

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, October 13, 2020

The House met at 1:30 p.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.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 3—The Public Service Act

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Crown Services.

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Central Services): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance, that Bill 3, The Public Service Act, be now read a first time.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister for Crown Services, seconded by the honourable Minister of Finance, that Bill 3, The Public Service Act, be now read a first time.

The honourable Minister of Crown Services.

Mr. Helwer: Government is committed to advancing transformation across the public service. The Public Service Act will provide a legislative framework for an ethical and effective public service for Manitoba by setting out fundamental values such as transparency, accountably—accountability, integrity and respect for others to ensure that they are consistently applied across the public service.

The Public Service Act will replace The Civil Service Act that is 134 years old. The new act will enable a modern and flexible public service.

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

Further introduction of bills?

Bill 4—The Retail Business Hours of Operation Act (Various Acts Amended or Repealed)

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Families (Mrs. Stefanson), that Bill 4, The Retail Business Hours of Operation Act (Various Acts Amended or Repealed), now be read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Fielding: I'm pleased to introduce Bill 4, The Retail Business Hours of Operation Act, various acts amendment or repealed. The proposal will repeal the retail business holiday act—closing act and The Shops Regulation Act to eliminate province-wide restrictions on holiday and Sunday shopping hours. We're going to maintain the status quo on Remembrance Day closures and retail worker provisions for Sundays.

Lastly, the bill makes consequential amendments to several acts to ensure municipalities have the authority to set restrictions on retail businesses in their jurisdiction as they please.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Bill 300—The United Church of Canada Amendment Act

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): I move, seconded by the member for Assiniboia (Mr. Johnston), that Bill 300, The United—

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Riding Mountain?

Mr. Nesbitt: —Church of Canada Amendment Act—

Madam Speaker: We've lost the sound on this and the activity. May I suggest then and ask, is there leave to allow us to come back to the member once the technology is fixed and he can then bring his bill forward? *[Agreed]*

Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): I am pleased to table the annual report

for the Manitoba Arts Council for the fiscal year 2019-2020.

Madam Speaker: Further tabling of reports?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I am pleased to table the following report for the Department of Justice, Legal Aid Manitoba annual report for the fiscal year of 2019-2020.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable Minister for Status of Women please proceed with her statement.

Cyber-Security Initiative for Young Women

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): Every year, our government has celebrated International Day of the Girl as an occasion to advocate for investing in girls, and we are continuing to build on that today. When we invest in girls and women, we invest in a better future.

October is also Women's History Month in Manitoba, a time for all of us to reflect on the legacies of those that came before and recognize those resilient women making history today.

The COVID-19 pandemic has required all of us to spend more time—more of our lives utilizing technology, and we're now online more than ever before. We've all experienced challenges in this COVID world. It has presented unique concerns, especially in terms of cyber security.

Students were suddenly required to learn virtually and that in itself created many challenges. That's why this year, our government is focusing on cyber safety.

I'm proud to share that, over the coming weeks, our government will be distributing USB data blockers to girls across our province through a number of agencies that work closely with young women. Now, more than ever before, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need for online connectivity, and we know that young women are most at risk of cyber violence.

Vulnerable youth often rely on public places like resource centres, universities, colleges, or even coffee shops or even shopping malls to access the Internet and charge their smartphones. We want to help secure their personal information and keep them safe from

exploitation. These blockers will protect young women from the hacking of their private data when charging their phones or mobile devices in public spaces.

Last week, I was especially delighted to personally deliver the very first supply of data blockers to newcomers employment education development services centre, and we will be delivering many more to organizations across the province throughout the month of October, as we continue to celebrate and recognize our future leaders.

I am proud of our government's commitment to the safety and well-being of Manitoban women and girls, to honouring the legacy of the strong women who have come before and to champion the dreams and aspirations of women of the future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

* (13:40)

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): On October 11th, we celebrated the International Day of the Girl.

There is still plenty of room to grow today on reducing systemic barriers and ensuring women and girls have equal opportunities in life. Globally and right here in this province, girls confront adversities—mainly stemming from poverty—that impede their education, prevent them from receiving skills training and making it difficult for them to enter the workforce.

The Status of Women Secretariat announced on Sunday a plan to give free USB data blockers to vulnerable teenaged girls across the province to protect their personal information while charging their phones in public spaces. And while I sincerely appreciate the Province's special focus on vulnerable girls, it shows how woefully out of step this government is with the most important needs of girls in this province.

Many children in remote and rural regions of Manitoba do not even have access to the Internet, much less to smartphones and USB devices, and children in poverty in urban areas don't have access to landline phones, much less smartphones or USB devices. During the early days of the pandemic in the spring, teachers and principals had to hand-deliver homework pages to students who don't have access to landline phones or Internet, much less a smartphone.

This government should instead put its efforts towards ensuring that Manitoba girls have equal

access to all levels of education, from early childhood education to post-secondary. This Province should focus our shared resources on ensuring universal access to menstruation products in schools, which has been a proven barrier to school attendance for girls whose families cannot afford these hygiene products.

And most crucially, this government must listen to advocates, who are the experts on the needs of Manitoban girls, when they ask for funding to support 24-hour safe spaces in our province. And if the Province wants to focus on preventing online violence towards girls, resources should be centred on school programming that can ably do this, not on a USB gadget that shifts responsibility to individual girls to prevent this.

Now, as legislators, it is our responsibility to make sure we tackle the issues facing Manitoban girls proactively and effectively and listen for what they ask for when they need it. Now, we must work together to prioritize the policies and programs with the greatest impact on Manitoba—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

An Honourable Member: Leave.

Madam Speaker: There has been a request for leave.

Is there leave to allow her to continue the rest of her statement?

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

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

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to allow the member to speak to this ministerial statement?

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied. *[interjection]*

Order. Order.

I would just like to make a correction. In recognizing the honourable Minister for Central Services, I had indicated a different ministry, but it is the Minister of Central Services (Mr. Helwer), and I would just like the record to be corrected.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: Any members' statements?

Northern Health Care

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Northern Manitoba is an area where health issues have for too long been not a priority for this government. I would like to say to the Premier (Mr. Pallister) today that northern Manitobans' health matters just as much as every other resident of Manitoba. This government has repeatedly failed to address the gaps in health care and is actually widening those gaps.

Since 2016, the government has failed to address Cross Lake's concern for more health services, namely a hospital. The community, being one of the fastest growing in the North, needs that hospital. This led the community to go to provincial government and ask for funding from the federal government, which they luckily received, but it's not enough. The Province needs to help out.

More recently, under this government Flin Flon has seen the closure of the operating room in the midst of a pandemic. Flin Flon also lost its only obstetrician in 2018, meaning there's no longer a doctor specialized in delivering babies on-site. Instead of finding a replacement, now the entire delivery ward has been shuttered, meaning that expecting mothers have to travel to The Pas or elsewhere for care. It is simply too expensive for new mothers and can cause unnecessary stress on what should be a celebratory event.

The Flin Flon hospital has now been reduced to a shoestring operation, as there is no longer an anesthesiologist on hand, either.

In Leaf Rapids, due to limited staff, when one staff member can't make it to work, the whole hospital had been shut down for a week.

The staff at our hospitals are doing the best that they can with what little they have been given.

And don't get me started on the shambles that NPTP has turned into in the middle of a pandemic. That will be for another day.

I am calling on this government to recognize that northern Manitobans are not getting the health care that they are entitled to and that they take action to reverse the health-care cuts and invest in a strong northern health-care system today.

Tall Grass Prairie Bakery

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): In September, Tall Grass Prairie bakery celebrated 30 years since opening its doors in the Wolseley constituency.

This is an achievement worth celebrating. Tall Grass represents so many things that our community values now more than ever.

In the 1980s, a group of Wolseley neighbours were meeting to worship, share meals and bake their own bread. These folks were concerned about the well-being of farmers, some of whom were struggling with poverty and suicide. From these conversations emerged a vision to open a bakery in order to support small-scale organic farmers and to change people's perspectives as to how food should be grown, how it should be made and how it should taste.

From the beginning, Tall Grass has milled their own grain. One reason that those cinnamon buns taste so good is that the organic whole grain may have come just from the farm yesterday.

Ownership of Tall Grass has also been a community endeavour. From the initial six friends who raised the money to start the bakery in 1990, there have been changes over the years. The current owners are founders Tabitha Langel and Lyle Barkman, along with Paul Langel and French baker Loïc Perrot. They employ over 60 people while supporting several small Manitoba farms.

Over the years, the owners have given away their grandmother's recipes, and during the pandemic, they gave away batches of sourdough starter to community members who suddenly developed an interest in breaking-baking their own bread. Past employees have gone on to open bakeries of their own, something the owners are proud of in the spirit of community development and access to good, nutritious food.

Broadcaster Stuart McLean once said of the Tall Grass bakery: They have learned you can't get rich when you pay fair wages to both farmers and staff, but you can make a decent living. To that I would add: fair wages, community engagement and environmentally sound business practices can change the world.

Congratulations, Tall Grass Prairie bakery on 30 years of changing our little corner of the world.

Fall Suppers

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Vérendrye): I rise in this House as we all return to the Chamber after the Thanksgiving weekend. This year's season of giving looks much different than years past. COVID-19 has changed our lives and the way we do things.

In past years, I've been busy attending fall suppers and celebrations, socializing with the constituents and enjoying all the great local fare each community has

to offer. Fall suppers are an important part of fundraising for many communities.

This year, many communities have changed their model of operation and have gone to a drive-through system for serving the meals.

I would like to thank all of the community groups for thinking outside the box and finding creative solutions to our new normal.

Fall is a beautiful time in my constituency of La Vérendrye. I am thankful for all the natural beauty we can enjoy, from the Sandilands Provincial Forest, Lake of the Woods, and many rivers and streams, and of course the farmland in all its beauty.

This past Saturday I toured parts of La Vérendrye and enjoyed some of its beauty. La Vérendrye has seen more than a seasonal change since this year's high-water event devastated many parts of my community. I am thankful for all the hard-working Manitobans that continue to work together to flatten the COVID curve.

We live in a great province in a country that we can get to enjoy many freedoms. With this freedom comes responsibilities. We all need to do our part in stopping COVID-19 and making Manitoba the great province it is.

Thank you.

* (13:50)

Judicial Sexual Assault Awareness Training

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Earlier this morning, I hand-delivered a letter to the Department of Justice, along with a copy to the Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen), suggesting an important piece of legislation be brought forward. It was actually Rona Ambrose, the interim leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, who first brought the idea forward, and I believe that our province needs to do the same.

The legislation would mandate provincial-appointed judges to take a formal course dealing with sexual assault. In addition to this, the legislation proposes that the Criminal Code require judges to provide their reasons for the decisions made in sexual assault proceedings.

Madam Speaker, Prince Edward Island, Ontario and now the House of Commons have taken action, and this is why I'm calling on this Manitoba government to do the same. I'm hopeful that the minister will take my suggestion seriously, and I

would be honoured to be the seconder of this legislation. Having said that, what is important is that we recognize the impact of sexual assault and bring forward this legislation as quickly as possible.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Riding Mountain.

Is the member for Riding Mountain there? Could the member unmute his mic?

Sheldon Kennedy

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Growing up in Elkhorn, Manitoba, Sheldon Kennedy dreamed of broadening his horizons and playing hockey professionally one day. His dedication and hard work as a young athlete carried him to a gold medal performance at the world juniors in 1988, and in 1989 he was named captain of the Swift Current Broncos, leading the team to the Memorial Cup.

For the next eight years, Sheldon played for the Detroit Red Wings, Calgary Flames and Boston Bruins. Outwardly, as his career caught fire, Sheldon was secure in his achievements as a professional athlete. Below the surface remained a painful personal truth that demanded to be heard.

In 1996, Sheldon Kennedy made the difficult decision to publicly charge his former junior hockey coach with sexual assault. It was a courageous act, disclosing over five years of recurrent abuse that began when he was 14 years old. Following his coach's conviction, Sheldon's charge grew into an urgent nationwide call to action, improving child safety in sports, schools and youth organizations. For over two decades, he has directed many critically important initiatives to protect vulnerable youth, notably working with Hockey Canada to develop the Respect in Sport program, establishing mandatory training for coaches to prevent bullying, abuse and discrimination.

In 1998, Sheldon undertook an 8,000-kilometre inline skate across Canada, which, besides raising public awareness, raised over \$1.2 million for the Canadian Red Cross Abuse Prevention Program.

In 2004, Sheldon co-founded the Respect Group, a company that works with schools, sports organizations and workplaces. In 2010 he began working with the Calgary chief of police and other child protection agencies to establish the Calgary child advocacy centre.

Sheldon has also worked for the International Olympic Committee and the NHL Players Association Substance Abuse Program, providing confidential supports to other survivors of childhood abuse.

Sheldon Kennedy will be inducted in both the Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame and Canada's Sports Hall of Fame as a member of the classes of 2020.

On behalf of all Manitobans I want to thank this small-town boy for 20 years of compassionate advocacy that has changed the culture of sport across Canada. Ensuring the protection of children remains a shared priority for future generations of parents, coaches and administrators.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

(Continued)

Madam Speaker: As there had been leave granted to allow the member for Riding Mountain to present his introduction of his bill, I would like to ask him if he's able to do that at this point.

Bill 300—The United Church of Canada Amendment Act

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): I move, seconded by the member for Assiniboia (Mr. Johnston), that Bill 300, The United Church of Canada Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Nesbitt: Madam Speaker, this bill amends the United Church of Canada act, to reflect changes to the church's governance structure.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Manitoba Hydro Rate Increases

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): With the stroke of a pen, this Premier has raised hydro rates for people right across Manitoba: 1.3 million people. That means household owners, renters, business owners are going to be paying way more on their hydro bills this December. That's a special happy holidays from this government, from this Premier and from their Cabinet.

Now, again, Manitobans own Manitoba Hydro, but they won't have an opportunity to present information, to argue against this rate hike. Simply put, it will be forced upon them by this Premier and his Cabinet. This is a mistake. People's hydro bills should be kept low and affordable.

Will the Premier stand up today and announce that he will cancel his plan to dramatically increase Manitobans' hydro utility bills?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, the interim 2.9 per cent increase in hydro rates pales in comparison to the underlying costs inflicted on Manitoba ratepayers by the previous NDP government when they proceeded—without consultation, without proper process—to engage in a massive overbuild of Hydro—dam and transmission line: not for the good of Manitobans, no. No, because, actually, the plus-10-billion dollars that Manitobans will be paying back, plus interest, isn't designed to serve Manitobans. It's designed to serve American customers.

The NDP believed that Hydro was theirs to manage for the good of Americans. We believe it's Manitobans' property for the good of Manitobans.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, my dad always told me that actions speak louder than words, and the actions of this Premier are that he believes that Manitoba Hydro is for him to manage exclusively, behind closed doors, without any input from Manitobans.

The facts are: Manitoba Hydro was profitable to the tune of \$100 million last year; it will be profitable to the tune of \$50 million this year. And yet, in spite of this, without—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —any hearings, without the opportunity for anybody in any of this Cabinet's constituencies to raise objections, this Premier is ordering Manitoba Hydro to dramatically increase their rates.

What's more, in the back of this nasty bill are provisions which will allow this Premier and his closest advisers to dictate future Manitoba Hydro policy for decades to come, again, without any public process.

Will the Premier simply stand in his place and commit to not increasing hydro rates this year and also

to removing every provision of BITSA that affects Manitoba Hydro?

Mr. Pallister: Well, Madam Speaker, if actions demonstrate greater—more openly than words do where people come from, I think the member has a lot of 'splaining to do, and so does his party.

The fact of the matter is, this bill, which I encourage the member to read, will protect electricity ratepayers from—for example, by requiring full public reviews of all projects—from ever having to see another massive boondoggle like the bipole west line ever happen again without their chance to have input. This bill will protect Manitoba Hydro ratepayers in a way they needed when the NDP were in power.

Now, Madam Speaker—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —the issue before us is whether Manitobans should be respected as the owners of Hydro or not. We believe they should. The NDP never did believe that.

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

Mr. Kinew: No one in Manitoba believes this Premier when it comes to Hydro.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Kinew: The reason is simple, Madam Speaker. It's very simple. On this side of the House, everyone knows that we stand for a publicly owned Manitoba Hydro.

