safety of staff and residents living in the care homes. As the needs, safety protocols and supports for staff increased, further steps were taken to ensure the health and safety of seniors.

We understand that to ensure the health and well-being of our seniors, it is essential to have support from family and friends. The ability to visit with those who best know you is key in maintaining both a mental and emotional health. With this in mind, we were the first province to introduce and fund the construction of outdoor all-season visitation shelters, which permit residents to visit with loved ones in a safe, sanitary environment.

The privacy and comfort of the units provide a safe space for seniors to receive and enjoy the company of those closest to them. To ensure that families throughout the province could benefit from these private visitation spaces, 160 shelters were delivered across Manitoba. The construction of these units was both accommodating to outdoor and indoor visitation options. A total of 105 external units and 55 indoor units were constructed and assembled so families could visit with their loved ones.

Madam Speaker, seniors are the base of our economy. Seniors have contributed to building an economy and building businesses which have developed the base for many Manitoba businesses. Seniors deserve the best in their later years for their many contributions to society.

One such way seniors can be cared for is through proper vaccinations, which help prevent the spread of flu and also assist the person with fighting a virus if they contract a form of the flu.

* (10:50)

The high-dose influenza vaccine is an immunization formulated for individuals over 65 years of age. Manitoba was the first province to offer the vaccination to that age group and to those living in long-term-care facilities, to clients in interim or transitional-care beds and to respite-care clients or unimmunized residents admitted to a long-term-care home during the flu season.

To ensure that all Manitobans are able to receive to vaccine this fall, the government has expanded the criteria for the vaccine to allow more seniors to get the high-dose influenza vaccine for free. The group, which has been expanded to include: residents of supportive and assisted living housing, those who are newly incarcerated or transferred from other federal or out-of-province correctional facilities, those receiving home-care services while on a waiting list for admission into a long-term-care facility, those living on a First Nation or in remote communities and those who live in the northern part of our province.

The increase in the focus of those receiving the vaccine will help safeguard those who are receiving support from caregivers and who are living in communal settings. The more people who are able to get the flu shot, the better we are at protecting those who need our care and those working on the front line.

Madam Speaker, we have further supported our seniors with an increase of over \$50 million in funding in our home care. Ensuring the safety of the homes seniors live in has been a priority. Ensuring health-care facilities are in line with revised Manitoba Fire Code requirements, including provision of fire suppression systems and increased fire separation enhancements to better protect residents, staff and the public, build on our government's commitment to have safe living spaces for seniors.

Madam Speaker, our government has committed to a \$2-billion health-care funding guarantee. This is an investment of more money, which has increased the record level of investment our government has already spent on health care.

Our health-care funding guarantee, the first of its kind in Manitoba, begins immediately with our commitment to build a new, state-of-the-art emergency department at the St. Boniface general hospital. This new emergency room, along with bigger and better emergency rooms at the Health Sciences Centre and Grace Hospital, will help to ensure better patient-focused care and more of what they have been asking for: more doctors, more nurses,

more paramedics and expanded and upgraded hospitals and health-care centres to help everyone.

This investment supports the needs of families and their loved ones throughout the province. We all want to have the insurance that, when we seek medical attention, we are able to access the professionals and their services. The additional medical supports will help alleviate the demands on our medical professions and offer timely response times for all seeking health care.

Madam Speaker, our government has invested in the future sustainability of our health care. We have taken action to put extra supports in place to protect our seniors, most vulnerable citizens and our front-line workers. The additional supports to the health-care system offer additional resources and new technology to facilitate medical procedures.

To further ensure the health of our health-care system and those seeking medical support, our government has followed the public health orders. In-patient visitation to hospitals or health centres has been suspended, with exceptions made on a case-by-case basis for patients receiving end-of-life care, those who are in labour and delivery, as well as anyone in pediatric care. This has been hard for family members who want to visit with loved ones, but essential in further protecting staff and individuals in our hospitals.

COVID-19 has offered many unforeseen challenges, which our health-care professionals and front-line workers have been meeting head-on. We thank them and their families for their commitment, their dedication and their bravery. The goal of the Manitoba government is to support the health and well-being of seniors and their loved ones, front-line workers, and all who may not be working the front lines but who offer their professional services so the medical professionals and others can work.

Our government has spent more money in health care to support staff, patients and in-capital projects. Many regions in Manitoba have benefitted from modern, state-of-the-art technology. I can think of the areas where I've grown up and how Dauphin received the MRI—very much needed machine, which has allowed individuals within the local community to access the the services for their health needs and not have to leave home, to be able to go in one day and not have to worry about finding a hotel room or an expense of having to wait in an area or having to buy meals, and instead go home and be comfortable in their own place waiting for the results. This

technology has resulted in so much for many of the rural patients. Further, it has also made them stay close to the care of those that they love and those that they seek the support from.

Our government has been investing in our future and in the future of all families needing health-care services.

Thank you.

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): I'm—feel very honoured this morning to be able to put a few words on the record and share how hard our government is working to keep our loved ones safe. Like my fellow colleague from Brandon East, I'd like to give a huge shout-out to all our health-care workers during these very challenging times.

Good governments make the difficult decisions necessary to ensure the protection of sustainable, quality services for their citizens, and our government's begun the hard work required to repair a lot of the damage and correct the course and move toward balance in a sustainable way.

The health and well-being of Manitobans is our top priority as we move forward through these pandemic times. Many seniors who contributed so much to our way of life, raising their families and building our communities, that they're—deserve the best in their later years. The goal of Manitoba government is to support the health and well-being of our seniors and their loved ones. Our government is committed to ensuring the health and well-being of these elderly. They built this beautiful province and worked very hard. And as they enter, you know, their final phase in life they deserve the utmost care and the quality that they worked so hard to achieve.

With the onset of COVID-19, we instituted steps to keep seniors in PCHs safe, including strict visitor restrictions, enhanced screening for staff, enhanced cleaning and disinfection protocols, and implementation of the on-site staffing model designed to stop the spread of the virus to and among residents.

And I can relate to this in my hometown in Swan River where I, being one of the caregivers, have the opportunity to go and visit my uncle on numerous occasions. And the screening at the doors, you know, have kept this environment very safe. And they really take this seriously, because we all know, you know, the dangers, what can come about from the virus taking off in one of our personal-care homes. As we move closer—it was a lot easier in the summer months and into the early fall when visiting in the outdoor

environment sometimes. And now we, you know, get the opportunity to visit inside of the in-or installations that have been put for visitations.

Our government introduced virtual chronic-care visits for PCH residents, which permit a physician to have an appointment with their patient virtually as an alternative to an in-person visit. We know the risk of COVID-19 is still present and it's likely going to remain present for some time. Manitoba's response to COVID-19 has been led by scientific evidence and the advice of our public health professionals. Despite sometimes we see that everybody is acting as a public health professional, we have to take that direction from our professionals.

Under the Pandemic Response System, we have the tools to take targeted action to prevent widespread social and economic isolation and closures. We've always adjusted where required based on public feedback and the advice of the—our health experts. And we've placed PCHs at the red or critical level to protect seniors, staff and their loved ones.

With the recent public health orders, in-patient visitations to hospitals or health-care centres have been suspended, with exceptions made on an on-case-by-case basis for patients receiving end-of-life care, in labour and delivery, as well as in pediatrics. Designed family—

* (11:00)

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

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 5—Immediate and Comprehensive Supports Needed for Manitoba Small Businesses

Madam Speaker: The hour is now 11 a.m. and time for private members' resolution. The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on Immediate and Comprehensive Supports Needed for Manitoba Small Businesses, brought forward by the honourable member for Fort Garry.

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): I move, seconded by the honourable member for St. James (Mr. Sala),

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has an obligation to develop immediate and comprehensive supports for small businesses and ensure they are prepared to withstand the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS small business in Manitoba is a vital part of the economy and its call to the Provincial

Government for supports throughout the pandemic have gone unanswered; and

WHEREAS millions of dollars of funds remain unspent under the Provincial Government's failed Manitoba Restart Program; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government, as of August 2020, spent \$425,000 on a failed economic ad campaign instead of providing supports to small businesses; and

WHEREAS the freezing of business loans since 2017 through the Communities Economic Development fund have negatively impacted small businesses; and

WHEREAS Manitoba small businesses have closed their doors, implemented safety protocols including masks, glass shields and internal policies to promote public safety for all Manitobans and are now relying on various levels of government to support them; and

WHEREAS small businesses in Manitoba were not supported by the Provincial Government to offset decreases in revenue, commercial rent costs, and costs associated with PPE; and

WHEREAS many small businesses are faced with large third-party delivery service fees as they have had to rely upon takeout and delivery services to stay open and keep people employed; and

WHEREAS some Manitoba small business owners have laid off staff throughout the pandemic and others have closed their doors permanently; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government "Gap Protection Program" did not include many small businesses as it excluded small businesses, fishers and farmers who did not have a registered corporation; and

WHEREAS the Provincial Government implemented code red restrictions during the second wave of the pandemic without providing any new supports to businesses that will be impacted the most by that measure.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to take measures to help small businesses survive the COVID-19 pandemic by implementing immediate and comprehensive financial supports and placing a cap on commission fees charged to restaurants by third party app-based food delivery platforms.

Motion presented.

Mr. Wasyliw: I am honoured to be able to speak to and bring forward this resolution and—which is obviously critical and important and timely. I'm a small-business owner myself and have been for years. I have a number of colleagues in the NDP caucus who are also small-business owners.

Small business is one of the sort of traditional constituencies of the NDP party, and we're seeing, at times like this, times of crisis, why that is. We have shown consistently, and we'll continue to show consistently, that we will stand up for small business in Manitoba, and that we will certainly attempt to convince this government to abandon this sort of hollow sloganeering and empty promises and actually provide real supports for small business.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

My own personal story is my family of newcomers that came to Canada, and they were all small-businesses owners, and the reason being they came here, they didn't speak English very well. There was a great deal of racism towards Ukrainians. It'd be difficult to get hired, and if you did, it would be difficult to find a job that could sustain a family.

So with few options and a belief in self-reliance, they often would start their own businesses, and we see that pattern today, especially in south Winnipeg with a lot of our small business being owned by newcomers. Small businesses obviously add character to the province. We're seeing with the bankruptcies and the closures, the loss of businesses that really define our neighbourhood in south River Heights, their Mona Lisa's is closed, Hermanos in the Exchange District, and of course, Segovia—people view this as part of their neighbourhood and part of what makes life good.

They also provide services and goods that often can't get purchased from large corporate stores, that they offer niche markets that wouldn't otherwise exist. These are businesses that hire locally, they buy locally, they keep monies circulating in Manitoba and any recovery of our economy will have to include small businesses.

But we know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that they are struggling, and not all small businesses are in the same boat. It depends on your sector. We know that the hospitality, tourism, arts and sports sectors of business have been particularly hard-hit.

We're hearing stories and, I think, we're all getting calls from small-business owners in their constituency that many of them have lost 70 per cent of their

business. Some have had to resort to full shutdowns depending on the type of business, and they have fixed costs that continue with rent, utilities, taxes, and they're not getting a break from that.

We've heard heartbreaking stories of businesses that kept staff on even when they couldn't afford to. One business was telling us that they have students on work visas, and if they don't get a certain number of hours, they'll actually get deported from Canada. And these workers are like family, and they can't afford it but they are finding them hours, even though the business doesn't necessarily justify it, in order to keep them in the country.