If this Premier is the champion for a publicly owned Hydro, let him stand in his place today and commit that no other subsidiary of Manitoba Hydro will ever be privatized, and let him stand in his place and apologize for misleading the people of Manitoba by privatizing Teshmont, a profitable subsidiary of Manitoba Hydro.

We know he won't do it. He can't, because he wants to privatize Hydro. His interim step, of course, is to—[interjection]

* (14:00)

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —raise the rates of people in Manitoba.

We have long been warning that the privatization of Manitoba Hydro will lead to higher rates. Today, we see the government is legislating higher rates.

Will the Premier simply stand in his place in the House today and admit that this is wrong and he will instead remove every provision of BITSA that deals with Manitoba Hydro?

Mr. Pallister: Well, that dog won't hunt, Madam Speaker.

The fact of the matter is that the NDP and the Conservatives, when in opposition, supported a Hydro referendum bill. The difference is the NDP never put any muscle in it. They never designed a referendum. They never structured the bill so it had any muscle at all. We did that. This government did that, Madam Speaker, to protect Manitoba Hydro against a repeat of the kinds of actions the NDP hoisted on Manitobans—not once, not twice, but many times.

They were two and a half times over budget on Keyask. They were two and a half times over budget on bipole. And the big thing here, Madam Speaker, is they did all this without letting Manitobans know, without involving Manitobans in the process.

This bill protects Manitobans for Manitoba Hydro so that nothing like that can ever happen again, Madam Speaker.

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

COVID-19 Pandemic Response Demographic Data Collection

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, I'm not sure what bill the Premier's talking about, but the bill his government introduced raises hydro rates before the holidays this year.

So let him go out and explain that to the people of Manitoba, tell them why is he raising hydro rates right before the holidays.

Today we saw a very, very serious increase in the amount of cases here, of COVID, in Manitoba, Madam Speaker. Many people are very, very concerned, and rightfully so.

In order for public health interventions to work, they need to have buy-in from the general public. In order for the public to buy in, they need to have access to the right data.

We know that this government is collecting COVID-19 data with respect to occupation, with respect to income level and with respect to race.

In order to facilitate Manitobans from further buying into this government's COVID plan, will the Premier commit today to further breaking down COVID numbers, including by demographic categories like income, occupation, and to work with community groups so that race can be released in a culturally safe manner?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, last week the member called our government sneaky for tabling a bill. I was kind of surprised at that, given the NDP's record—and his personally—is, well, pretty much one of concealment.

So, now the member asks to do something that's well under way, so sure, we'll do that. But, Madam Speaker, I'd encourage the member, if he's going to throw charges around and make them personal, he'd better be careful throwing them from a glass house.

And I'll say to the member that the NDP's record on promising one thing and doing another is pretty strong. They promised before the election that they wouldn't raise the PST, and did. They said that the stadium deal was all in the best interests of Manitobans, and covered it up. And they promised that they'd build Hydro and it wouldn't cost Manitobans a penny. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: And, Madam Speaker, I got a bipole waste line that's costing Manitoba ratepayers more than \$5 billion right now.

That's a Christmas gift that Manitobans will be paying for a long, long time. Thank you very much, NDP.

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

Mr. Kinew: Should Manitobans be concerned that a Premier can't answer a direct question about COVID-19 in the midst of the pandemic? Should Manitobans be concerned that his brutal dodge of that question was applauded by the Cabinet that is making decisions about COVID-19 during the pandemic?

I will leave that to Manitobans to determine.

The point that I'm making here today, Madam Speaker, is that our team is calling for COVID-19 data on income, on occupation and, in a culturally safe manner, on race to be released so that Manitobans can have confidence in our pandemic response.

Again, if this information was to be released and we were to see that there were a particular number of

cases in the transportation industry, then maybe we could put into place more protections for those workers as one example.

We're all in this together. When will we all have access to the same data, Madam Speaker?

Will the Premier commit today to releasing information on COVID-19 cases broken down by income and occupation, and also to work with community groups to release race information in a culturally safe manner?

Mr. Pallister: If the member truly believes the words coming out of his mouth, Madam Speaker, about all of us having this challenge that we're going to face together, then he should step up, he should man up, and he should—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —face the challenge together and not be a Monday-morning quarterback.

The fact of the matter is the member just asked for information—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —which I have told him is in preparation by our department right now.

But the actual fact of the matter is none of this information would have been available under the NDP. We've stepped up our data collection ability here so we're able to share information that wouldn't even have been available after 17 years of NDP government, Madam Speaker.

So if the member truly believes—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —we're in it together, start acting like it.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, this guy trips on his front step and he blames the NDP. It's got to be difficult.

We're in the midst of a very serious pandemic: 35 lives lost, as of the most recent update. This is tragic, Madam Speaker. What we're calling for, on this side of the House, is greater transparency. We want the public to buy in to the public health measures. In order to facilitate that process, let's have a fulsome disclosure of information.

We know that this government has the COVID-19 cases broken down by income, by occupation, by race. They could work with community groups today to ensure that race information is presented in a culturally safe manner. They could work to ensure that the data will be disclosed so that every Manitoban can understand the contours of this pandemic and fully appreciate the need for all of us to step up and do our part to help stop COVID-19.

Will the Premier simply stand in his place today and commit that he will release data on COVID-19 broken down by income, occupation and other demographic categories by the end of this week?

Mr. Pallister: This government has a deserved reputation for transparency, Madam Speaker. That's something that the member opposite can't claim. He talks about—I don't know what his reference meant about tripping on the step; he went to the steps, he went to the doors of people in Fort Rouge and asked them to vote for him; he went to the doors of the people in his riding, not having disclosed his own record to them, and he speaks in this House about transparency.

Madam Speaker, transparency—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —transparency is what we're offering—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: The member speaks from his seat, Madam Speaker, but he won't speak about his record on transparency because he can't, and his own party covered up his record, too.

Now, Madam Speaker, transparency is how we're acting. The member opposite only talks about it. He never demonstrates it.

COVID-19 Spread Prevention Plan for Correctional Facilities

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): There are now confirmed COVID-19 cases at no less than three correctional facilities in Manitoba: the Remand Centre, Milner Ridge and Headingley, which is now in code red because of an outbreak. There is little information provided on the details of the cases in these correctional facilities, Madam Speaker.

We need to know who's been infected as well as the nature of the transmission. We also need to know what steps the government is taking to reduce the risk and stop the spread in correctional facilities.

What is the minister's plan to address COVID-19 for all persons in correctional facilities?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I do appreciate the question and the opportunity to update the House on our actions we have taken.

I will advise the House, since the onset of COVID-19 we have been working very closely with the public health officials, in terms of Dr. Atwal and his group, and we've been working very closely. We've changed the way we manage inmates. We've changed the way we process inmates. And we certainly have increased our personal protection equipment there to keep both our staff safe and certainly the inmates safe.

There is, currently in Headingley, nine inmates that are infected and two staff; so that's the status at Headingley today.

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

Ms. Fontaine: So there's now an outbreak of COVID-19 at Headingley.

We know that one concrete and immediate step that can be taken to reduce the spread of COVID is to lessen or stop completely the transfer of persons, staff or those that are currently incarcerated, between facilities, Madam Speaker.

* (14:10)

We need to know the minister will act and have a plan to stop any spread of COVID-19 in correctional facilities.

Will the minister commit today to stopping transfers between facilities as one part to help fight in the spread of COVID-19?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker, since the onset of COVID-19, we've been very cautious in terms of making transfers. With the onset of the positive results in Headingley, we have discontinued transfers and any new admissions to Headingley. That is in place already.

We will continue to discontinue visitations. So there'll be no visitations into that particular facility. We're also getting additional medical protective equipment there for staff, and certainly—and when inmates request personal protection equipment, that is supplied to them as well.

So, certainly, solid steps have been taken. Public health officials are on site. And further recommendations will be forthcoming, I am sure.

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

Ms. Fontaine: The minister just said that they're on the path to getting staff proper PPE. It's seven months into a COVID global pandemic.

Madam Speaker, we know that access to proper PPE and the training will be key in controlling the spread in correctional facilities. There needs to be a targeted plan to address testing, tracing and tracking in correctional facilities. We need to stop the spread between facilities.

It is essential for staff. It is essential for Manitobans currently incarcerated. It's essential for public health to all of our communities.

Will the minister present a plan today that keeps correctional facilities and everyone there safe?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker, our staff have always had personal protection equipment. We are simply upgrading that to a medical status equipment for staff that are in the impacted areas.

Certainly, there's been no transfers in and out of that facility. We've been working very closely with public health officials all along. That's why there's plans in place to deal with this pandemic as it now is impacting three of our locations.

So there's plans in place. Our staff are well trained to handle situations like this. And we will keep—make sure we'll mitigate any future damage to the inmates and, certainly, to staff. There's a plan in place and actions are being taken.

Parkview Place Personal-Care Home Containment of COVID-19 Outbreak

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, as of Monday, 74 cases and seven deaths are linked to an outbreak of COVID-19 at Parkview Place. It's simply heartbreaking and unacceptable.

The sacrifices families and staff have made to try to keep themselves and their community safe is not being met with the same resolve from the Pallister government. They cut long-term care before the pandemic and haven't done nearly enough throughout it.

What steps is the minister going to take now to stop the deaths at Parkview Place?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, the preamble is false, but let me respond by saying the following.

What is unacceptable is when 6,000 people in Quebec die in a personal-care home or 4,000 people in Ontario, and that is why this government took action, acted early, partitioned our personal-care homes, shut down visitation until we could make it safe.

We moved one-worker-per-site for all of our personal-care homes. We believe that these and other measures taken in a timely way by our government have saved countless lives.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, I think the families of the seven lives that were lost at Parkview Place would disagree with the minister's sentiment there.

Staff at Parkview Place have always done their best, and family members have reached out to me recently to let me know that the fatal circumstances at Parkview were unfortunately an outbreak waiting to happen, Madam Speaker.

They say that before the virus struck, the facility was poorly laid out for social distancing, with narrow hallways, crowded shared rooms and inadequate distancing in recreational spaces.

In their own words, whatever measures that were taken to quarantine and isolate known cases were inadequate or put into place too late. Seventy-four cases and seven deaths is the tragic consequence.

What will the minister do to ensure this doesn't happen again?

Mr. Friesen: The member should understand that they are reflecting on the very, very significant work of the regional health authorities, of key leaders of the personal-care-home delivery organizations, of the many people on the front line who have acted with intent and acted with sincerity to keep our seniors safe.

The member, and all members, should understand that those efforts at the front line have been heroic. They have saved lives.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, unfortunately, Parkview is still in the midst of this outbreak. We sincerely hope that more cases and deaths do not follow, and my heart is with the families of those who've lost loved ones.

But hope alone is not enough, Madam Speaker. Families tell me that much greater action is needed, including increased PPE, additional staff, increased cleaning and more mental health supports for patients during this challenging time. In other words, they're looking for the minister's direct intervention to ensure that this outbreak is truly contained.

Will the minister tell these families, and reassure others, that the—that he will directly intervene to ensure this outbreak is contained and that no more residents will die?

Mr. Friesen: Hope is not enough, and that is why this government has taken action—has taken significant action—to protect seniors. I think right now of the co-visitation shelters: that this government became the first sponsoring government to bring shelters that will enable visitation to go on between the residents and their family members who love them.

Madam Speaker, we are redoubling our efforts to keep our seniors safe. We will continue to be vigilant. We will continue to do all that we can with all our many partners to ensure that our seniors in Manitoba, both at personal-care homes and otherwise, are kept safe.

COVID-19 Pandemic Opioid Overdose Deaths

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): The Pallister government's Throne Speech does not include any reference to the word addiction, nor does it include any reference to harm reduction. That's a stunning failure on this government's part, given overdose deaths and the demands for addiction services has only worsened during this pandemic. In fact, we are greatly concerned that this government does not have a full understanding of how serious a crisis this is.

I ask the minister today: How many people have lost their lives to overdoses during this pandemic?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): This government continues to take the issues around mental health and addictions incredibly seriously, and that is why there have been \$42 million of new announcements for

investments in just the last seven months, Madam Speaker.

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

Mrs. Smith: Whatever this government is doing obviously isn't working, because families continue to lose loved ones to the overdose crisis that's happening here during this pandemic, and this minister refuses to tell and be transparent to Manitobans in how many lives have actually been lost.

So again I'll ask the minister: How many lives have been lost due to an opioid or addiction overdose in this province since the pandemic?

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, there have been 'overdoth'-dose deaths here in Manitoba, as there have been in every other jurisdiction in Canada.

I can tell you that COVID-19 is hard on populations, including those living with addictions. That is why we have invested \$3.5 million in the new Bruce Oake Recovery Centre to bring new treatment beds online.

It is why we are in the middle of soliciting for a 24-7 safe space for people in Winnipeg. It is why we doubled access to our take-home naloxone kits and then redoubled those efforts again. It is why we added 70 supportive housing units to help those who are recovering from addictions get help and safety and accountability and a path forward.

Madam Speaker, we are taking actions on mental health and addictions.

*(14:20)

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

Mrs. Smith: British Columbia is being transparent in releasing the number of deaths that have happened during this pandemic to overdose. Why is our Province not doing it?

So, again I'll ask this minister: How many people have lost their lives during this pandemic due to an opioid or addictions overdose?

It's a simple question. Manitobans need to know, and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) earlier said that his government is being transparent. So why aren't they being transparent about how many people have lost their lives to opioids or addiction crisis during this pandemic?

Release the numbers and let Manitobans know. I've sent letters. I've done a FIPPA. I've talked to families. I've called the minister's office. No answer.

So will the minister release those numbers today to Manitobans?

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, the member feigns an interest in these issues but seems completely unmoved by millions and millions of dollars in investments by this government over the past weeks and months to help people out of their addictions, meet them at their point of need. I would reflect on the fact that only weeks ago we opened Manitoba's most recent Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine clinic in Portage la Prairie. This becomes our sixth clinic that is designed to get people with addictions help sooner, co-ordinated, meeting them where they need the help.

Madam Speaker, the evidence of the overwhelming improvement to our system in results, as a result of RAAM clinics, continues to come in.

Non-Profit Organizations Provincial Funding Concerns

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, the pandemic is being used as an excuse to cut the funding of non-profit organizations across the province. Environmental organizations such as the Green Action Centre, Climate Change Connection and the Manitoba Eco-Network all saw their funding cut.

The programs the minister pointed to as potential replacements, including the Conservation and Climate Fund, have yet to announce any funding six months into the fiscal year. This was a deliberate means to starve and silence the important work of non-governmental organizations in this province.

Will the minister reverse these cuts to non-governmental organizations?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate): I assure the member opposite there have been no cuts to funding for green initiatives. In fact, we have doubled our amounts of investments from \$300,000 to \$600,000 this year, and we hope to see in future even more investments in green projects.

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

Ms. Naylor: Madam Speaker, non-profits of all kinds are feeling the effects of the Pallister government's austerity. On September 30th, the Manitoba Federation of Non-profit Organizations closed its

doors. The Pallister government cut its funding as of December 2019, but didn't even tell them until January.

With provincial funding cut and now a pandemic, the organization was given no time to transition their operations. It's very unfortunate, but a decision the Pallister government has purposely made.

Why is the Pallister government gutting non-profit organizations?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Municipal Relations): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take the member's question and put some accurate information on the record.

We have been working with our non-profit sector throughout the entire pandemic. Work had commenced at the onset of the pandemic to reach out and to talk to them about their needs and their shifting needs in light of the pandemic. We have made money available. We have advanced funding to non-profits as soon as possible, and we have sped up the flowing of dollars to—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: —all of these organizations so that they could get through the pandemic. We've also—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: —made significant investments in community throughout this pandemic so that we can have supports to community when they're needed most.

The member is putting false information on the record. We have been working with community. We have been enhancing funding to communities, and we'll continue to do that. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Wolseley, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Naylor: Madam Speaker, I'm going to repeat—because I'm not sure that the name of the organization was heard over the heckling—but the Manitoba Federation of Non-profit Organizations closed its doors due to funding cuts by this government. The Pallister government's message is being received loud and clear by our non-profit organizations: you are on your own.

It does not need to be this way. They could have been given time to transition their operations. Instead,

they've been notified of cuts in a year with little time to adapt. These are important organizations that drive change and represent voices that we need now more than ever. The minister needs to reconsider and reverse these cuts.