We've heard other businesses spend tens of thousands of dollars on upgrades in infrastructure, Plexiglas partitions, to keep their businesses safe and able to operate. Some businesses are spending tens of thousands of dollars creating Internet platforms. They have not received any help from this government.

The original shutdown, the government had allowed for PST deferrals and utility referrals. Those have all expired. We're now, arguably, in a second, more-worse shutdown, and the government is silent on that, and they have not come back and said that they're going to help small businesses with that.

Many of these businesses are only in business right now because of the federal government. And those supports from the federal government are inadequate, and there are huge gaps. And we say that it was this government's responsibility to assist and to fill in those gaps. But here's been the response from the Pallister government: they have admitted in Estimates, the Finance Minister told me directly, that they had no plan, that there was absolutely nothing in place to anticipate a second shutdown or to evolve whatever business programs were in place, and they still don't have a plan. They said that they wouldn't rule out adding supports in the future. But people need help now.

The first shutdown made businesses vulnerable. They had to load up on debt. Well, they're now full on debt and they can't take any more debts; they need grants. And this government, of course, sees no role for themselves. To add insult to injury, we have the Premier (Mr. Pallister) saying that we had the most generous programs in the country. That's not true. We know that's not true. The media has debunked that. And imagine being a small-business owner on the verge of collapse where you ask for help and this government sneers at you, going, well, we've got the best programs around, so, too bad. I mean, that's been

the sort of callous, mean-spirited attitude of this government.

I'll quote from the Premier (Mr. Pallister), who was quoted in the Toronto Star. He said that, we're prepared to spend more money if we need to, but there is a limit to how much the most highly indebted province in the country can do toward supports.

Well, first of all, we're not the most highly indebted province in the country; that's not true. And, of course, the government and—the Pallister government's reluctant to even help, and they're saying, we're not going to help. In fact, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business surveyed its members across Canada and found that Manitoba was the worst, that only 10.4 per cent of our businesses who were polled agreed that we had sufficient programs.

Now, one of the issues that we're hearing from small business that needs to be addressed immediately, especially with the hospitality industry, which has been hardest hit, is that the online platforms they're being forced to do business on, like Uber Eats and SkipTheDishes, their fees are upwards 30 per cent of the bill. So, when you order from one—a takeout thing and Uber Eats or SkipTheDishes brings it to you, 30 per cent of that bill doesn't go to the restaurant. And when you look at most restaurants have a 4 per cent profit margin, that's their profit. They're actually delivering food at a loss.

One of the immediate things that the government can do—because it's not something in a situation where you could argue well, you know, these businesses don't have to use these online platforms. Well, now they do, because they have closed indoor service. And so they're being taken advantage of. And one of the things that this government can do immediately is put a cap, a 15 per cent cap, on these types of services while the pandemic is going on. And this will keep many restaurants from operating, and it'll prevent them being taken advantage of and some companies making excessive profits because they happen to be in the right place at the right time as opposed to providing some useful service.

* (11:10)

Other jurisdictions have started moving. They have had these discussions in Ontario. We're hearing from small-business owners that they just simply can't survive; they can't act as a restaurant if somebody is creaming 30 per cent off the top from the bill. And either their services are going to become less

affordable because they're going to have to raise their prices or, as what's happening, they simply have to, you know, eat the costs and make very little money.

The other issue that was raised is scapegoating. This government has been scapegoating small businesses and this is going to have a lasting legacy. We're hearing of owners that had a senior come in for takeout, was tired, and sat down waiting for their food to come. And an inspector came along and said, oh, you're providing dine-in service. Here's your \$5,000 ticket.

That \$5,000 ticket could be the difference between whether they're open tomorrow or not, and it doesn't do anybody in this province any good with this government trying to deflect blame on its, you know, its flaccid response to these business supports and say that it's somehow small businesses to blame for COVID.

They're not. They are—many of them are responsibly doing their part. They're making all kinds of sacrifices. And the issue here before us is that this government isn't prepared to match that sacrifice. They aren't prepared to do the things that they need to do to recognize that this industry is getting hit harder than others and that we, as Manitobans, need to be there for them.

So thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Questions

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A question period up to 10 minutes will be held and questions may be addressed in the following sequences: the first question may be asked by a member from another party, any subsequent questions may be followed by—in rotation between parties, each independent member may ask one question. And no questions or answers shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Can the member for Fort Garry explain how he misinterpreted the eligibility requirements of the Manitoba gap protection plan and the recent Manitoba bridge funding program by saying in his resolution that in order to be eligible a business must be a corporation, when the programs simply require them to be registered with a business number at the Manitoba Companies Office?

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): I think when we talked to small businesses—I mean, we, at least, talk to small businesses. I don't think the member opposite does—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: –they're telling us that these programs are so hard to apply for and—including the bridge program, which you have to be fully shut down in order to qualify. We have businesses that are limping along with takeout service that will not qualify for this meagre support that this government is offering.

So I would urge this member to go back to his minister and say, listen, this program is not designed well. It's designed to fail and it needs to be fixed. And we need the—

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

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Just a quick question. I recognize that there are some very serious issues around delivery companies. I'm just wondering if the member could explain how a cap on commission fees charged to restaurants by third party food platforms would work—just because I know that SkipTheDishes, for example, has—for new entrants—has waived the fee. So they have actually done more than this government has for restaurants.

But if you could just explain how the—how that would work.

Mr. Wasyliw: I think it would be a simple legislative change that would prevent, during a time where these public health orders are in place, any business charging more than, say, 15 per cent for a commission, that would be, you know, considered an illegal contractual service and there would be a remedy, obviously, in the courts for that.

But even if you don't go that far, this government needs to sit down with SkipTheDishes and Uber Eats and say, listen, you know, how can we make this work for everybody and ensure that you guys still have a business at the end of this and that the people that you support are actually still in business—

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

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I'd like to ask my colleague, do you think the \$5,000 Manitoba Bridge Grant program is sufficient for small businesses?

Mr. Wasyliw: We know it's not. We are hearing from small businesses that tell us that, you know, they—thanking the NDP for fighting to turn the gap program from a loan to a grant, and they really appreciate that we did that and the government at least listened to us on that part.

But they said \$5,000 grant is not enough. They have fixed costs of 30, 40 thousand dollars a month, and that \$5,000 that happened just once—doesn't even happen every month—will not keep them in business, and—it certainly will help their cash flow slightly, but it's no solution. And if this government actually consulted with small business they would know that.

And if they were—

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

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Vérendrye): The member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw) suggested a cap of 15 per cent that he would like to see placed on commissions charged by third party app food delivery providers.

Where did he get this figure, and has he consulted with the delivery drivers as to if that would be enough?

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm not sure I fully understand the question of consulting with delivery drivers whether that would be enough.

We have consulted with small businesses and, they tell us that these fees are killing them, that they basically are sending food out the door at a loss and the only people who will be profiting from their business will be platform companies—middlemen who have the monopoly over the service and can charge these usurious rates.

And they're asking for balance, they're asking in a time of crisis that these caps be put in place so that they can survive and still have a business after the crisis. And I think that's a—

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

Mr. Sala: Many Manitoban businesses have said the the Manitoba Bridge Grant program is too little too late.

What should this government say to the businesses who are forced to close for good before this program was implemented?

Mr. Wasyliw: I think an apology would be a nice start.

This government has been gaslighting Manitobans and gaslighting small businesses. They've been trying to say that these programs are the most generous and the most effective. Well, if you're a small-business owner you know that's nonsense.

And you know that because you can't get these programs. They're designed to fail, they're overly bureaucratic. And if you can get them, they're of such trifling amounts of money that it won't do anything to keep your business open.

This government really needs to look at itself in the mirror and say, what are we doing here? Because this going to prolong our recession and it's going to make it harder for—

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

Mr. Smook: I'd like to ask the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw), like, the question I asked previously. Where did he get that 15 per cent number from, and does he know what it actually costs to deliver the food products?

Like, has he—where did he get that number from? And I suggested that—asked if he had consulted with—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Smook: —the—with the drivers or the companies. Like, where does he get the 15 per cent number from? Does he know what the total value of that 15 per cent would bring in to a driver in a day? *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: I see the gaslighting is continuing here today, and it's really unfortunate that the members opposite are not taking this seriously.

Trying to frame this as somehow the drivers are going to get, you know, hurt by this—the drivers are exploited by this and they get a fraction of what the platform companies get from this 30 per cent off-the-top fee.

So it's incredibly disingenuous to come to the Legislature and say that you're worried about the drivers when you're really worried about large multinational corporations who are right now making excess profits at the behest of our local small businesses.

On our side of the House—

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

Mr. Sala: I'd like to ask my colleague: What have you heard from small-business owners in your constituency about current government supports?

Mr. Wasyliw: They've been very clear that this government has been missing in action, that this

government hasn't listened to them and hasn't taken their concerns seriously.

* (11:20)

And to be clear, I mean, we have to deal with this as a sectoral problem. Certain sectors, like tourism, hospitality, art, sports, are hit harder than others, and they are asking for individual approaches to individual sectors. And this one-size-fits-all-help-nobody approach that the government's currently doing is not working for anybody. And they've been calling out for help, and they're seeing more and more of their friends and colleagues go out of business, and—

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

Mr. Smook: Once again, I would like to ask the member, he said that the drivers get a small portion of the 30 per cent. Does he have a figure exactly what that portion is? Like, it's—it would be good to know because 15 per cent, now, what is the driver going to get out of that 15 per cent?

I would ask—once again, ask that question: What are those figures?

Mr. Wasyliw: I think I would refer my friend to his Conservative colleagues in Ontario where the government there is also looking seriously at this measure. I would hope that this government wouldn't just be a mouthpiece for large multinational corporations and that they would take an interest in small business and would want to ensure that we could keep them open as much as possible.

And standing up today in the House and kind of showing their true colours, well, I guess that makes sense, but it's not going to do anything for Manitoban small businesses. And so I would urge them to support this motion. I think it'd be a good start to show that they're serious about small business and that they're now—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up, and the question period has expired.

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Debate is open. Any speakers?

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): I'm pleased to be able to put some good words on the record this morning of what our government is doing to support small businesses during this pandemic.

Small businesses are an essential part of the Manitoba economy. I don't think we can emphasize that enough. Small businesses employ many Manitobans and help keep food on the table for many, many people. I know this first-hand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I owned, operated and was a shareholder in several small and medium-sized businesses for 40 years prior to being elected to represent the citizens of Riding Mountain. I understand the ramifications of putting your money at risk, the sweat equity that owners put into their chosen businesses and the stress that meeting payroll every two weeks can bring.

The goal of our Progressive Conservative government is to support the well-being and survival of our local small businesses, something that was rarely seen under 17 years of NDP rule in this province. The pandemic has increased our resolve to ensure our businesses receive the supports they need at this trying time.

Our government knows that protecting jobs and growing our economy is—are the only options if our province wants to emerge stronger on the other side of this pandemic. Our government has and is continuing to support businesses, their employees and the owners who need it. Over 21,000 Manitobans have used this assistance to keep working or to return to work.