Will she do so today? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: In addition to flowing dollars rapidly to our non-profit agencies, our government supersized the Building Sustainable Communities fund to \$10 million. We have been flowing community dollars to rec centres and community centres—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: —and trails throughout the province since the beginning of the pandemic. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: We also doubled the funding—the member might want to pay attention and listen to this because I know there were significant—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: —dollars that went right to the community of St. Johns, to Concordia, to Wolseley, to every community—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

I'm just going to ask that respect be shown when answers are being given or trying to be given. As members sit and heckle, I'm having difficulty hearing the answer and I'm going to ask the member to patiently listen and show some respect for the members that are trying to answer questions.

The honourable member still has about 17 seconds left. The honourable minister.

Ms. Squires: While the member may not be proud of the funds that are being invested in her community, on this side of the House, we're very proud of the money that we're putting into Fort Rouge, into Concordia, into all the communities throughout all of Manitoba.

We doubled the funding for The Green Team. We doubled the funding for the Building Sustainable Communities. We're working with communities throughout this province and we'll continue to do so.

Children's Special Allowance Legal Resources for CFS Agencies

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): For months, we've been asking this government to remove a truly offensive clause from the budget bill denying children who are in care their day in court. This is one of the most disgusting and immoral pieces of legislation I have ever seen.

For years, the Manitoba government, under the NDP and PCs alike, took money intended for children in care. Those children could build up a nest egg when they aged out, and that was all taken away. There are people living under bridges today, at the Salvation Army or the Main Street Project because this government took what was theirs.

The government is the legal parent, and for thousands of Indigenous children, the Manitoba government has been and continues to be an—abusive, cruel, two-faced, vindictive and greedy. We all know it was wrong.

The question is how the Premier can possibly justify not just the theft of over \$300 million from Indigenous children in care, but blocking those children from getting justice in the courts.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, that was rather harsh, Madam Speaker. For a minute, I thought he was talking about Justin Trudeau's firing of Bill Morneau, the former Finance Minister: vindictive, unjustified.

These questions are directed at a government that is ending the practice of clawing back federal support that goes to Indigenous child-welfare agencies.

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

Mr. Lamont: Let's be clear: the government defended this by saying they were trying to protect taxpayers. Taxpayers aren't in the constitution. Every one of us has a higher obligation to citizens and to every resident of Manitoba, to justice and to the law. Children are citizens. They don't necessarily pay taxes. Some seniors don't pay taxes. Indigenous people and First Nations, contrary to popular belief, play plenty of taxes. They certainly pay a price for living in this society.

This is not about protecting taxpayers. The PC Cabinet is trying to vote itself immunity to ministers for the consequences of their actions of stealing \$330 million that forced vulnerable people even further into poverty.

Will this government, for once, do the right thing and drop these clauses so the children can get their day in court?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Families): Madam Speaker, the—requiring agencies and authorities to remit the payments for the children's special allowance back to the provincial government is a practice that was held under the previous NDP government. We have ended that practice.

* (14:30)

We've gone towards single-envelope funding, which is working very well in the province of Manitoba. In fact, in the last three years alone, as a result of allowing those authorities and agencies to invest in preventative measures to keep families together, we have seen a reduction in the number of children in care for the last three consecutive years, something that never happened. In fact, under the NDP government, it doubled.

Shame on them, Madam Speaker.

Health-Care Aides Position Vacancies

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): With all the additional challenges that care facilities are facing right now, there is a higher need for more health-care aides. Now, there are specific facilities here in Manitoba where there are open health-care aide positions. However, I'm being told that these positions are not being filled.

What will this government do to help encourage these positions be filled and ensure residents are being provided with the best care and health-care aides are not being overworked?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I thank the member for the question.

We have made very clear to the service delivery organizations providing long-term care in Manitoba that they should keep their receipts, that the expenses that they are incurring that are COVID-19-involved, for additional portering, additional infection prevention and control, other expenses that they are incurring, people to facilitate the co-visitation—all of that should be collected. All of that will be repaid. The Province will make them whole. We want to make sure that we are there to help those long-term-care homes that provide the personnel and the resources that they need to keep their residents safe.

Conservation Initiatives Funding Announcement

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Vérendrye): Our government knows that one of the best ways to protect our environment for the next generation is to invest in conservation. My constituency and all of Manitoba is full of natural beauty that provides incredible opportunities for recreation and is critical to our province's biodiversity.

Our government continues to invest in important projects through the Conservation Trust, the GROW Trust, and the Wetlands GROW Trust.

Can the minister please tell the House about the latest investment in these great initiatives?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development): I certainly thank the member for La Vérendrye for bringing up this subject.

Our government will provide up to \$8.6 million for Manitoba-based groups to support conservation projects through the Conservation Trust, the GROW Trust, the Wetlands GROW Trust. These projects will protect our water quality, sustainably manage our natural resources and leave a legacy for all Manitobans to enjoy by creating environmental benefits for decades to come.

The next intake for projects is now open. To apply, visit the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation website at mhhc.mb.ca or contact your local MLA for more information.

Northern Manitoba Economic Investment

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): Madam Speaker, the North is being left behind by the Pallister government. As we speak, Vale is reviewing its operations with an eye on reducing its workforce. It is so unfortunate.

The Pallister government has known for years that northern Manitoba is in the midst of losing 2,000 good-paying jobs, and now, in the most recent talks of cuts, it is happening amidst a pandemic. This is a recipe for disaster.

I ask the minister: Will they do anything to address the need for good-paying jobs in northern Manitoba?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development): Well, Madam Speaker, Vale in Thompson has announced that they are doing a review of their mining operations, and they've been

keeping us in close contact with those. They haven't made any decisions finally on what they're doing.

I should add, though, that there is a record amount of investment coming into the mining community in this coming year, in terms of exploration, mineral exploration up—all across the province, and we look forward to seeing that investment helping good-paying jobs all across Manitoba.

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

Ms. Adams: Madam Speaker, here is what the Pallister government actually did. Business loans for the Communities Economic Development Fund have been frozen for more than three years. They ripped up the mining reserve fund, whose purpose it was to support communities facing disruptions in their community due to change in production. They replaced it with the exploration fund, which has yet to flow a single dollar to anyone, let alone a northern community.

In other words, their lack of action speaks for itself.

Why is the Pallister government abandoning northern Manitoba?

Mr. Pedersen: Well, Madam Speaker, the minister is just—or, the member is just totally wrong. *[interjection]* Have your fun.

Madam Speaker, the community mining development fund has now been given \$20 million. It's being run by the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce. They've actually approved three projects to date, and I know there's more projects coming. And this is to—how to develop economic development in northern communities, which is what the goal of the program should be and it never was under the previous government.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

Speaker's Ruling

Madam Speaker: I have a ruling for the House.

On March 11th, 2020, the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) raised a matter of privilege regarding the government's failure to bring forward their first-quarter financial report and how, in doing so, the government has impeded the member's ability to do his job and to hold the government to account.

The member concluded his remarks by moving, and I quote, that this matter be moved to an all-party committee for consideration. End quote.

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

As the House should know, in order to be ruled in order as a prima facie case of privilege, members must demonstrate both that the issue has been raised at the earliest opportunity and also provide sufficient evidence that the privileges of the House have been breached.

Regarding timeliness, the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) stated that the phrase earliest opportunity should be understood in a reasonable manner, and it should take into account the realistic functioning of the Legislature. However, the member did not explain what it was that prevented him from raising this matter earlier.

The first-quarter financial report is usually released early in the fall, and therefore the member had ample time to research this matter and raise it in the House last year. Accordingly, I am ruling that the condition of timeliness was not met in this case.

Regarding the second condition, the member argued that by failing to issue a first-quarter financial report, the government impeded the member's ability to do his job and to hold the government to account. On the matter of tabling documents by a minister, Bosc and Gagnon, House of Commons Procedure and Practice, Third Edition, cites a ruling of Speaker Fraser from 1993, which can be found on page 443, citation 106. The Speaker ruled that a prima facie case of privilege had occurred when the government failed to table a document required by statute in a timely manner.

This is a key element of finding a prima facie breach of privilege. A member raising the issue must identify where in legislation there is a requirement that the specific document be tabled in the House.

When raising this matter of privilege, the honourable member for Concordia did not indicate any statute requiring the tabling of the first-quarter financial report. The Financial Administration Act requires the Minister of Finance to lay a copy of the Public Accounts before the Legislative Assembly; however, there is no mention regarding the number of

financial updates required or whether they need to be tabled in the House.

This approach has also been followed by past Manitoba Speakers, as Speaker Hickes ruled on a similar ruling in 2004 as follows, and I quote: I would like to advise the House that I have checked the procedural authorities, and there is no reference or citation that advises that it is a matter of privilege if a government does not table information when requested to do so, with the exception of items that are required to be tabled by statute. End quote.

I would therefore rule that the honourable member does not have a prima facie matter of privilege.

* (14:40)

Petitions?

Point of Order

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations): Madam Speaker, point of order.

Madam Speaker: Oh, on a point of order.

Ms. Clarke: Madam Speaker, I'd like to table the requested copies of the document I quoted from in the House on October the 9th during the Throne Speech debate, and I would also like to advise that a digital copy has been provided.

Madam Speaker: And I would just thank the minister for that. It had been pointed out the other day that, when referencing a private document, that it must be tabled in the House, and I believe that the minister has now finalized and provided that document.

PETITIONS

Madam Speaker: For the ease of me recognizing members for petitions, because we've got quite a number and a number of them are also virtual, I would like to start at the beginning and go from there.

The honourable member for Concordia has indicated he would like to present his petition.

Dauphin Correctional Centre

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I do wish to bring a petition forward here to the Legislature.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government plans to close the Dauphin Correctional Centre, DCC, in May 2020.

(2) The DCC is one of the largest employers in Dauphin, providing the community with good, family-supporting jobs.

(3) Approximately 80 families will be directly affected by the closure, which will also impact the local economy.

(4) As of January 27th, 2020, Manitoba's justice system was already more than 250 inmates overcapacity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Justice to immediately reverse the decision to close the DCC and proceed with the previous plan to build a new correctional and healing centre with an expanded courthouse in Dauphin.

And this petition is signed by many Manitobans.

Cochlear Implant Program

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) People who suffer hearing loss due to aging, illness, employment or accident not only lose the ability to communicate effectively with friends, relatives or colleagues, they also can experience unemployment, social isolation and struggles with mental health.

A cochlear implant is a life-changing electronic device that allows deaf people to receive and process sounds and speech, and also can partially restore hearing in people who have severe hearing loss and who do not benefit from conventional hearing aids. A processor behind the ear captures and processes sound signals, which are transmitted to a receiver implanted into the skull that relays the information to the inner ear, the cochlea.

The technology has been available since 1989 through the Central Speech and Hearing Clinic, founded in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The Surgical Hearing Implant Program began implanting patients in the fall of 2011 and marked the completion of 250 cochlear implant surgeries in Manitoba in the summer of 2018. The program has implanted about 60 devices since the summer of 2018, as it is only able to implant about 40 to 50 devices per year.

There are no upfront costs to Manitoba residents who proceed with cochlear implant surgery, as Manitoba Health covers the surgical procedure, internal implant and the first external sound processor. Newfoundland and Manitoba have the highest estimated implantation costs of all provinces.

Alberta has one of the best programs, with Alberta aids for daily living, AADL, and their cost share means the patient pays only approximately \$500 out of pocket.

Assistive Devices Program in Ontario covers 75 per cent of the cost, up to a maximum amount of \$5,444, for a cochlear implant replacement speech processor.

The BC Adult Cochlear Implant Program offers subsidized replacements to aging sound processors through the Sound Processor Replacement Program. This provincially funded program is available to those cochlear implant recipients whose sound processors have reached six to seven years of age.

The cochlear implant is a lifelong commitment. However, as the technology changes over time, parts and software become no longer functional or available. The cost of upgrading a cochlear implant in Manitoba of approximately \$11,000 is much more expensive than in other provinces, as adult patients are responsible for the upgrade costs of their sound processor.

In Manitoba, pediatric patients, under 18 years of age, are eligible for funding assistance through the Cochlear Implant Speech Processor Replacement Program, which provides up to 80 per cent of the replacement costs associated with a device upgrade.

It is unreasonable that this technology is inaccessible to many citizens of Manitoba who must choose between hearing and deafness due to financial constraints because the costs of maintaining the equipment are prohibitive for low-income earners or those on fixed income, such as an old age pension or Employment and Income Assistance.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide financing for upgrades to the cochlear implant covered under medicare, or provide funding assistance through the Cochlear Implant Speech Processor Replacement Program to assist with the replacement costs associated with a device upgrade.

Signed by Shelley Oleschuk, Dale Oleschuk, Lorraine Oleschuk and many others.

Madam Speaker: And I should indicate that, in accordance with our rule 133(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

Further petitions?

If—is—the honourable member for Tyndall Park.

Vivian Sand Facility Project—Clean Environment Commission Review

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The Vivian sands project is a proposed silica sand mine and processing plant to be built in the RM of Springfield. The overall project includes mining claims of over 85,000 hectares, making it the largest claim ever given to a single company in Manitoba's history. It is larger than the city of Winnipeg, which is 46,410 hectares.

(2) The amount of dry, solid sand mined, produced per year according to the EAP is 1.36 million tons, and much of this sand will be used in fracking.

(3) A major concern of the proposed mine and plant is that, if developed, it could contaminate the Sandilands aquifer, including both carbonate and sandstone aquifers, which covers much of southeastern Manitoba. It has excellent water quality and is the water source for tens of thousands of Manitobans, including many municipal water systems, agriculture, industry, private wells and an abundance of wildlife and ecosystems. Further, people in the Indigenous communities that are potentially affected by this were not afforded the required Indigenous consultation from either the federal or provincial government officials.

(4) The sustainable yield of the combined sandstone and carbonate aquifers has still not yet been established by provincial authorities.

(5) The mine could cause leaking of acid and heavy metals and pollute the aquifer, as it will go down 200 feet into the Winnipeg formation of the sandstone aquifer. There is concern that the shale, which separates the carbonate and sandstone aquifers—sand and pyritic oolite itself contains sulphides—will, when exposed to injected air from the CanWhite Sands extraction process, turn to acid.

(6) An additional concern with the proposed mine and plant is the potential to pollute the Brokenhead River and the aquatic food chain leading to Lake Winnipeg.

* (14:50)

(7) Residents in the area have also expressed fear of being overexposed to silica dust during production, as there has been a demonstrated lack of safety and environmental procedures by the CanWhite Sands Corporation during the exploratory drilling phase. Signage and fencing has been poor; identifying and required mine claim tags were missing; there were no warnings for silica dust exposure and no coverings to prevent exposure of the silica stock piles to the elements.

(8) Residents' concerns include the fact that boreholes, which should have been promptly and properly sealed, were left open for a year. The drilling of hundreds of improperly sealed boreholes yearly create significant risks of surface contamination, mixing of aquifer waters and drainage of surface fecal matter into the aquifer.

(9) There is also a risk of subsidence around each borehole as a result of sand extraction.

(10) There are also potential transboundary issues that need to be addressed as the 'aquifers' extend into Minnesota.

(11) This project should not proceed, as no licensing conditions and mitigation measures will alleviate the risk to all Manitobans and the environment since CanWhite Sands Corporation plans to use an unprecedented mining technique with no established safe outcome. The corporation has gone on record indicating that it does not know how to mine for the silica in the water supply and "need to develop a new extraction methodology that has never been done before."

(12) Contamination of the aquifers and the environment is irreversible and there are many surface sources of high purity silica that can be extracted without endangering two essential regional aquifers.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to undertake a combined review of the Vivian Sand Facility processing plant and the mining/extraction portion of the operation as a class 3 development with a review by Manitoba's Clean Environment

Commission to include public hearings and participant funding.

(2) To urge the provincial government to halt all activity at the mine and plant until the Clean Environment Commission's review is completed and the project proposal has been thoroughly evaluated.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Dauphin Correctional Centre

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government plans to close the Dauphin Correctional Centre, DCCC, in May 2020.

(2) The DCCC is one of the largest employers in Dauphin, providing the community with good, family-supporting jobs.

(3) Approximately 80 families will be directly affected by the closure, which will also impact the local economy.