Our government has committed, to date, almost \$1 billion to help businesses through this pandemic. According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer in Ottawa, our government's investment in COVID-19 supports is one of the highest in Canada. Our government has committed to seeing these supports and programs evolve and adapt based on the needs of Manitoba's small businesses and the challenges that this pandemic presents.

With the onset of COVID-19, we developed programs to help small businesses survive this pandemic, such as the Back to Work in Manitoba wage 'subsigy', the Manitoba Gap Protection Program, the recently announced Bridge Grant, the Manitoba Job Restart program, further investment in the Manitoba Futurpreneur youth pandemic recover project, the B2B Manitoba personal protection equipment marketplace for small business, the Restart Capital Program, and we also partnered with the federal government to help support the Commercial Rent Assist program.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Back to Work wage subsidy provides small-business owners with a grant of up to \$7 per hour to cover 50 per cent of the wages

of new or re-hired workers. This program has a budget of \$120 million—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

I just want to remind the member for Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt) that he has to wear his suit coat.

Mr. Nesbitt: Okay; just hold on. I'm sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The back to 'worch' wage subsidy provides small-business owners with a grant of up to \$7 per hour to cover 50 per cent of the wages of new or rehired workers. This program has a budget of over \$120 million. I am pleased to advise the House this morning that this program will immediately provide small businesses with a \$1,500 cash advance for each new hire or rehire. This 'cass'—these cash advances will put roughly \$15 million into business operating budgets immediately. And this Back to Work program is not closed yet. Businesses have until December 1st to apply.

So far in total, our government's wage subsidy program has provided \$68 million in support, and 19,000 workers are enrolled in the program. Our government is currently reviewing applications that would add an additional estimated \$46 million of support for hiring by Manitoba businesses.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government has always adjusted when required based on public feedback and the advice of health experts. For example, our government increased the programs that have had positive feedback from small-business owners. On August 26th, our government announced it was enhancing the Back to Work program by doubling the amount of subsidized employees to 20 and increasing the maximum level of financial support available to employers from \$50,000 to \$100,000.

The Manitoba Gap Protection Program has provided \$60 million to nearly 10,000 Manitoba businesses. The \$6,000 conditional loan received by these businesses in the early summer has now been converted to a grant.

At the same time as all of Manitoba went into the critical red category, forcing many non-essential businesses to close, we announced the Manitoba Bridge Grant. This grant, which is exclusive to small and medium businesses, will provide those owners that are impacted by these new restrictions a grant of \$5,000. The Bridge Grant was introduced by our government because we realized that small businesses

have made sacrifices in this critical time in our province's fight against COVID-19, and this will be a bridge to the future by providing relief from the financial challenges created by necessary public health orders.

The Bridge Grant program has a total initial budget of \$100 million to help Manitoba's small and medium-sized businesses. If current lockdowns are still in place in January, another \$100 million has been earmarked for the program that's—so that small businesses can access more funding.

Our government has also announced that we will consult with the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development Winnipeg and Manitoba businesses on developing a plan and how to best utilize a \$50-million long-term recovery fund.

Our government has not just been helping small businesses; we have been helping our front-line workers. We implemented the Risk Recognition Program, which acknowledged the hard work performed and provided by nearly 80,000 Manitobans with a \$1,500 cheque. Our government has worked diligently to develop targeted programs that identified gaps in the federal small-business support programs and have filled these gaps with made-in-Manitoba solutions.

Our government has also created programs which will stimulate the overall economy, such as the Restart Program, which invested \$500 million as part of an infrastructure-based stimulus package which will be used to improve critical infrastructure within the province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition to these programs, smaller administrative changes were made to provide support to small businesses, such as instructing Manitoba Hydro, Centra Gas and Manitoba Public Insurance to not charge interest or penalties in the event that small businesses are unable to pay at this time. We've directed Manitoba Hydro and Centra Gas to not disconnect customers during this pandemic. We're—we encouraged the Workers Compensation Board to do the same and asked the WCB to extend relief from penalties for late payments.

*(11:30)

The \$37-million surplus at the Workers Compensation Board will be shared with those who contributed as a rebate. We have instructed Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries not to charge interest on

receivables from restaurants, bars, and specialty wine stores.

On March 22nd, near the start of the pandemic, our government extended the tax filing deadlines for small businesses impacted by COVID-19. This freed up funds so that small businesses could have more flexibility in their cash flow to manage the changing situation.

Our government eliminated PST on commercial property insurance, which has saved Manitoba businesses roughly \$75 million this year.

Manitoba Public Insurance issued roughly \$110 million in rebates to policy holders, many of which were commercial policies held by Manitoba businesses.

We worked with our municipal partners to ensure municipalities not charge interest on education taxes and also encouraged the municipalities to do the same with respect to their own taxes.

In addition to these financial supports, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government has provided virtual mental health support and therapy right to the homes of small-business owners and their employees who may be facing challenges dealing with these stressful times. So far, 4,000 Manitobans have accessed free therapy and mental health help.

From the beginning of this pandemic, our government has been in communication and consultation with small business. Our government established the Premier's Economic Opportunities Advisory Board in order to chart Manitoba's course for reopening its economy and renewing its growth in order to move the province forward from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our government also realized that having programs for small business is only half the solution. These types of businesses might not have a lawyer and accountant on staff to help them navigate these programs.

The second half of providing supports for small business is helping owners access the support they need. That is why our government created the Manitoba Economic Support Centre to connect small-business owners with the support they need and help navigating the programs available.

These programs, when viewed as a whole, create a comprehensive safety net for Manitoba small businesses and are part of the COVID-19-related

relief that our government is proud to offer during this pandemic.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I just want to thank my colleague from Fort Garry for bringing forward this really important PMR, highlighting the importance of providing the need to provide more supports for our small businesses here in Manitoba.

I think it's clear—you know, listening to our Conservative colleagues on the other side of the House in their questions that they asked, making a mockery of this PMR, asking questions about, you know, trying to ridicule my colleague's commentary around concerns around the high cost using third party delivery services—that they don't take this seriously.

And I think any illusion that the Conservative Party in Manitoba is the party of small business—which is how they like to think of themselves—has been completely shattered. And I think, when I consider my conversations with local businesses in our community and businesses around the province who I've had a chance to speak with, I hear the same thing over and over again and that's that, for the most part, businesses feel as though they are forgotten about by this government and they are not receiving the supports they require.

Small businesses in Manitoba, as my colleague states in this resolution, are in need of immediate and comprehensive supports and they've been ignored even though they're the backbone of our economy. These small businesses are more than just job creators. They're what make our communities great places to live.

I think about some of the amazing businesses in my own community, places like St. James Burger & Chip or Yafa Café or High Tea Bakery or Sargent Sundae. These are the kind of businesses that create the kind of community that we all want to live in. They're the kinds of businesses that define our experience of living in this neighbourhood. And businesses do a lot more than just create jobs. They define our communities and they also, in many cases, give back.

We've got businesses in our community here like for example, Willy Dogs, a great local restaurateur who's using some of his profits to support the local Grace Hospital, or our friends at St. James Burger & Chip that are using profits to support veterans in our community.

Businesses do a lot, and they are working hard in responding to the challenges that have come forward. They are dealing with incredibly fast-paced rule changes, oftentimes that they're learning about on a Friday afternoon and then, on a Monday, being forced to look for how they're supposed to change the way that they go about doing their business, oftentimes facing struggles in getting that information. And they're forced to make significant investments in PPE and Plexiglas to help keep Manitobans safe. So, they're stepping up. They're doing what is needed to keep Manitobans safe.

But their efforts aren't being matched by this government. And this government isn't doing their part to respond back to those efforts that have been put forward by small businesses. They're hurting, and many businesses in Manitoba are likely facing closure in the coming year due to the incredible challenges that they're facing and the lack of supports that they're receiving from this government.

You know, the Manitoba Restaurant Association recently stated that revenues are 10 to 20 per cent of what they were pre-pandemic. Many of them are operating with completely new business models. I mean, I think of some of the dine-in restaurants who have been forced to completely change the way that they do business, moving to a takeout model where they're, as my colleague for Fort Garry highlighted, forced to pay exorbitant commission rates to companies like Uber Eats, or 30 per cent commission rates, making it nearly impossible for them to make a go of it.

Now they're facing increased costs of goods. Food costs are going up due to scarcity around the world for a number of products. Different items are costing more and more money, and those businesses are struggling to cover those increased costs of goods.

Costs of rent, insurance, leases—none of those things are going away. Those still continue to be costs that they're struggling with. And yet, again, no real significant increase in supports from the government.

The costs of PPE and safety equipment are incredibly huge, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I mean, I talked to some local businesses that have paid upwards of \$10,000 for Plexiglas to keep their customers safe, to do what they can to protect Manitobans. And yet, those investments aren't being matched by the Province in responding to those efforts, and those businesses are often being left to cover all those costs on their own.

You know, credit scores for many of these business owners are being destroyed through no fault of their own. That's going to have a significant impact going forward. And yet, we see the government taking no action to help respond to these types of concerns where, again, through no fault of their own, business owners are sustaining huge hits to their credit, which is going to ultimately impact their ability to continue doing business for years to come.

You know, business are hurting and struggling under the ad hoc decision making that we're seeing from this government about closures. And oftentimes we're seeing decisions on a Friday afternoon, announcements that will require complete and total sea change in how businesses are operating, and businesses are left to figure this out over the course of a weekend and are given no ability to plan, you know.

So, when I speak with some local businesses, or you listen to local business owners like our friends over at St. James Burger & Chip, they struggle with the fact that, you know, new restrictions are announced on a Friday afternoon, and they had been given no warning of any kind, and there's just no clear rubric for decision making around why restrictions are being put in place and why these businesses are being forced to make changes on a dime. And they're just given no warning.

So, businesses need more reliability, and they should be able to look ahead and say, if cases get to a certain level or if we get to a certain infection rate, that I know that I'm likely going to be facing increased restrictions. So they're struggling under the weight of that lack of clear-clarity around how these decisions are being made and, in fact, most of these decisions that are being made seem to be made on a relatively ad hoc basis.

You know, all of this is happening, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we're heading into October and December—October to December, which is, for most businesses, the most profitable time of the year. But again, given the situation we're in, those businesses are potentially staring down the barrel of not making bank during this stretch of time. And, again, no indications that this government is going to step up to provide supports that are required.

* (11:40)

You know, the government likes to brag about their Restart Program, but if we look at what's happened we can see that it's wildly underspent. You know, they've committed only \$114 million out of

\$300 million that was announced, that's been actually sent out the door. What more needs to be said?

These programs are clearly not working. They're not getting funds into the hands of businesses as they're supposed to. And if you talk to any business owner they'll tell you. The evidence is in the—clear as day, we are not spending the dollars that were committed and that's pretty clear evidence that the programs are not well designed. We've got, you know, the heads of some of the most important business advocacy organizations in the province—people like Chuck Davidson, Loren Remillard, Jonathan Alward—and they're all saying the same thing.

I mean, you know, the Tories like to continue to talk about how generous their programs are, that these are the most generous programs in the country, that they're the most effective programs in the country, and yet, the very people that should be onside with them and agreeing that their programs are in fact doing what they're supposed to do are coming out over and over again stating really clearly that the programs are insufficient, that they're not hitting the mark, that they're leaving businesses to fend for themselves at a time when they need more support than ever before.