(4) As of January 27, 2020, Manitoba's justice system was already more than 250 inmates overcapacity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Justice to immediately reverse the decision to close the DCCC and proceed with the previous plan to build a new correctional and healing centre with an expanded courthouse in Dauphin.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further petitions?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Madam Speaker: If not, I will call orders of the day, government business.

House Business

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): On House business, Madam Speaker. Pursuant to rule 33(7), I'm announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Brandon

East (Mr. Isleifson). The title of the resolution is called: Call on the Federal Government to increase the quota of the MPNP.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that, pursuant to rule 33(7), the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Brandon East. The title of the resolution is: Call on the Federal Government to increase the quota of the MPNP.

THRONE SPEECH (Third Day of Debate)

Madam Speaker: Resuming debate on the motion of the honourable member for Swan River (Mr. Wowchuk) and the amendment and sub-amendment thereto, standing in the name of the honourable member for Transcona, who has 17 minutes remaining.

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I would like to continue with a cautionary tale for all Manitobans.

As many of you know, as I neared the end of my treatment for the cancer I had, and because of the chemo drugs, my heart and lungs were greatly affected. In early April, I wasn't feeling well; I was lethargic and losing weight, and because of COVID-19, I didn't know—I didn't do what I needed to do: I needed to get myself to an emergency room. As it turned out, it came to late April and my spouse had to call for an ambulance because in the middle of the night I became unresponsive. Due to her quick thinking, she immediately called 911, and as a result, I was admitted to St. Boniface ICU. I won't go into the details of my stay at St. Boniface, but suffice it to say, my spouse and the team at St. Boniface ICU saved my life.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

And, as I said earlier, let this be a cautionary tale. We are not invincible. And when we need help, we need to access help. And just like the medical professionals have been saying all along during the pandemic, so I say to all Manitobans, if you're sick, get yourself the help you need. Don't wait until it is almost too late.

And, as it went, I was in St. Boniface for nearly three weeks, and while there, I had the good fortune of meeting many Manitobans. One of my roommates was Patrick, from the Brandon area. I told Patrick that, you know, I happen to be the MLA, because he kind of recognized me because he saw my thing in the

paper. And Patrick told me of the difficulties he was having with his heart and that he needed to have a stent inserted.

However, instead of being able to focus on his recovery, he was distracted by how he was going to pay for the cab ride from Winnipeg back to his home. The care he required was only available to him here in Winnipeg, and he wondered why, as a senior on a fixed income, he was on the hook for transportation costs.

Sitting with him in our room, I had recalled that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) was going to mail out cheques for \$200. Perhaps Patrick could use that money to cover the cost of a ride back to Brandon. He told me the real amount was close to \$400 and that he would have preferred the Pallister government cover the cost of transporting him to and from his home in western Manitoba to St. Boniface Hospital.

Another roommate of mine, Percy, from Winnipeg, had the same procedure as Patrick but had the good fortune of living close to St. Boniface Hospital, and therefore didn't have to pay the exorbitant cost of accessing health care. Percy also said that he would've preferred his \$200 cheque go to investments in health care where people like Patrick didn't have to pay for the health care they needed.

These are just some of the stories of ordinary Manitobans, people who have worked hard to contribute to the province and people who look to their provincial government to ensure that proper investments are made to maintain quality health care, public education and our prairie way of life.

I would now like to tell you the story of Courtney: Courtney, who is a true inspiration; Courtney, who is one of my constituents here in Transcona. I've known Courtney for close to 10 years, as our sons used to play minor hockey together in the system out here in east Winnipeg.

Courtney and her partner have five children: from newborn all the way up to the age of 18. Courtney is also enrolled at the University of Manitoba and is close to completing her master's degree in social work.

Courtney called me one day, concerned about the Province's back to school plan, for she and her partner have children at all three levels of school, and they were concerned for the health and well-being of their extended family members who they call upon to help with child care.

She was also concerned because there wasn't going to be the recommended two metres distance, like we enjoy right here in the Chamber, at her children's schools. She had heard about Louis Riel School Division working to provide two-metre social distance in their classrooms and wondered why this wasn't the case in other city of Winnipeg and Manitoba school divisions.

She wondered why the Province was allowing one school division to do one thing and the neighbouring school division to do another.

*(15:00)

I couldn't provide the answer she needed, so I said to her to have faith in her local schools, as she is sending her children, because they will do their best to ensure that they have a safe learning environment.

But I think she wanted to hear that the Province had her back and that they would provide some leadership in what the return to school could look like for all our children in this province. Courtney called me back again two weeks ago and voiced her concerns again because, in one of her children's schools, there was a lack of hand sanitizer available.

This speaks, Madam Speaker, to the lack of consistency, which is maddening to Courtney and many Manitobans who have children, and with the back-to-school plan that this Province has put forth. They feel that the Province has let them down in providing clear, concise direction to school divisions throughout our province, as well as necessary resources to ensure safe learning spaces for all.

I couldn't agree more with these concerns expressed by these Manitobans, and I haven't even spoken yet to the plight of Winnipeg School Division parents, who are left without school bus transportation because, right now, the school bus transportation isn't available. All they see is a provincial government that inappropriately inserted themselves into the collective bargaining process without prescribing any constructive dialogue.

Then we have the citizens of northeast Winnipeg–Transcona—who are looking for something, anything, from this provincial government to address the many issues emanating from this part of our province. I harken back to the 2016 election campaign when we had, then, the leader of the opposition himself standing in front of Park Manor Personal Care Home in East End, Transcona, announcing that, if elected, his government would make the necessary

investments in new personal-care-home spaces for our seniors. Then, when elected, we heard nothing.

Even after the local organizing committee at Park Manor had planned the expansion, was asked to redo their proposal to take into account a new pod system of design, and then, after this submission was placed, we heard nothing.

Studies have indicated that Transcona and northeast Winnipeg are in dire need of further investment in senior-care-home spaces, and still in 2020, in this Throne Speech, we heard nothing.

The Dynacare lab situation in my constituency is also of serious concern. The Dynacare lab in Transcona has consistently some of the longest wait times in the city. Our constituents have been contacting my office throughout the summer and early fall, concerned about long wait times—long wait times standing outdoors in exposed areas and where people are in direct sunlight without any reprieve from the elements.

Residents don't want to hear of another super centre located somewhere out by Kildonan Place, where it is not part of our Transcona here and east Winnipeg. They want a lab that has proper human resources and a place to sit comfortably while they wait for lab services. And just like the Premier (Mr. Pallister) said, in—regarding COVID-19 testing and long wait times, this is unacceptable and we need to find a solution that rectifies this situation.

Then there is—there was the proposed new construction of a DSFM school that was promised for Transcona and is now off the table. This new school would have been a welcome addition to our neighbourhood in east-end Transcona, and would have had the requisite child-care spaces that are part of every new school construction in Manitoba. Instead, Transcona remains—like a good portion of this city and the province—a child-care desert where a lack of affordable, quality, publicly accessible child-care spaces are unfortunately the norm.

Now we move to the decision to close CancerCare treatment facilities at Concordia and Seven Oaks hospitals. These community-based, conveniently located CancerCare centres are being removed from the residents of north Winnipeg. We have—we've had a significant number of calls and emails to our constituency office regarding this decision. Many are concerned with how they are going to fit patients and their own care into the remaining four CancerCare centres in Winnipeg, and

this remains a major concern because there hasn't been any plan laid out to do so.

Now, let's get to jobs and the true and just economic recovery for all Manitobans. I received an email from a constituent named Diana [*phonetic*] just last week outlining what a true and just economic recovery can look like. In her email, Diana [*phonetic*] espoused the virtues of collective effort, collective support, not just within our own circles but all the circles that are based on the value of community and the prairie spirit that existed here long—as long as Indigenous people have called this part of the world home.

However, what the pandemic has done is exposed deep disparities within our economy and society, and one thing is certain: the road towards recovery remains long and uncertain. As elected officials, as members of our community, we must work together to lay the groundwork for a strong, inclusive and sustainable economic recovery that ensures no one is left behind.

Manitoba's economic shutdown earlier in the year hit low-wage workers the hardest, especially women, youth and people of colour. To encourage job creation and ensure essential-service workers receive a living wage, let's have Manitoba take a bold step and raise our minimum wage to \$15 an hour. To get this done, the Province can provide financial support to small business. This small business is the same small business who'll be the backbone of our economic recovery. The Province can do this in the form of wage supports for these small-business enterprises. Studies have shown that a \$15 minimum wage results in more disposable income for workers, which will reverberate throughout the economy.

We can lead our country in this and prove that together as Manitobans we can support our workers and small business together.

Can you still hear me and see me?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We can still hear you.

Mr. Altomare: Oh, I'm back.

Diana [*phonetic*] in her email goes on to say—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member for Transcona.

Mr. Altomare: Can you hear me, Madam—Mr. Speaker? Okay, then I will continue.

Diana [*phonetic*], in her email, goes on to say that to plan for a true and just recovery, she's wanting to hear about a plan for accessible, affordable, public

child-care spaces. Many research studies have indicated that this type of child care can lead us to a full employment economy, one that includes the participation of more women and single-parent households. As Diana [phonetic] has said, there can be no just economic recovery without high-quality, accessible, affordable, public child care. Not only does this support women in the job market, but it is also an important source of employment and a known economic driver.

As we emerge out of the pandemic, we need to ensure that we continue to invest in physical infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, public transportation and a green economic recovery. Our provincial government can partner with the federal government and identify shovel-ready infrastructure projects.

A good start would be to ensure that all Manitobans have access to broadband Internet services, especially those in rural and isolated communities. This is something where the expertise of our very own Manitoba Hydro can be tapped into to take the lead.

Citizens also need a provincial government to take the lead in Canada and invest in a green climate-resilient projects. Our very own New Flyer Industries, located in Transcona, is a world leader in green transportation technologies, such as electric and hydrogen fuel cell buses. In our very own backyard, we have ready and willing partners in New Flyer, City of Winnipeg and the federal government.

* (15:10)

We can assist our own transportation industry by incentivizing the expansion of public transit in Winnipeg, one that highlights zero-emission vehicles that are manufactured in the constituency of Transcona. And this expansion of rapid transit that was outlined today by the City can include the Provincial government to partner with the City and make this expansion zero emission.

Recovery also entails proper and robust infrastructure, investments in our social enterprises, investments in long-term care, home care, public education and post-secondary education.

The Pallister government has pledged an additional \$1.6 billion in funding for public education over the next four years. At the same time, they say they will phase out education property taxes up to the tune of about \$825 million over this same four-year period. That's even an extra \$600 million a year.

This year's education budget is \$1.33 billion. So, going forward, it will be a close to a \$2-billion-a-year investment enterprise. The math to me doesn't make sense, and I hope that the Province looks closely into this.

And then, finally, to ensure a true and just economic recovery made right here in Manitoba, we must reject calls for American-style cuts, austerity and privatization. Instead, we need a Manitoba plan, a prairie plan, rooted in our way of doing things, rooted in the philosophy that created medicare for all, a fully funded public education system, old-age security and the Canada Pension Plan.

We need a bold vision for our province, one that points to the future, and it's based on a foundation of—

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

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): I do—I appreciate the opportunity to speak to our government's Throne Speech.

I certainly hope that everyone had a safe and fun happy Thanksgiving over the weekend. I know it's not a Thanksgiving that many of us are used to, where we couldn't have large family gatherings, see friends and loved ones like we have in previous years. However, I know that Manitobans did what they could to celebrate all that we do have to be thankful for as a province.

This is a truly an historic time for us as a province and, of course, members of the Legislative Assembly. As a province, the people of Manitoba have done an amazing job to adhere to public health orders, helping each other when needed and helped weather a global pandemic, the likes of which we have not seen in a century.

Here in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, this is the first time we are witnessing a hybrid model of participation where many members are participating online. I commend and thank the Legislative staff, clerks and everyone who made this possible. It's during times like these that we have no choice but to adapt to our ever-changing environment, and the staff of the Legislative Assembly rose to the occasion, and for this, I say thank you.

Given the ever-changing nature of COVID, it has created certain uncertainties for everyone, including small-business owners. Our government understood that and created the engagemb.ca portal to help direct Manitobans with specific questions about health

orders and how they impact their individual businesses.

Through this process, our government has consulted with more Manitobans more often than any other government in the past to inform them of our collective COVID-19 response. We listened and we will keep listening.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, 2020 is our province's sesquicentennial, or 150th birthday. We, as a government, has designs on a fun-filled year of activities and celebration. Now, unfortunately, circumstances have not allowed us to do so. Despite the cancelling of events, this year will be a year nobody will ever forget. It'll be a year where Manitoba's resolve, our entrepreneurial spirit and adaptiveness were put to a test, a test that not only was passed, but succeeded, and I believe that Manitobans will come out stronger than ever.

We must not forget the heroes who worked tirelessly during this time, who helped strengthen our resolve. They are the front-line workers—those who worked in hospitals, grocery stores, food delivery, truck drivers and all others who delivered essential services. To all them, I say thank you. I know that I can speak on behalf of all Manitobans when I say thank you for everything you have done.

The outpouring of praise and expressions of gratitude for the front line was incredible and well-deserved. The people of Lagimodière, like other Manitobans, have demonstrated their strength, tenacity and courage as they've overcome the challenges of this pandemic. I am incredibly proud to represent the people of Lagimodière and thank them again for entrusting me to represent them during these uncertain and often challenging times.

You took the public health orders seriously, followed the guidelines and helped your neighbours with the fight against COVID-19, and for this I cannot thank you enough. After all, we in Lagimodière are incredibly fortunate to live in such a beautiful and diverse community where every neighbourhood has its own distinct charm. Whether you live in Royalwood for its parks; Bois-des-Esprits along the Seine River; Sage Creek with its natural prairie grasslands; Island Lakes for its iconic Lindsey Wilson Park, equipped with a splash pad, workout equipment and picnic area; Bonavista, a brand new community; and, of course, the good people who live on the east side of St. Anne's Road, who back onto the Seine River.

Like all communities, Lagimodière is home to a number of small businesses; restaurants such as the Block & Blade in Sage Creek, MC's Curry in Island Lakes, 9Round gym, Orangetheory Fitness and a number of other small enfranchised companies that make up the backbone of our community.

For many people in Lagimodière, the summer of 2020 was very different. Rather than travelling outside the province, many of them spent their time exploring our own backyard. Manitoba has an abundance of natural beauty, including breathtaking lakes, boreal forests and a prairie mountain region.

Over the summer, I had the opportunity to travel to many of the communities represented by some of my colleagues. And like never before it is important that Manitobans remain united, whether you're from urban, rural or suburban communities. So I took the opportunity to travel with my colleagues from Riding Mountain, from Interlake and Dauphin. We toured their communities and highlighted certain attractions on social media and spoke to Manitobans and heard their stories as they dealt with the pandemic. It was very interesting to not only see the many hidden jewels of our province, but it was also interesting to see the number of constituents from my riding visiting Manitoba's hidden jewels.

Some of the highlights included Moggey's Cabin, Steep Rock, the Manitoba Narrows, Elkhorn Resort and other amazing scenery in around the Riding Mountain region.

While it was a great experience to tour parts of Manitoba with my colleagues, it was also an opportunity to see, as I had mentioned before, some constituents of mine who were out and about as they discovered Manitoba. In July, I ran into Wayne and Helen Lymburner of—at Steep Rock while touring with the member from Interlake-Gimli. Wayne and Helen are amazing people who live in Lagimodière. They have devoted themselves to the Island Lakes Residents' Group and have done far more than their share of volunteering for their time in our neighbourhood. It was nice to see them taking some well-deserved time off throughout the summer. Like Wayne and Helen, many other Manitobans spent time travelling Manitoba and exploring its natural beauty.

While we had a beautiful summer and many families spent much deserved time off exploring the province, I 'continued' to work hard on behalf of my constituents and make sure that their needs and concerns were heard, and I am proud to be part of a

government that has delivered for the people in Lagimodière.

Some of the projects that I was happy to announce with some of my colleagues in and around Lagimodière include upgrades to the St. Vital Curling Club, securing funds for the construction of a community kitchen at the Gurdwara on Archibald, a safe and accessible dock for the Seine River, the sea pathway in Island Lakes, Sage Creek Green Team, a community theatre upgrade at J.H. Bruns and a new interchange at the corner of St. Mary's and the Perimeter.