You know, it's only after they're getting called out by those business advocates that the government has now started to change their language and has started to be a little bit more honest about the nature of these programs and have reflected on the fact that, no, their programs are in fact not the most generous in the country.

And, unfortunately, the government continues to fail to listen, so their work is—you know, it's continuing to compound the struggles and the challenges that small businesses are facing. They're creating a huge risk of massive layoffs in this province with this third wave—or this second wave that we're facing, and their failure to provide supports. They're maximizing the chances of economic scarring in this province.

And frankly, their failure to invest in small businesses and to provide the supports required are just going to result in us having to spend a lot more money further down the road in employment and income assistance payments. And they are ultimately prolonging the amount the time that it's going to take for this province's economy to get back to where it needs to get.

We need to institute immediate and comprehensive supports for our small businesses now, and

I thank the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw) for bringing forward this resolution.

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Vérendrye): I'm glad to put some words on the record for the resolution brought forward by the member for Fort Garry entitled Immediate and Comprehensive Supports Needed for Manitoba Small Businesses.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know how important small business is to Manitoba. I am proud to be part of a government that has always stood up for small business. Small businesses are essential—are an essential part of the Manitoba economy. Small businesses employ many Manitobans and put food on the table for thousands of Manitoba families.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have been a small-business owner since 1978. I got elected and became a politician in 2011. One of the reasons I ran for office was because how the NDP government brought in increases in taxes, red tape. They were just not friends of small business. They put in all kinds of roadblocks to make it almost impossible for small businesses to exist.

They were not a friend to small business then and they certainly are not now. As much as they stand up in this House and claim they are, they are not. On that side of the House, they do not have the small business experience that they claim.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, La Vérendrye, the constituency that I represent, is made up of mostly small communities. We have no big box stores so basically every business in La Vérendrye is a small business. And I'm proud our government is committed to supporting Manitoba's small business.

Our government knows that protecting jobs and helping small business grow will play an important role in restoring our economy after we beat COVID-19. Our government is supporting workers, students, and businesses who need it. Over 21,000 Manitobans have used this assistance to keep working or return to work.

Our government has created the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) economic opportunities board, which is a board of accomplished private and public sector leaders that will advise the government on how to create jobs and build on Manitoba's unique strengths and help grow Manitoba's small-business community.

Since the start of COVID-19, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government has developed a number of programs to help small businesses survive this

pandemic: The Back to Work in Manitoba wage subsidy, the Manitoba Gap Protection Program, the Manitoba Job Restart program, further investment in Manitoba Futurpreneur youth pandemic recovery project, the B2B Manitoba personal protection equipment marketplace for small business, the Restart capital program. Our government partnered with the federal government to help support the commercial rent assist program and recently developed the Bridge Grant.

The Back to Work subsidy our government created provides small-business owners with a grant to cover 50 per cent of wages of new or rehired workers. This program provided up to \$120 million in support. Mr. Deputy Speaker, according to the Parliamentary Budget Office, our government's investments on COVID-19 prevention is one of the highest in the country.

The Back to Work program helps small businesses by alleviating some of the biggest burdens that most small businesses face: their payroll. And, in most cases, payroll is the toughest for small businesses to meet. In addition to this program, provided small businesses with \$1,500 cash advance for each new hire or rehire. These cash advances will put roughly \$15 million into business operating budgets. This program has not closed yet, and businesses have until December 1st to apply.

Our government also provided \$60 million through the Manitoba Gap Protection Program, specifically for small and medium-sized businesses, to nearly 10,000 Manitoba businesses. All the money administered through this program has been converted to a grant. So no small business will have to repay anything; it is theirs.

The new program our government created to help small businesses during this pandemic is the Bridge Grant announced on November the 10th. This new Manitoba bridge gap program will provide an immediate payment of \$5,000 up front to small and medium-sized businesses, not-for-profits and charitable organizations that were directly ordered to temporarily cease operations or to close their publicly accessible physical locations by Manitoba COVID-19 public health orders that came in effect on November the 12th. This includes restaurants, bars, beverage rooms, brew pubs, microbreweries, distilleries, casinos, recreation and sports facilities, museums and galleries, theatres and concert halls, as well as organizations like charities, not-for-profits and faith-based organizations that have been adversely affected.

Our government has also created programs which will stimulate the overall economy, such as the Restart Program, which invested \$500 million as part of an infrastructure-based stimulus package, which will go to improving critical infrastructure in Manitoba. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the spinoff from spending from this \$500 million will definitely benefit small business. There's a lot of spinoff. When there is work being done, whether it be on highways or building projects, a lot of that spinoff will go to small business.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Manitoba Job Restart program—our government created the Manitoba Job Restart program, which provided Manitobans who safely return to work and voluntarily stop collecting the federal Canada Emergency Response Benefit or similar program could receive up to \$2,000 for returning to work more than 30 hours per week. This has helped small business find employees. Earlier in the summertime when things were opening back up again, it was difficult sometimes for businesses to find employees, but with this program, they were able to do that.

* (11:50)

In addition to the larger programs, there were many smaller changes made to provide support to small businesses. The Workers Compensation Board had a \$37-million surplus that will be sent out to businesses as a rebate.

Our government eliminated PST on commercial property insurance, which saved Manitoba businesses roughly \$38 million. When we talk about PST and being a friend of small business, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the NDP, when they were in power, all they did was increase taxes, including the PST, including putting PST on insurance and a number of other issues that hurt small business.

Manitoba Public Insurance issued roughly \$110 million in rebates to policy holders, many of which were commercial policy holders held by Manitoba small businesses.

On March 22nd, at the start of our pandemic, our government extended tax filing deadlines for small businesses affected by COVID-19.