Each of these community groups play a vital role in southeast Winnipeg, and I'm very proud of our government for funding these projects that are very important to them. The St. Veltel [*phonetic*] curling club is an example of a community group that is essential to southeast Winnipeg. The club is a curling hub not only for southeast, but for the entire province. It is famous for producing high quality curling champions such as Jennifer Jones, Kaitlyn Lawes and Dawn McEwen, people who continue to shape and influence the sport of curling.

*(15:20)

Throughout the years serving as an MLA, I've had the distinct pleasure to honour—and honour to attend the many events, tournaments and send-off parties and New Year's Day levies at the club. The executive, the volunteers and the curlers all work together to create a bond that is beyond a sport or an activity, but created a true community. Thank you to the entire team at the St. Vital Curling Club for your continued work and dedicated to the community.

The Island Lakes Residents' Group has been a staple of Island Lakes since its inception in 1989 and has continued to work hard and advocate for the residents ever since. I am proud of the strong working relationship that I have developed with this group.

The executive is truly dedicated to the community and have successfully advocated for many of the amenities in the community that we all enjoy today. Over the years, they have organized an annual spring cleanup and barbecue, the annual Island Lakes garage sale, and community meetings to keep residents apprised of what's happening in the neighbourhood. To them I say, keep up the good work. You have earned the respect of the entire community.

Save Our Seine, also known as SOS, is an amazing organization whose mandate is to preserve, protect and enhance the natural environment and

heritage resource of the Seine River. Their expertise, work and advocacy over the years has created the beautiful riverbank and the public awareness of the importance of the Seine River.

I've had the distinct pleasure this summer to have joined the Seine River—Save Our Seine, rather, in planting trees along the riverbank. People from all over the city come to the Seine River to canoe, kayak or just to enjoy its natural beauty. This all thanks to the hard work by Save Our Seine. Thank you so much.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could go on about the number of community groups in my community and certainly the—how our government has supported them, not only in the past but throughout this pandemic, but I do want to leave off with this and say thank you again for the opportunity to speak to our Throne Speech. I know that our government takes this current situation very seriously and again, thank you for the opportunity to speak to this.

Thank you.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Well, let's talk about what the Pallister government has done since they've been in office. That member talked about—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Smith: So let's see. [*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Smith: They've closed not one, not two, but three emergency rooms: Victoria hospital, Seven Oaks emergency room, Concordia emergency room. They've—18 ICU beds have been closed. They've closed an urgent-care centre: shuttered it in the middle of the night.

Took the Misericordia sign off: something that was historically—people looked at and were appreciative of, and that's actually where I was born. I loved driving over that bridge and actually seeing a hospital where I had roots in and many Manitobans had roots in.

Let's see. They closed five QuickCare clinics: the one on Portage Avenue, the ones on Vermillion Road, Jefferson, Dakota. They closed five primary community clinics: Corydon, St. Boniface Family Medical Centre. Hundreds of patients went to that hospital—or that clinic to seek medical attention. They said, oh, those Manitobans don't need a doctor there. They can go find doctors somewhere else.

They closed the Mature Women's Centre. So when that member was talking about supporting Manitobans, especially women—closing mature women's clinic, that's how they show appreciation to women here in Manitoba. And that's just one of hundreds of things that they've done to show appreciation to Manitobans since they've taken office.

They've closed the obstetrics unit in Flin Flon. Now women in Flin Flon now have to travel over an hour to go have their baby. I talked about this at length. Women, you know, sometimes have emergencies, you know, and need to seek medical attention immediately. Well, now they have to drive an hour or longer.

They privatized Lifeflight, an essential service to community members in rural communities that need to get on a plane, on a flight, to come to see a doctor in the city. We saw lives lost because of that.

Mr. Donkey had to travel on a bus by himself because they cut services for a companion to even be on the bus to go with Mr. Donkey, and he ended up dying on the bus, not even able to get to the hospital. And that's just one example that I want to highlight that this government has continued to do.

They pushed for the closure of 26 of 53 Dynacare locations. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I used to be able to go into my doctor's office and go right in and get bloodwork. Well, I recently, just over a month ago, had to go for bloodwork. I registered online. I waited in line over an hour and a half, and you know what? I felt bad because there were people there that would—before me that didn't register that were still there after I left.

I don't know what kind of system that this government thinks that they're improving, but it certainly isn't an improvement when you see people that are elderly, that are—have mobility issues. It's only getting colder and it's only getting worse under this government and, you know, they're doing nothing but sitting on their hands while people wait in line.

And let's talk about lines. Well, I have one of the COVID testing sites in my riding right on Anderson and Main, and it's been in the news, like, hundreds of times since this testing site opened. Why? Not because people are getting efficient service, but because this government has failed to open up more testing sites to meet the demand that people have.

More and more people in this province are being infected with COVID, which is unfortunate, but we need rapid access to testing. There's no way that

people should have to wait in their car with their children for hours on end to actually get in to get testing. Not only that, but wait days for the tests to come back because there's so many people being tested. Has this government got off their hands to address that? Absolutely not.

They opened one on Portage Avenue, which is to capacity and way beyond capacity. They should be opening, more than ever, more sites so that more people can get tested so that we can stop the spread, but is this government doing that? No. They're depending on others to ensure that they go and get tested.

Well, I can tell you, Deputy Speaker, that people's time is precious, and when you're ill, you're sick, do you want to be sitting and waiting in a car? Do you want to be sitting and waiting in a car with young children? People should be able to go online, they should be able to book an appointment, they should be able to get in and get out instead of waiting in cars.

And, in fact, community members have come forward and said, like, people are urinating on their properties because they don't want to get out of line because then they're going to have to come back and wait in that line again. And does this government do anything to address that? Absolutely not one thing.

And this government, in fact, has had seven months—seven months, Deputy Speaker—to address this. They knew a second wave was coming. We heard them talk about a second wave many times in this House, but did they do anything to prepare for that? Absolutely nothing. They sat on their hands.

They thought it wasn't going to happen, or maybe they just didn't, you know, think that they needed to prepare for it. Maybe they thought that what they had was adequate, but obviously, they know what they're doing right now is not adequate because it's not meeting the needs of Manitobans.

Today there was 125 new cases, Deputy Speaker, and more lives lost. We can't afford to address the COVID crisis this way. We can't afford to have people dying in our province. These are Manitobans that have helped to build this province and the ones that are most vulnerable. We should be putting things in place to make sure that they are the most protected.

When we talk about Parkview centre, you know: seven lives lost. That could have been, you know, prevented possibly, some of that, but, you know, we have to do more and put more measures in place so

that we are making sure that no life is lost, that persons that want to go and get tested will go and get tested.

We need to ensure that people get paid sick leave. My sister works in a school. She had a cough so they asked her to go and get tested. She went and got tested. She came back with a negative. She went back to work for one day, was again coughing, so they asked her to go and get tested again. She went and got tested again.

Well, she can't keep going and getting tested. They both came back negative. So she's now back at work. Today's her first day back at work. She's been off for over two weeks, and each time, that eats up her sick time. Well, she doesn't even have enough sick time to cover all of the days that she's been away, let alone the consistency that children need in school to have that same person. She's been away for two weeks; somebody else has been in place of her; thankfully, she has the same sub that was able to cover her. But not everybody has that, you know, that luxury of having someone cover them.

* (15:30)

But I do want to take the opportunity to say thank you to all of the Manitobans who have certainly stepped up, who have certainly sacrificed and, you know, condolences to our many families who have, of course, lost a loved one during this pandemic. I know it's been hard, and I certainly, you know, stand with you and will push for more measures to ensure that Manitobans get the services that they need so that we can fight this pandemic in a timely manner so that people can get the testing and the resources that they need to take care of themselves.

And, of course, you know, all of the front-line workers that continue to put their lives at risk to ensure that we stayed healthy, you know, I think of our health-care workers and I think about our grocery workers that, each and every day, you know, made sure that Manitobans were able to get the food and nutrition and, you know, toilet paper and whatever else they needed, and, of course, our truck drivers that, you know, had to drive from coast to coast to coast to bring those essential needs, services and groceries and things to the communities that needed them here in Manitoba.

And certainly our NDP caucus, you know, has been standing united, side-by-side with each of you, and I want to say that, you know, I feel shameful that our government hasn't made the same sacrifices, that while you had to be on the front lines, you know, fighting and maintaining services, that we actually

weren't in this place debating. We weren't here making sure that we could ask the questions that we certainly were receiving in our offices, asking why this wasn't happening, why do we have to go to work when, you know, you're not in the Manitoba Legislature. And Manitobans will know that each and every day we were asking to get back to work, to get back into this very place to ask the questions that Manitobans wanted to hear.

And I certainly want to say a big thank you to the Manitoba Metis community for their contributions in making this province a great province. You know, we have a Premier (Mr. Pallister) who uses his vendetta against President Chartrand to really not represent the Metis people, you know, which is shameful. When I was working in a school, you know, lot of the young kids, we would call Louis Riel the father of Manitoba. And many of my students would know that. And, you know, he was, when I was going to school, known as a 'traitor.' And we know today that that was, in fact, false, that he actually fought to ensure that, you know, 150 years later, that we are in fact here as a province, standing proud.

So I want to say thank you, of course, to President Chartrand, but I also want to say to our Premier to stop letting his vendetta with President David Chartrand stop him from representing the Metis people, because I've certainly got emails from our Metis community asking why our Premier is doing that, why is he letting that guide how he represents Metis people in Manitoba?

So he should stop his Trumpian style of politics and certainly recognize the—Louis Riel and the Metis people for their contributions to this great province that we are so happy and proud to live in today.

So I want to get back to, you know, Manitobans having to really step up and, you know, our government here really not having to do the same thing. In fact, not even wanting to sit here while our Government House Leader here was negotiating and trying to get us back into the House and, you know, the Pallister government refusing to get back to work when we were all willing to—and ready to get back into this very House.

You know, the Throne Speech really missed an opportunity for a Pallister government to address the real concerns of families and to honour the commitments that so many Manitobans had made. You know, I remember when the schools were shut down and parents now had to become the teachers. And what a struggle it was for some parents because

some parents still had to work. They still had to go to work every day and they still had to figure out how they were going to home-school their children.

And, you know, child-care centres also shut down due to the pandemic and many families were struggling and scrambling for who was going to help, you know, support their family while they had to go to work while this Pallister government sat on their hands and did nothing to support families.

Those that, you know, certainly were in the business industry, small businesses, and I represent part of the community where there's a lot of businesses and a lot have shut down. And I think of Luda's, which is right on Salter and Aberdeen, a small family business that's run by a mom and her daughter and sometimes the grandson comes and helps in—helps out.

When you walk in there, everybody knows everybody. They know you by name and many people, you know, that's their daily routine, is they go there.

Well, that restaurant has been closed since March. It doesn't have the space capacity to be able to, you know, when the government released, oh, you can open up at 30 per cent capacity, they couldn't even open up at that because they wouldn't make any money. And then when they said, oh, 50 per cent, well, then I got other emails from businesses saying, like, we can't even open up to that because we don't have the space to be able to do that, nor do we have the finances to provide the PPE to our customers that are coming in or to our staff.

And this government did nothing to support those small businesses—many, I'm sad to say, that have had to shutter their doors because of their lack of commitment and support to Manitobans. These are people who have paid taxes, people who have helped make this province a great province. And what did this government do? They turned a blind eye. Oh, you know, we're not going to do nothing.

Instead, what they did was they picked an argument with the Trudeau government time after time. This Premier (Mr. Pallister), you know, had to—on one hand—up the Trudeau government every time, and it was, like, really? Like, that's the kind of premier that we have here in Manitoba that just has to be No. 1 at everything but yet he can't be No. 1 at supporting Manitobans when they most need it.

And we're in a global pandemic. It's not like people aren't losing their lives. You know, I remember

when it first hit and being in Dauphin and actually seeing them—I was with the member from St. Johns and we were in the room and we were watching the news and they were building the hospitals there and how many, you know, excavators and stuff were, like, there were thousands of them, and just, like, kind of being really shocked at, like, that was coming here and we couldn't—there was nothing we can do about it.

So, this Pallister government has really made life harder for Manitobans during this pandemic. We've seen, you know, tens of thousands of jobs be lost under this government.

And this government, you know, Pallister government, says, oh, we're going to create jobs; we're going to get people back to work. Where? Where are they going to get people back to work when there's no jobs, when they've cut the very jobs that Manitobans relied on? Ten thousand civic jobs under their watch have been cut. They've cut it. Pallister himself has taken that scissors and he said, okay, they're out of a job. You know, how is that being supportive of, you know, Manitobans and getting Manitobans back to work?

You know, I want to go back to another closure, a new facility that was supposed to open for CancerCare. You know, that was cut. You know, people—I heard my colleague there and, you know, I'm just so happy and thankful that my colleague from Transcona is, you know, here today to speak and to share his experience and really to give voice to the constituents of Transcona.

But, again, he's gone through that and he knows how valuable it is to have those services and those resources there. And what does this government do? Oh, they—there's enough CancerCare resources in Manitoba.

Well, there is not. You know, there's so many people that are losing their lives and they need to have quick access to those things when they need them, but this government doesn't seem to think so.

There was even a personal-care home in Lac du Bonnet and, you know, that's a rural community and I, you know, I often think about our rural communities because we're so fortunate to live in an urban area where, you know, there's services—I'm not going to say an abundance of them, but there are, you know, services there, and Lac du Bonnet is a service that they needed a personal-care home. And what did this government do? The Pallister government cut that.

* (15:40)

They also cut the Vita-in Vita, a primary care ACCESS Clinic; in The Pas, another primary ACCESS Clinic; in Bridgwater, a primary ACCESS clinic; and I mean, I have pages and pages and pages of all of the cuts, and this government says: oh we're investing in this, we're doing that—all at the same time cutting essential services that Manitobans rely on.

You know, when you go to the hospital now, you have to go and wait in line. If you go on and check how long the line up is and how many patients are waiting, like it's not a quick in and quick out. Manitobans are struggling to see a general practitioner because this government, you know, continues to close clinics here in our province and you know, without batting an eye, which is unfortunate.

You know, the bottom line is that this government has had seven months to prepare for this pandemic, and what have they done? They've sat on their hands; they've continued to cut jobs, they've continued not provide supports to Manitobans that so desperately need it. And I think about, you know, our addictions centres—treatment centres; I think about our homeless shelters, and I think about those that need EIA and we certainly seen how this government responds, which is not to provide as much support as Manitobans need.

So I'm going to end with really thanking Manitobans and really saying a heartfelt thank you to all of those that have sacrificed, that have had to, you know, put their lives on hold, whether it's to support a loved one or to homeschool their kid, or whether it was, you know, having to provide some child care for—whether it was a family member or a friend, and all of those that really stepped up and made sure that the services that us Manitobans rely on that were there. That they have made the ultimate sacrifice and that, you know, I'm ashamed, you know, standing here, that our government, you know, in standing in this House and being the opposition, how I haven't felt that I can really essentially do my job because they've stopped me from being in this House to represent you.

They've stopped us from doing our job and making sure that they were accountable. They have been unaccountable for seven months. It's time for them to step up to provide the supports to Manitobans—

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

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, we're in the middle of a pandemic. I want to thank all those who are on the front lines and contributing to the

effort to prevent spread of the COVID-19 infections, who are contributing to test and treat individuals who've developed infections with this coronavirus.

I also want to thank the residents of River Heights, who are continually raising concerns with me and keeping me abreast of what's happening in our community.

I want to emphasize that we're now in the middle of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Throne Speech should be first and foremost measured in terms of how it deals with this pandemic.

It's important when facing a crisis that the message from the leader of our province be factual. It's important when facing a crisis that there's an element of how we are working together to address the crisis.

Instead, this Throne Speech tries to sugar-coat the present situation we're in. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) paints a world in which, in his rhetoric, he is protecting Manitobans. But sadly, the Premier has failed badly in preparing for the second wave of this pandemic.

We have this past week, even as the Premier speaks to dismiss concerns, seen extraordinarily long wait times for tests—often five, six, or seven hours. Coupled to this, we're seeing extraordinarily long wait times for the results of tests.

This last week, during the week when the Throne Speech was read, my daughter waited seven days for the results of her COVID-19 test. Fortunately, it was negative. But the wait was frustrating, excruciating and difficult. But the anguish and the frustration of my daughter must be seen also in the context of what this means for our attempts to control the COVID-19 pandemic in Manitoba.