In addition to financial supports, our government has provided virtual mental-health support and therapy right to the homes of small-business owners and their employees who are facing difficulties in these times through 'alibiliti' CBT. This program, launched on October 13th, 2020, so far has—4,000 Manitobans have accessed free therapy for

mental health help. We know how difficult times are today with the stress of being in business or just the stress of having COVID around. We know that a lot of people are in need of mental health help, so our government is helping out with that.

From the beginning of our pandemic, our government has been in communication and consultation with small business. We have worked with small businesses when developing a plan to reopen Manitoba's economy back in May and June, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The members opposite can say what they want, but they have never been a friend to small business and never will. No matter how many times they stand up, they're always in favour of taxes; they're always in favour of things that do not help small business.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government has worked with small business from the beginning of COVID-19 and will continue to work with and support small business 'til COVID-19 is gone.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): It is a pleasure to put some words on the record.

There are—this is an important motion. There are—the other members from the government side have made a series of, let's say, inaccurate statements about the success of their programs, as well as this government's commitments.

I'll—just one example is they—the claim about the PBO, saying that this government has said that it has among the most generous programs. This government's own documents disagree with that. If you actually look at the fiscal update from June, it says that the PBO is overestimating the amount by over \$400 million.

So, this—I don't understand why the members continually keep making claims about what—that their own government doesn't agree with. The fact is is that, if these programs had been generous, if they'd been successful, you wouldn't have seen the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, and CFIB all publicly saying that the programs were inadequate, and we wouldn't have a situation where 53 per cent of the businesses in Winnipeg are losing money for every day they stay open.

The fact is is that most—the vast majority of assistance has come from the federal government, especially in terms of the federal wage subsidy. And

though I'm loath to admit it, the NDP, frankly, did cut taxes for small businesses. They took it from, I believe, 12 per cent to zero.

Now, of course, they also included small businesses when individuals turned themselves into corporations, you know, corporations which don't actually have any employees, have any revenue or do any business, but it means that a slight group of individuals were able to massively reduce their tax burden as a consequence.

I will also point out that—two issues: when this government keeps on talking about what the WCB and MPI did, those are Crown corporations. They're not supposed to be interfered with by this government, and there have been political scandals in the past about people interfering with and ordering Crown corporations to take certain measures.

The fact is that both MPI and this government has made huge claims about the fact—and argued with the Auditor General about this—because they've denied that they actually have any control over MPI or denied they had any control over the funds of the Workers Compensation Board; that was the basis by which they claimed to be running much larger deficits than they were. And now they want to take credit for the Workers Compensation Board and say they're actually responsible for that, and that they're responsible for MPI.

The fact is, if you look at these programs, you look at the gap protection plan, it was a fiasco, it barely had a 50 per cent uptake. The same is also true of the wage subsidy programs that were brought into existence. The programs that have been introduced have been loaded with all sorts of strings attached so that people can only apply if they don't actually get any federal assistance. So there's a general—there's a generous federal assistance program, and this so called gap—the reason it was a Gap Protection Program was supposed to be for people who didn't qualify. Well, it actually meant that there were a lot of people who couldn't double up when they needed to.

And the most recent grant program—the Bridge Grant program is also—I've heard from many people that they—many small businesses, that it is basically worthless. And I've heard—and I've talked to many entrepreneurs and small business who are not eligible for any provincial programs at all.

We are—this is—the reaction and the way this government talks about their supports for small

business is exactly the way they talk about the pandemic.

We are facing an actual crisis, and there's a lot of self-congratulation and patting themselves on the back when there are businesses—many businesses that have gone under. And the small businesses and entrepreneurs to—who ran those businesses now have a massive debt that they have to deal with. They may have—I was talking with people back in March who were at risk of losing their house because of the lack of supports from this government.

And I just got off the phone with somebody who was talking about how the only thing that saved them was the federal wage subsidy program. And somebody else said he only thing that saved them was the—and the only thing they qualified for was the federal rent subsidy program.

Now, which also could have been improved. It's had low uptake because this government hasn't brought in the rules that would actually require landlords to comply, to actually take part in the program.

So it is very unfortunate. I think we are—again, I've said this many times, we are facing a series of bankruptcies, we are facing a series of insolvencies, and we keep getting—pleading with—from the small-business sector, and this government has been responding with press releases but not with actual programs that work.

There's so much more that we can and should be doing. We've made many recommendations. To that extent, we should be doing more—there should be an entire plan for the hospitality industry.

There needs to be—we could be doing buyback plans, we could be doing all sorts of support. Small businesses weren't even given money in order to get ready to run their businesses safely. And, frankly, that we're all paying for the price for this right now. Both because we're looking at another very serious shutdown, which is going to cost a lot of people their livelihoods, and the government just isn't there for the support.

We've been absolutely clear about this: we need a harder lockdown, and it will only work if we have income supports so people can stay—afford to stay home; and business supports; and organizational supports so that businesses don't have to go broke.

We're faced with a choice right now between the idea that—sorry, the idea that the government is—wants

to punish people with fines of \$1,200 for not listening to the rules, but if people follow the rules, they're going to go broke, explains why we are in this crisis. That is because people are stuck between a rock and a hard place. And the only way that they can make a living and keep a roof over their head or keep their doors open to their business is if they keep open in the middle of the worst pandemic in—pandemic and worst cases in Canada.

So we are happy to work—to support this. And I would like to just to say to the member for St. James (Mr. Sala), I very much enjoyed his map on his wall. So thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. Vital—no.

The honourable member for Borderland.

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): So just a few seconds left on the clock, but let me just say this government brought Manitobans—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. When this matter's before this House, the honourable member for Borderland will have 10 minutes remaining.

The time being 12 p.m., the House is recessed and stands recessed until 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, November 19, 2020

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