When Manitobans have to wait seven days for test results for a disease with an incubation period of up to two weeks, this adds an extra week before public health officials can start the contact tracing, which is so critical to bringing the epidemic under control.

That extra week means the memory of exactly where she went, exactly who she met is 'dimmed.' That extra week means an extra week at least before her contacts can be traced, and in that time they have likely become infectious and spread the disease because no one has alerted them to the fact that they were close contacts to a person with COVID-19 infection.

The chance of effectively using contact tracing to stop the spread is drastically reduced when results of testing take this long. The chance of spread is so much greater. This is a very dangerous situation that the Premier has put us in.

We are seeing, every day, the results of the Premier's lack of preparedness. In the last few days, with 97 new cases on Saturday and 124 new cases today, on a per capita basis we're similar to Ontario, Quebec and Alberta, with very high levels of infections.

We were lucky in the first wave of the pandemic. Manitoba was affected later than other provinces and we were able to escape with relatively few cases. Now, in the second wave, we have one of the highest per capita number of new cases of any province.

It is not just in the testing and quick contact tracing that we're falling short. Inspectors visiting bars should have been better trained and more effective in stopping the spread at these locations and in personal-care homes.

There was plenty of time to prepare for a second wave, and yet it has not been handled this—very well. There have been far too many cases in personal-care homes, and outbreaks have not been as well-controlled and as quickly controlled as they should have been.

We have more than 74 cases—17 in staff and 57 in residents—and seven deaths in the outbreak at Parkview Place personal-care home, and these numbers may yet go higher. Conditions at Parkview have been described as very poor. The COVID pandemic has exposed existing problems. Further, there's been no sign of the needed rapid response team that we called for months ago, an essential need for this second wave.

Instead, the government has loosened the one-site rule, potentially increasing spread of the virus at a time when we need to control it. This outbreak has got out of control in part because of the poor support by the government for personal-care homes.

Jan Legeros, executive director of the Long Term and Continuing Care Association of Manitoba, has spoken of the dire situation of funding for personal-care homes in Manitoba. She says major additional funding needs to address the COVID-19 pandemic have come on top of 15 years of funding freezes—no funding for increased supplies around infection prevention and zero annual inflationary operation increases.

As well, she continues, for the last two years, direct funding reductions were implemented along with other regional cost-saving measures, which many times directly and negatively impacted our members—people running personal-care homes.

The government was also very slow to confirm it will support expenses in personal-care homes directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in months and months of uncertainty. It's no wonder, given the government's lack of attention to the operating needs of personal-care homes, that we're having outbreaks. Manitobans are not impressed, and they should not be impressed.

In addition to the changes I've mentioned, there have been sharp cutbacks in home-care services during the COVID-19 pandemic, at the very time when more care is needed, not less. This speaks once more to the lack of advance planning and the lack of the needed surge capacity in health care.

A close friend whose father was receiving critical home care that he needed before the pandemic arrived, he talks of the collapse of home-care services in the last few months and the fact that he has had no alternative, because of the lack of home care, but to have his father moved to a personal-care home, where is—he is likely in greater danger of getting the COVID-19 virus infection.

In short, the government seems to have a lack of understanding of the crucial role of home care, and have drastically cut back, even though funding from the federal government for home care has increased.

It is not just COVID planning in personal-care homes, in home care where there are shortfalls. In emergency response in northern Manitoba we've moved from an excellent system to a mediocre one. It is as if the Premier (Mr. Pallister) never really learned to know the North, and never really learned what was in place through the Lifeflight Air Ambulance system.

*(15:50)

He has replaced a highly functional system with one that takes twice as long to reach many northern communities. This is coming even though we know that, in emergency medicine, time is life and, at first stroke, time is brain. We know it's important to have an ambulance, whether a ground ambulance or an air ambulance, arrive quickly.

While the Premier wants cannabis available within a half hour of any Manitoban, it now takes two

hours, 39 minutes to get an air ambulance to Tadoule Lake. This is more than an hour longer than it was previously. This 67 per cent increase in emergency response time is simply unacceptable.

The Premier has made a bad mistake and he even used an untendered contract to achieve this bad mistake. Those who were angry at the NDP for using untendered contracts are now shaking their head at the puzzling antics of the current Premier.

For preventive health care, the Premier has not fully understood the critical need for a major effort in prevention and the urgent need to improve preventative services. The Premier has not understood the need to separate the operational oversight and funding of prevention services separate from clinical services.

If you do not separate them, clinical care always grabs the lion's share of the budget, leaving little prevention, which becomes an afterthought instead of part of an upfront plan. This is happening now, even when some of the biggest gains are to be found in prevention. Indeed, as we are finding during the pandemic, keeping Manitobans healthy is absolutely critical.

The current diabetes epidemic continues. The current government has yet to present a comprehensive plan with goals and specific targets to reduce diabetes and to address the epidemic. Why has the Premier (Mr. Pallister) not even fully endorsed the Diabetes Canada 360 initiative and provided a detailed plan and funding to achieve the four main goals?

The well-being of children is fundamental. This is especially true of children in the care of Child and Family Services and yet the previous government took the children's special allowances away from children in the care of Child and Family Services, putting their well-being in jeopardy. The present government continued this for three years and is now moving in the BITSA bill to prevent any legal challenges to this theft of money from children.

At the same time, the present government removed children from 800 Adele in the middle of the night and has blocked further use of this facility to help children. It's an odd way for a government to act when one of the critical roles of government is to look after our most vulnerable citizens.

Instead of providing the challenge and taking the challenge of providing the option for all children to have online learning, the government has been slow to

develop a service for all Manitobans; has been slow to develop adequate broadband Internet access for all Manitobans; and has proceeded without trying to ensure the very best education for all Manitoba children.

We need to ensure and to help Manitobans learn and to help Manitobans continue to learn throughout their lives. Put simply, the government was not adequately ready for the education of our children this fall, particularly in relation to children with disabilities who need special attention.

Sadly, when it comes to supporting the environment, this government has come up short. A project to mine silica sand near Vivian, Manitoba is raising major 'concerns' for the future of the Sandilands aquifer and yet the government has been silent.

There is a need to eco-certify the whitefish fishery in Lake Winnipeg in order to improve the ability to market whitefish, and yet the current government has not acted. In spite of having promised to act during the election of 2016, the government missed the deadline it set of 2019 to have the North End treatment plant up and functioning. It is good that the government has finally realized it will take some provincial funding to achieve this and as I will note shortly, there are concerns about the safety of our drinking water in Winnipeg which the government is not addressing.

And as I've previously raised, the government's approach to Crown lands has problems for the environment and the future of those lands.

It is very clear that jurisdictions which have done the best in controlling the spread of the COVID-19 virus are ones in which the economy is doing well and which employment is doing well. The primary need to improve Manitoba's economy is to get the COVID pandemic better under control and, as my colleague, the MLA for St. Boniface, has emphasized, we need a strong recovery and it needs investment in our future instead of the government's austerity approach.

Currently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we are seeing increased concerns with addiction and substance abuse, increased concerns with mental illness and increased concerns with our children's learning. Direct action is needed.

But I want to discuss, in this context, the need as well for attention to lead pollution and lead poisoning in Manitoba. Let me begin by mentioning the finding that 20 per cent of homes in Winnipeg which have lead pipes which supply their drinking water have

higher than acceptable levels of lead in their drinking water. The Premier talks of protecting our water. The minister of municipal affairs talks of protecting our water. Why are they not even mentioning the lead contamination of drinking water in Manitoba?

Indeed, lead pollution and lead poisoning are an important issue which was completely missing from the Throne Speech, as it has been missing too often from this government's agenda. During the COVID pandemic, when we are seeing more issues with addictions and substance abuse, we need to recognize that lead exposure is a contributing factor to substance abuse.

During the COVID pandemic, when we're very concerned about the mental health of Manitobans, we need to recognize that lead is a contributing factor in mental illness.

Lead, as we know—or should know—is poisonous to children in very low concentrations. In children, it affects the developing brain and causes learning disabilities associated with difficulties in reading and in math. It also causes behavioural problems, including ADHD, impulsivity, aggressiveness and lack of self-control. These contribute to children affected by lead doing poorly in school, often dropping out of school, having mental illnesses and getting involved in substance abuse, in juvenile delinquency, in homelessness and in crime. With lead exposure in Manitoba from industrial sources, from lead pipes to bring drinking water, from lead paint, we need to do more to prevent lead poisoning.

As Gerald Markowitz and David Rozner wrote in their book, the *Lead Wars*, the scientific community and many political leaders now recognize that lead poisoning has been among the most important epidemics affecting children in the last hundred years. Sadly, this appreciation has been lacking among consecutive governments in Manitoba, who've largely attempted to cover up information about lead.

The lack of awareness of the multitude effects of lead by the current provincial government has been striking. For example, when the former minister of Sustainable Development claimed, in March 2019, that lead poisoning does not lead to mental illness. It is important to understand that lead has no essential role in human physiology.

As shown in ice cores from Greenland, there were, before the industrial revolution, only trivial amounts of lead in the atmosphere. The concentration increased 400 per cent from the mid-18th century to

the early 20th century; increased another 300 per cent from 1950 to 1975.

Some of the toxic effects of lead were known in the 1800s. By the mid-1950s, it was well established and well-known that lead exposure causes permanent neurological damage to children. In 1975, the CDC in the United States recommended that all children ages one through five years who live in or frequently visit sites of potential lead exposure should be screened once a year. By the 1980s, about 50 per cent of children in New York City, in Rhode Island, in Massachusetts were already being screened for lead poisoning. In 1991, the CDC in the United States included in its strategic plan: (1) universal screening of children between the ages of one and five years, and (2) comprehensive lead abatement.

And yet, here we are in Manitoba, 30 years later, and we still are not doing the screening and the lead abatement which needs to be done.

It's now clear that lead exposure is a major contributing factor to crime, particularly violent crime. In Manitoba, we have the highest rate of violent crime in all provinces. Could this be because consecutive governments have not paid attention to reducing lead pollution and lead poisoning?

* (16:00)

In an elegant study in North Carolina, it was shown that interventions for children found to have high lead levels were effective in reducing school suspensions, juvenile delinquency and crime, particularly violent crime. The intervention, including full removal of lead exposure, attention to behavioural and learning problems and nutritional intervention—poor nutrition increases lead absorption—were effective in reducing violent crime to the extent that they'd been applied to all children with blood lead levels at five micrograms per decilitre and above, and if they'd been so applied, they would've reduced violent crime by about half.

It's not a small effect, and considering that Manitoba has the highest level of violent crime of all provinces and that Manitoba's done so little to address lead poisoning, the issue needs the urgent attention of the provincial government.

The government needs to be screening children in all areas where there's concern over lead exposure. The government also needs a comprehensive plan to remove the sources of lead from children's lives and, indeed, from adults' lives as well.

We still don't have a screening program in Manitoba in spite of decades of evidence of high lead exposure. And we still don't have a well co-ordinated public-health approach to address children with high lead levels, which involves remediation of homes and removal of lead from homes where children are shown to have high lead levels.

The lack of mention of lead in the Throne Speech is a severe shortcoming of the government, but it's only one of many. In conclusion, I remind MLAs that the world we have built and the world we build today will determine our future, the future of our province and the future of the people in our province.

We badly need improvements in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. We badly need a much better approach to preventive health care. And when it comes to lead pollution and lead poisoning, it's important to remember that the worth of the human brain is incalculable. The value we assign to it will be defined by the intensity with which we pursue or avoid the protection of its optimum development.

While the current government prevaricates, the scientific community itself has no doubt about lead's terrible effects. Lead blunts children's cognition and is the silent thief of their futures. Those who have watched a century of children sacrificed on the altar of lead poisoning are aghast that we as a wealthy industrial society would continue to knowingly allow future generations of children to be exposed to lead.

The 'covent'—current government of Manitoba and the several before it have fallen far short of where we need to be in protecting children's brains by eliminating lead toxicity and lead poisoning in our province. Action is urgent. Action is needed.

The central question is this: Does this government have the political will to do what is necessary and to do what is right?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, merci, miigwech.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I appreciate the opportunity to put a few words on the record in response to the Throne Speech.

First, I'd like to start by saying thank you yet again, once again, as we should always be thanking all the Manitobans who are doing their absolute best to adhere to public health orders, to keep themselves, their families, their neighbours and communities safe during this pandemic and to again thank all essential service workers who have been working around the clock tirelessly throughout this pandemic. Many, of

which we're hearing from now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are really experiencing a level of fatigue and exhaustion due to working throughout this pandemic without the resources and adequate funding that they need in order to do their jobs as safely as possible. I want to thank all of those essential workers and thank Manitobans.

I know people are tired; I know that folks are experiencing compliance fatigue. I know that people are struggling as we transition, you know, through fall and now looking forward into winter. Folks are struggling to find, you know, new ways and creative ways to make sure that their needs are met, that their family members are looked after and safe and taken care of.

And I want to thank everyone for all of their efforts throughout this pandemic, and remind folks that, you know, there are resources available, there are people they can reach out to, and it's important for us to work extra hard to stay connected to one another, that physically distancing and social isolation has an impact.

And so, you know, while on that side of the House, you know, they're busy cutting resources and cutting funds from the organizations that fill a lot of those gaps for people, I want Manitobans to know that on this side of the House, we're going to be working extremely hard and fighting every day to ensure that the organizations, non-profits, et cetera, that have been doing a tremendous job filling gaps for Manitobans that they see the resources they need and that their voices are heard.

So I, you know, I've been reflecting on the Throne Speech, and I took to my social media right after the Throne Speech was delivered to kind of share a few of my immediate thoughts, and what I did was I asked Manitobans to let me know what their thoughts were on the Throne Speech.

A lot of folks actually didn't really know what a Throne Speech was, they didn't know where they could access it, so I provided a link to that, and I heard from a number of folks who actually took the time to go through the document, who took the time to listen to some of what was shared, and they provided their own feedback, and I'm going to get into that in a little bit.

Interestingly enough, a lot of my own reflections, a lot of the criticisms and concerns that I heard from, you know, different folks in community, certainly

folks in our caucus, were echoed by many Manitobans.

And I think it really speaks to the fact that there's a general consensus around what this government is not doing and where they're failing, and it speaks to the fact that Manitobans are paying attention. People are listening. People are looking to the government to provide answers and clarification and resource where they know it's needed, and they recognize that this government is dropping the ball in key ways that aren't just going to negatively impact folks during the pandemic, but it's going to have potentially long-term outcomes that are harmful for many Manitobans.

So, when I hear the Premier (Mr. Pallister)—when I hear the Premier talk about we're all in this together, I'm sorry, I have to—I chuckle a little bit every time, I really do, because it's not true, you know, it's just not a true statement. The fact of the matter is we may be experiencing this together, but we're not all experiencing this pandemic in the same way. And the only way that the needs of folks are equitably going to be addressed is if we recognize those differences, if we recognize that not everybody is walking through this pandemic in the same way. We're not all in this exactly the same way together.

There are key areas that stood out for me, like I said, that I know stood out for many other folks, but I'd like to speak to a few of those specifically. I'd like to talk about the realities that folks of different genders may face, I want to talk about the fact that systemic racism—while the rest of the world is awakening to the realities of systemic racism, apparently the Premier has no idea that it exists, because it wasn't mentioned, not one time, in the Throne Speech.

During a time, during a pandemic, where systemic discrimination is having catastrophic impacts on some communities versus others, to not have it mentioned—not once—in the Throne Speech during this pandemic is shameful, and it speaks to a complete lack of awareness. It speaks to a level of being out of touch that every single person should be concerned about.

Addictions and mental health weren't mentioned in the Throne Speech. Today I was really glad to see my colleague, the representative for Point Douglas, the MLA for Point Douglas, ask very direct questions about the numbers of overdoses during this pandemic related to opioid addictions, substance use. The minister couldn't give a direct response on that question, where in other jurisdictions they're releasing

that data, they're transparent around that data. And the reason for that transparency is because folks can recognize and do recognize that those people, families struggling with problematic substance use and addictions are disproportionately experiencing some negative outcomes during this pandemic and that has to be named and identified in order to be addressed.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

And that's really what I'm talking about here. It's that if you don't identify something, if you can't name it, if you don't articulate it, how are you supposed to even address it?

So, those were a few things that really stood out to me and those are things, actually, that I heard from many constituents as well. Mental health not being mentioned or talked about, no strategies or plans around that, nothing to adequately address addictions and problematic substance use—that was brought to my attention.

* (16:10)

Several folks raised the point that during this pandemic we've actually seen the government really try to advance and—advance their privatization agenda, which I think is something that we cannot let go of in terms of highlighting what the government is doing. In that regard, I think it's hilarious whenever members opposite look at—across this way and call us ideological, as if their austerity agenda isn't rooted in ideology that's actually not even evidence based.

If they invested resources in the areas that we've been talking about, addressing social determinants of health, that would benefit everybody in Manitoba. It would benefit absolutely everyone, and the research and the evidence is there to substantiate that that sort of investment provides long-term positive health outcomes for as many people as possible and actually benefits communities and benefits government economically as well.

So what I'm going to speak on a little bit is systemic racism, because it is so important, because it is real, and because governments in other jurisdictions are recognizing it and speaking on it. For whatever the reasons are, here in Manitoba, our Premier and our government doesn't want to speak on it, doesn't want to address it.

Actually, something that I find really, really concerning is the ways in which this government has perpetuated systemic discrimination.

You know, there's a protest happening right now, outside on the Legislature grounds, that is speaking to legislation that this government is trying to pass that discriminates against Indigenous children. It is a racist piece of legislation. It is. It's discriminatory. It's wrong. It's disgusting, as far as I'm concerned, that they've embedded that in something that they're hoping—I think they are hoping—people just wouldn't take notice of, and that not a single member on that side of the House has taken to any platform to say they stand against. That sends a message loud and clear to Manitobans about whose children are prioritized and which children are prioritized in this province.

It's critically important that we don't shy away from—in 2020, that we don't shy away from naming and identifying the very things that keep all of us behind, not just some or a few. Not addressing these issues harms absolutely everybody. It benefits, foundationally, a system that has only benefited a few and harms, morally, absolutely everyone.

Something that also really troubles me, and I—we've spoken to it and it's been mentioned in this House—but, it's these little remarks that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has made.

You know, during the month of June, there was a historic rally—peaceful rally—here in Manitoba; almost 20,000 people attended. Justice 4 Black Lives Winnipeg hosted that rally talking about and speaking to the issues around anti-black racism, systemic violence, police brutality against black bodies. And in an interview, the Premier made mention of all lives matter, which he claimed he didn't understand was essentially a racist dog whistle. And that's not something I'm going to let go and that's not something I think anybody should let go.

There are many comments that this Premier has made. There's an absence of comment this Premier has made, reflected in the Throne Speech, for example, that reflects something everyone should be concerned of and that's about who is prioritized in this province.

The Throne Speech purports to be laying out the path forward and protecting Manitobans, but which Manitobans, Madam Speaker? Which Manitobans is this government purporting to be protecting?

I wonder if it's international students. Is it those folks? Is it the international students who had their health care removed? Is it the international students who are paying exorbitant amounts of money for private insurance and who are now actively discriminated against in our health-care system?

Which, maybe, some folks aren't aware of. I am aware of because I've sat down and had conversations with international students who have had nearly catastrophic outcomes trying to access health care in Manitoba and have been denied equitable access because that health care was removed by this government.

So you can't say that you're putting forward a plan and laying a path to protect Manitobans and not specifically identify which Manitobans you refuse to protect. I would really like to see the government speak to that; but they won't, so I will.

You know, I think about the fact that women have been disproportionately impacted during this pandemic. We know that across many jurisdictions women are disproportionately negatively impacted by this pandemic. And yet the government has—I can't even say the government has applied—they haven't applied a gendered analysis at all to the recovery here in Manitoba and to keeping the curve flat. In fact, you know, I would argue that this government has made it much harder for women to recover during this pandemic, to move forward through this pandemic and beyond it and have equitable positive outcomes.

When you see this government attack early childhood educators and attack their ability to provide care in Manitoba, when you see this government refuse to even entertain a liveable wage, which would by far make a difference for racialized women in this province, when you see that this government—again, I could go back to international students, because many of the meetings that I've had with students who had faced discrimination in our health-care system and who don't have equitable access to health care when they're sick, Madam Speaker, are international students who are women, who identify as women.

And I was really glad to hear my colleague, the representative and MLA for Notre Dame, her comments today and her ministerial response about how this government needs to do a better job listening to young women, listening to the needs of girls, that in doing so you can actually respond in a way that meets their needs as opposed to just giving folks what you think they need and, you know, have a press release and think that it's—because it looks shiny that it'll make a big difference, where you could investing dollars in other ways that really address the needs of young women and girls in this province.

It was disappointing to me that she wasn't granted leave—actually by a male minister across—she was

denied leave in order to complete her statement on International Day of the Girl, which is disappointing.

But, you know, one of the other things that I wanted to make sure I talked about, you know, outside of things I've been asking in question period around the government's failed response to COVID: seven months to get ready and, unfortunately, the serious lack of capacity in the system. As it is, that wasn't really addressed at all in the Throne Speech: how is this government going to clean up their mess, the mess that they knew would happen if they didn't act quickly enough and appropriately.

Seniors, Madam Speaker. You know, seniors in this province have 'beared' a brunt that many of us will never fully understand or appreciate, the immunocompromised folks, being highly isolated, being without the resources that they need, being without the investments that are required in our public health-care system to make sure that our home care didn't absolutely fall apart for many folks during this pandemic which, unfortunately, home care has been pulled back in a way that has really harmed many folks, many seniors, immunocompromised folks with disabilities. But folks in long-term care right now are struggling to see why this government has left them without the resources they need in order to thrive during this pandemic.

And ultimately I think it really speaks to this government overall: the lack of willingness to invest in the areas where we really need it most, the lack of this government's willingness to commit to putting resources in place so that folks who are most marginalized, who are targeted, who are vulnerable don't go without during this pandemic and beyond.

Because this isn't just about the COVID-19 pandemic; this is also about what our lives look like beyond the pandemic. And so I would implore this government to reflect on the Throne Speech, listen to Manitobans, listen to Manitobans who are saying you need to start identifying, strategizing and dealing with the realities around systemic racism.

* (16:20)

You need to apply a gendered lens and analysis to how we're going to recover and move through this pandemic. You need to make sure you're investing in our public health-care system. Drop the for-profit privatization agenda that doesn't equitably serve Manitobans and is going to hurt everybody in the long run.

Maybe, maybe even make mention of the two-spirit and LGBTTQ folks who exist in this province and who deserve to intentionally have their needs and their experiences addressed in a Throne Speech, in policy, because that community, those communities weren't mentioned at all.

And outside of maybe a member opposite making fun of binaries in this House, quite frankly, two-spirit and LGBTQ people aren't mentioned very much, if at all, by this government. And that is shameful. It's actually reprehensible, Madam Speaker.

So, again, if this government wants to put forward documentation and policy in a Throne Speech that says this is about protecting Manitobans, then this government needs to commit to protecting all Manitobans, Madam Speaker. This government hasn't been doing that. This government is intentionally leaving out the Manitobans that they think don't have a voice, the Manitobans that they think don't deserve to be amplified in this Chamber. That's disgraceful, and it won't stand.

I know on this side of the House, myself and my colleagues and all the Manitobans that I hear from on a daily basis will not let it stand.

And I hope, I implore members opposite—some of which maybe are trying to act like you're not paying attention to what I'm saying, but I know that there's a few over there, Madam Speaker, members opposite who are hearing what I'm saying, who pay attention to my social media, who are listening and having meetings with Manitobans in their offices, virtually now, who are telling and reassuring Manitobans that they're there for them, that even though their government, that their Premier (Mr. Pallister) erases those folks from a Throne Speech, doesn't speak to those folks in policy, there are members opposite who are having those meetings and meeting with those Manitobans and reassuring them that they care.

I would encourage those members, Madam Speaker, to start using their platforms to actually amplify those voices in public and in policy and reflect that we are actually all in this together.

Thank you.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I'd like to start by just recognizing my colleague for those powerful words and pointing out some of the major concerns with this government. I'm grateful to have such impressive folks on this side of the building and—really a privilege to work with them.

Thanks to the Speaker and to Leg. employees here for everything that you've done to help prepare us for a safe return to the building. And I do want to express a thank you to you, Madam Speaker.

I'd also like to thank Manitobans for their sacrifices and their commitment to doing their part over the last seven months. We've seen Manitobans step up in ways that, unfortunately, have not been matched by this government, and we want to make sure we recognize that commitment that Manitobans have had to helping us to flatten the curve.

I'd also like to thank front-line health-care workers in this province for their incredible bravery and their sacrifices in helping to keep us all safe and in working for us in long shifts and sometimes 16-hour shifts, knowing that so many of our nurses are given forced overtime to try to ensure that Manitobans continue to get the health-care services they need, and their work needs to be acknowledged.

We'd also should acknowledge the work of front-line service providers: folks working in our grocery stores, in our community organizations. Everybody has seen, through this pandemic, just how important those workers are, how important that labour is to allowing this province to continue moving forward. And it's my hope that as a result of that recognition of their importance that folks on the other side of this room will start to understand the importance and the value in investing in those workers and ensuring that we give them a minimum wage that they can actually live on.

Lastly, because it's so critically important to me, I'd like to thank child-care workers for their continued efforts that have allowed Manitobans to keep working and to keep our economy going through an incredibly difficult period.

I think many Manitobans, even those who maybe previously didn't think a lot about the importance of the work performed by child-care workers are now deeply aware of how essential those services are, of how essential child-care workers are in this province and how important they are to ensuring that our economy can keep moving forward.

So, it's good to be in here, it's good to have an opportunity to speak to this government's recent Throne Speech and it's good to be back here after an extended absence during what might have been the most important period in recent Manitoban history to actually have a chance to ask this government some

questions about what they have not been doing over the last while.

We know that Manitobans stepped up during the course of this pandemic and it's clear to us that this government is not doing its part to match their commitment.

Simply put, this government has not done enough and it's clear from this Throne Speech that they're not planning on doing enough for everyday Manitobans. I'm thinking about families who are showing up to COVID-testing sites and being told that they're not able to access the test; that they need to come back. I'm thinking about those families that are showing up to those sites with young kids in tow who are being told that they need to wait five hours, or seniors who are having to go multiple times to access a test, often in the presence of many other people who may themselves be sick, placing Manitobans at risk.

I'm thinking about families whose kids are still attending packed classrooms in the midst of a pandemic or who didn't receive clarity on what plans would be put in place to ensure that their families would be safe because this government failed to create a centralized and co-ordinated strategy to ensure a safe return to school. I'm thinking about child-care professionals who are left to fend for themselves throughout the first part of this pandemic and who've been treated with absolute and total disrespect and whose jobs are now in question because the government has frozen funding for child-care centres for four years and has failed to do anything about it, so I'm thinking about them and those jobs that are currently being put at risk by this government.

I'm also thinking about all the small-business owners in St. James who I've come to know and who continue to struggle because, if they'd had the benefit of existing in another province, they probably would've received a significantly higher level of supports in helping to pay their wages, their rent, their additional costs of business; they probably would've been given greater clarity on how they were supposed to operate instead of being left, again, to figure out for themselves over and over and over again, scratching their heads, how it's possible that a government could fail on so many accounts to worry about the needs of small businesses in this province.

So, Madam Speaker, instead of focusing on matching the commitment of these Manitobans and all Manitobans who did a lot to ensure that this province could continue to forge on, this government has continued to focus on cuts and moving this province

backwards, on selling our assets, on making announcements and then underspending time and time and time again.

So, no, I do not support this Throne Speech. It did not hit the mark and I think we need to continue to ensure that this government moves forward in responding to a number of these issues.

In terms of the COVID response, Madam Speaker, we're now seven months into the pandemic and it's pretty clear that this government is failing in its response. Last May, when survey results found that he was the least popular premier in the entire country, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) boasted that he doesn't care about popularity, he just cares about results. Well, here we are, many months later and, as the Premier said, results matter. So here's the results: Manitoba now has one of the fastest rates of infection in the entire country, hospitalizations are at a record high and we have senior citizens and people with young children being turned away from tests or waiting five hours for a test or waiting for up to a week for their results. This is totally and completely unacceptable for obvious reasons, and at my end of the city, we didn't even have testing for a period of about a month and a half until a week and a half ago.

*(16:30)

And, you know what, I know that pretty well because my family had to go obtain some tests for my daughter after she got a case of the sniffles at daycare and we wanted to check that out and ensure that she was okay and our family would be okay.

So we drove over to the only accessible site for us, which was on Main Street, and when we got there we learned, like many other Manitobans, that the wait would be approximately five hours to get access to a test. So we decided to drive on to Selkirk, and there we waited for two and a half hours to get a test.

So that day—only because my family was fortunate enough to have five hours to burn in the middle of a weekend and only because we were lucky enough to own a vehicle, because many Manitobans need to use public transportation, or if they can't access that for some reason, maybe they need to access testing through the use of a cab—we were incredibly lucky. We were lucky that we were able to access that test.

Some families are not so lucky, Madam Speaker, and there's no excuse for the situation that this government has created. We deserve convenient access to testing so that we can have the best shot

possible in getting this pandemic and this situation in Manitoba under control.

So we now find ourselves in this unenviable situation of scrambling last-minute to figure out this testing question, while each of us receives a steady stream of questions from constituents, asking about what the heck is going on. It should make every one of the MLAs on the other side of that House very angry that their government has failed to meet this basic requirement in ensuring that Manitobans can stay safe.

Madam Speaker, in the last several months, instead of focusing on ensuring that Manitobans were ready for a safe back-to-school, or instead of ensuring that we had enough test sites to handle the second wave, which we all saw coming months in advance, we've seen this government doing what they do best which is to take public wealth and to transfer that into private hands, and to focus on chipping Hydro apart, piece by piece.

Recently, even though the Premier and his Cabinet protest endlessly that we're making this stuff up, we saw this government take a very valuable asset, which all of us as Manitobans owned a piece of, and poof, next thing you know, it's gone. That asset's been now transferred from the hands of Manitobans to the hands of private capital.

Teshmont Consultants which was a subsidiary that, again, all of us owned a piece of here, was a company that was built off historic investments that we've made as a province in Hydro. It's a Manitoban success story, it's part of our hydro history and every one of us should be proud of the history in the story and the success of that company.

Government wants to paint this as nothing but an operational decision by Hydro, but we know better. It was approved by this government because nothing gets approved without passing by the desk of the Premier. So, no matter how much they protest that we're just making stuff up about privatization, we know that facts matter and the fact is, the Manitoba government just sold off a bunch of our stuff.

As recently as a few weeks ago, we were partial owners in that company and now, that wealth has been transferred and this sale doesn't just mean the loss of an incredibly valuable resource and asset for Manitobans, it means that our economy is going backwards.

Teshmont was an innovative company, a forward-looking company, an energy company that could've

been used to help us build an economy of the future here in Manitoba, an economy that was forward-looking and that was focused on using our greatest assets and building upon those assets, to deliver more wealth for all Manitobans. And instead, what do we do? We sell it off.

The fact is, it makes absolutely zero sense because, I don't know about you, Madam Speaker, but when you have ownership in a winning company, a company that produces profits, it's pretty basic that you don't tend to go and sell that off, especially not if it's providing value for an entire population in the province of Manitoba.

This Premier has no vision for the province, he's got no plans for helping all Manitobans to do better, he's got no plan for growing more wealth for all Manitobans and instead, they're doing what they do best: they focus on reducing, on shrinking, on making things smaller, on cutting costs, on shrinking everything no matter what the impact, because that's who they are.

And that's, I think, one of the biggest differences between the Conservatives in this province and the NDP: where they focus on reducing and shrinking and cutting, we focus on building, on growing and making a better tomorrow for all Manitobans.

The government's desire to transfer public wealth into private hands does not end with Teshmont, unfortunately. Over the last several months, we've learned of two different instances of direct government interference in Manitoba Hydro International, which is an incredibly valuable and wholly owned subsidiary of Manitoba Hydro.

And what we've learned, mostly through FIPPA and the good work of journalists, is pretty ugly. What we've learned is this—and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) hasn't been very willing to answer these questions over the last couple times we've had a chance to ask him in the House, so I have a great pleasure here of, again, making this point: the Premier's hand-picked head of Treasury Board, who was previously an executive with Bell MTS, gave direction to Manitoba Hydro that resulted in a \$40-million contract extension to guess who, Madam Speaker? Bell MTS.

Even more concerning: that was possible after the Premier had made a public commitment on record in 2017 that Mr. Beauregard would recuse himself for any and all decisions relating to Bell MTS.

But we know that that wasn't true, Madam Speaker. We know because Mr. Beauregard is

apparently going around as an unaccountable, unelected actor, the hand-picked head of Treasury Board, going around giving direction to the head of our most valuable Crown corporation.

And in doing that, Madam Speaker, they broke the law. That's another thing we haven't really had much of a chance to talk about yet here. They very clearly violated the Crown corporations accountability act, which requires 30 day—within 30 days that any direction from a Cabinet-level committee to one of our Crowns be announced. And there's a very good reason for that, because we don't want business being done in secret. We don't want secret actors going around telling our most valuable Crown corporation what the Premier wants them to do without having to answer to anybody for that. The reason the Premier doesn't like the idea of us pursuing this is because he's not a big fan of accountability.

That questionable interference in Hydro doesn't end there, unfortunately. We know that direct interference from the government has resulted in a stop-sell order being issued to Manitoba Hydro International, and that stop-sell order, which prevents Manitoba Hydro International from engaging in any new contracts, is currently in the process of crippling that business, that business that creates millions of dollars of wealth for Manitobans.

So we know that that stop-sell order is not only crippling the business of Manitoba Hydro International, we also know that it's crippling the business of several Manitoba-based Internet service provider companies whose contracts and whose future is now in question.

So, in the middle of a pandemic, when we want to ensure at all costs that Manitobans are working, that they have access to good quality jobs, our government is going backwards and causing several of these fantastic Manitoba companies to stop work, to lay people off.

That's an absolute shame, Madam Speaker: more economic hardship, more jobs lost, all due to the actions of this Premier and his Cabinet. No one knows why they're directing MHI to allow its business to shrink up, but we can take some pretty good guesses.

We know that in three to four months from now, when MHI's book of business is dried up, when their balance sheet is looking pretty ugly, that there's going to be quite a good case there to be made by this government as to why we might want to consider

hiving off that asset, why we might want to consider transferring that public wealth into private hands.

That's a shame. We know that he's trying to go down the same route he went with Teshmont, and on this side of the House we're going to do everything we can to stop that.

Beyond that meddling in Hydro's affairs and stage-setting for selling off public wealth, the government continues to attack the integrity of the PUB, issuing a rate increase without an independent rate review, something which ensures Manitobans are protected from overzealous governments, doesn't matter the stripe.

Hydro didn't even submit a rate increase application, but this government sees fit to give everyone a rate increase, just in time for the holidays. The government does not like independent review processes, Madam Speaker, and the reasons are pretty clear. With Bill 44, it's clear that the government is trying to eviscerate the role of the PUB as we know it, but now the Premier (Mr. Pallister) wants to just pretend that the PUB doesn't even exist.

Now, we know why the Premier is so frustrated by the PUB, Madam Speaker. It's because every time this government goes to the PUB to ask for rate increase, the PUB denies them their request.

Why? Because this government continues to ask for rate increases that are completely exorbitant, that are unneeded. For example, in 2017, this government went to the PUB and asked for a 7.9 per cent increase, and the PUB saw fit to give them only half of that.

That decision, by that independent board, put \$60 million a year back in the pockets of Manitobans. You know, this government likes to talk a lot about putting money back on the kitchen tables of Manitobans but thanks to that independent process that protected each and every one of us from an overzealous government that was looking to use Hydro to fatten up its coffers, every single one of us has gained \$60 million as a result of that independent process. We should all be grateful for that PUB review process. We should be protecting it.

* (16:40)

But, again, we understand why the Premier and his Cabinet may be feeling a little frustrated with the PUB, because they inconveniently concluded in 2014 that both Keeyask and bipole projects should have gone ahead. So, again, another thing that drives this Premier and this government to frustration about this

PUB. The PUB has proven time and time again its incredible value, it's proven time and time again its importance, and we need to protect it.

Bill 44 is a disgrace. It's a disgrace of a bill and it's an affront to the democratic process here in Manitoba, and Manitobans deserve to have an independent process for reviewing hydro rate increases. The attacks on Hydro and on Manitobans need to stop.

They need to stop selling off our valuable resources like Teshmont to the highest bidder. They need to stop working to choke out Manitoba Hydro International, stop working to turn over control of our provincially owned fibre-optic line to private interests, to use a concession model to sell off access to that fibre-optic line—which will allow us to get Internet across the province—to the highest bidder.

They need to show some regard for the importance of independent rate review processes and the value they produce for Manitobans. And they need to stop wasting Manitoban dollars on partisan reviews: partisan reviews like the Brad Wall review, which is being conducted by not one, but two ex-Conservative premiers. I think we all can have some degree of confidence that the results of that report will probably not bring a non-partisan bit of information and will probably bring very little value in helping us to understand how we can move forward in improving projects or project management with Manitoba Hydro.

So we need to ensure that we continue to protect Hydro. We need this government to stop attacking it, to stop working to break it up. And we need to do that at all costs, Madam Speaker.

Quickly, one of my biggest concerns about this Throne Speech is the clear indication that this government is moving to privatize child care in this province. They've announced that they're looking to use a new funding model. Now, we don't know exactly what that means, but I can tell you it's pretty clear what that does mean because of the indications they've offered us.

We know that what's likely to happen is they're likely to move towards the creation of a two-tier system of child care in this province, and it means Manitobans are going to see a slow and steady decline of child care in this province. We're going to see a steady increase in the costs of child care and we're going to see a decrease in Manitobans' ability to access child-care services, Madam Speaker.

This government needs to stay away from child care. They need to protect our publicly funded child-care institutions. They need to protect that community infrastructure that's been there for years and years. We need to ensure that it's there for many more years to come.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to the Throne Speech. I do not support it.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to respond to this Throne Speech, and it feels very strange doing this virtually, but, you know, it's been a very intense year, as COVID has changed everyone's plans and everyone's daily routines.

I know I think about the big events like Folk Fest and Folklorama and Manitoba 150, Madam Speaker. I know it feels like just a couple months ago, people from Manitoba 150 were coming down to meet with all of us MLAs and tell us about these big plans over the summer. And I know—I still think they did a wonderful job in rolling out the plans that they were able to over the summer, and I think that there are other ways Manitobans have been able to celebrate this.

And I know for myself, and I'm sure many MLAs, Folklorama is just—it's a big, big part of our summers, and so to not experience it, I almost feel as if my entire year has been a little bit thrown off now. COVID has just affected so many people's lives, and anyone who has had trips booked or weddings planned, unfortunately, it—they've been dramatically changed. And we recognize how many jobs and businesses were and continue to be affected by it.

You know, I want to use this as a very quick opportunity to thank a few people, and I know my colleagues have been doing the same throughout their responses as well, but everyone from our front-line workers to volunteers who have stepped up—I know one of my constituency assistants, actually, he's stepped up and he's volunteering at different hospital [*inaudible*] intake.

And I want to thank our teachers for how they have been adapting. I know a few of the teachers that teach currently in the constituency of Tyndall Park I went to school with, and so we have each other on Instagram. And they're posting pictures of these plastic shields and barriers and all the cool ways that they're actually teaching students but with very little contact. And I know if I were a teacher I would be

going and looking at these forms of social media because there's actually some really brilliant ideas. And I want to encourage teachers to keep sharing your ideas and just thank you for being so adaptable.

And I know often our truck drivers, sometimes they go unacknowledged and I think we really, really need to show our appreciation. If it wasn't for our truck drivers we wouldn't have resources coming into Winnipeg, coming into Manitoba as a whole, everything from when people first started stocking up on toilet paper. We know that's not the way to do things now, but we do owe a huge amount of gratitude to our truck drivers, Madam Speaker.

I also want to thank people who are working in care facilities. They're doing their best to provide safety for seniors within these facilities as well as keep lines of communication open, and this is something the long-term-care association has really been advocating to, and I'll speak more to that shortly, Madam Speaker.

But I've spoken with constituents who just had their first babies and have felt heartbroken because they haven't been able to allow their friends and family over to meet and visit the babies, and constituents who are unable to go and see their loved ones who maybe are very ill or maybe have passed away due to COVID, and this is because of flight restrictions and travel restrictions.

You know, Madam Speaker, I think that this isn't said enough, either: during phase 1, Manitobans had this wonderful opportunity where we really got to understand COVID-19 and we're learning this because we are now in the middle of a second wave, and although numbers are not promising—they are very—they can be quite scary sometimes—I think Manitobans are doing a great job.

We're in the better position to be able to handle a second wave right now. People are wearing face masks more. I know my two nephews—they're, I think, eight and six, maybe, Madam Speaker—and they're telling me about their little face masks that they get to put on every time they go outside.

And I know that there's books out there now educating children on the importance of face masks and not only face masks, but also the physical distancing and the washing of hands and singing the ABCs. Things like that I think people are becoming very well informed on, and that's helping our economy greatly.

Just a little bit of a transition: this Throne Speech, expectedly, had no surprises, Madam Speaker. It's filled with big, big words but such little action or plans, and it's hard to be optimistic about it when this seems to be an ongoing pattern of the government.

And I want to start by talking about seniors, specifically about care facilities. You know, this government has talked before about building more personal-care homes. Don't get me wrong; I'm so for that, but personal-care homes are not the only answer. We also need to be talking about retirement housing, supportive housing, 55-plus homes.

I want to—like, I've heard so many stories, as all MLAs will have, from people about home care. I have constituents who receive home care who have some thoughts that they would like to share and possibly some great suggestions that we've been sharing with this government.

We also hear it from the home-care workers' standpoint where I think we could do a better job at keeping home-care workers on schedules that are more maintainable where they aren't having to jump from house to house super quickly and they can be more diligent and sometimes stay longer with their residents. You know, we talk about health-care aides, too.

If seniors are in the position to be able to stay in their homes, we should be doing everything in our power to allow this to be their first option, and sometimes it's little things, Madam Speaker. Maybe a senior needs a rail installed to get from the front door into their—just into their house. Maybe they need a rail installed to get from the bottom of the staircase to the top. Maybe it's a rail inside the shower.

If we could be doing little things, though, that would allow seniors to remain in their homes close to their friends, close to their families, the communities in which they grew up, we should be doing this.

* (16:50)

Madam Speaker, I've been advocating for a seniors' advocate for, gosh, four or five years now. I believe it's one of the first things I started talking about back when I first got elected, and I do believe it's picking up momentum as there are groups now talking about it too. But we are really, really begging that this government will get on board, and we need a seniors' advocate here in Manitoba, someone where seniors and their families can go and provide their

concern in a non-partisan way so that they can get the help that they deserve.

And I started to mention this a little bit earlier, Madam Speaker, but I think about LTCAM, and I know my colleague from River Heights made mention to this as well: the Long Term Care Association of Manitoba. They're an incredible organization for seniors in the province, and they've been diligent and working hard in gathering signatures over the last few months, requesting that this government give resources to seniors to be able to communicate with their loved ones during the pandemic. And this could be as simple as old iPhones people aren't using or old iPads.

But, unfortunately, and I spoke with the executive director just the other day, the government has completely ignored their request, and so something needs to change. Lines of communication have to go both ways, Madam Speaker. And I truly believe that seniors and loved ones of seniors and advocates for seniors, they're speaking out more now than ever, so it's time that this government step up.

The next topic that I wanted to respond to in the Throne Speech is education. Madam Speaker, education is huge on all levels, especially right now during COVID, and we're hearing tons of stories, as I also made reference to, with teachers being flexible and adapting. But we're also hearing stories from parents and from students.

And I had one constituent, Madam Speaker. This was a few weeks ago. I've—we—during the pandemic, during phase 1, I stopped going to McDonald's for a few weeks on Saturdays and then we started back up, but as numbers started to rise again and the second wave started, we stopped going again. But a few weeks back, when I was still there, I had a constituent come by, and him and his wife have six children. Out of six children, four go to different schools. And they were seriously concerned because, yes, they're in the position they can drive their children to school, which not all parents are, but these are four different schools, six different children that likely meet a minimum four different cohorts, likely six different cohorts, all then coming back to one big family.

So parents were very nervous about encountering this, about having to make decisions. Do I send my child to school? Do I try to home-school? Do I think about private school? And, Madam Speaker, this government did not provide a whole lot of options. I'm

starting to feel a little more optimistic because school divisions, I hear, have been working incredibly well with families and parents and students and trying to find adaptive ways to ensure that if parents are feeling more comfortable to keep their children home, they can try and create a way to do so.

But, Madam Speaker, we also have to keep in mind, not everyone is in the position to keep their children at home or send their children to private school. So we need to do what's going to be the best for the larger economy.

Madam Speaker, it's not just elementary schools too; it's high schools, and whether it was grade 12s last year, I feel sincerely bad because they don't—they didn't all get to experience their graduation, and I can't speak for everyone, but I know I look back on my grade 12 graduation very fondly. And I think that our—Manitoba did a great job in still trying to celebrate with putting signs out on the front lawn, but I do feel like that was an important milestone in many people's lives and a lot of high school students had to go without.

And I think about high school students now; this is their final year and it is a different experience. I know every high school is doing things a little bit differently, but nearby my constituency, they're going to every two—or two to three times a week rather than every day.

And then you think about the transition to post-secondary. Post-secondary immediately out of high school can be very, very exciting. It can be very, very scary but a huge part of it is the social component. And this year, first-year post-secondary students, their courses are all online. And, you know, our instructors and professors—and I'm a student myself and my class this term is actually online as well; it's a different experience.

And I don't mind it so much myself because of the busyness and because I have had the experience of in class, but [*inaudible*] that as soon as it's safe again, we want people to have that experience. University, post-secondary, college, it's so much more than just the academics. You could argue the academics is the most important part, Madam Speaker, but I do think that social component is huge.

Another topic that I wanted to get to, Madam Speaker, and I'm just keeping track of the time here, was immigration. I'm curious to learn more about the special immigration Credential Recognition Program

for the Provincial Nominee Program but I'm flooded with thoughts and some pretty strong emotions with respect to immigration in Manitoba.

You know, I can't help but think about how the NDP completely, completely destroyed the Provincial Nominee Program here in Manitoba and it does bother me sometimes that they like to pretend that they can just come out on top of it as if none of that ever happened.

But the Provincial Nominee Program at one point was a beautiful program. It went from no wait times to, under the NDP government, sometimes over four, five year of wait times. It went from being a smooth application process to every additional challenge one could possibly imagine.

And I want to be clear: although it is very upsetting to me that the NDP were the ones who ruined the Provincial Nominee Program here in Manitoba, the Conservative government isn't really helping. The Conservative government recently, or a couple years ago now, but it's still implemented, brought in this \$500 additional fee, and you got to keep in mind, back when the Provincial Nominee Program first came into Manitoba, it ran incredibly well; it was an exceptional program and there was no fee, so there's no way to justify now why that \$500 head tax or fee, whatever you want to call it, is now being charged to new immigrants.

In addition to the fee, too, this government has shifted the focus of the Provincial Nominee Program. When it was first created, it was created with the hopes of reuniting families and this government has changed it and I think that there's room for some of those changes but we can't forget about that family reunification part. We need that. That's something where Manitoba and Canada as a whole, it's something we pride ourselves on, it's something we want to encourage.

So, Madam Speaker, I do look forward to this session of the Legislature and I'm hopeful that, moving forward, my leader and—the member from St. Boniface and my colleague from River Heights and myself will be allowed to participate and have the opportunity to take part in debate and ensure that we can advocate for our constituents.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Unlike our Premier (Mr. Pallister), I won't take his Throne Speech and just

throw it on the floor behind me, but really, that's where it should be—it's that or in the garbage can, because that's about what it's worth, Madam Speaker.

You know, here we are in the middle of a pandemic, the worst health concern that we've had now since, when, 1919, 1920, somewhere back then, and yet this government continues to cut health care. Now, they'll stand up and say, oh, no, we didn't do that.

Well, I'll tell you, Madam Speaker, I invite them to come to Flin Flon and tell people in that constituency that there's been no cuts to health care. They'll get run out of town on a rail. Each and every one of those members of the Pallister government should hang their heads in shame—in shame—that they expect 90-year-old seniors to come to Winnipeg for medical, sometimes once a month, but now with

COVID in place, the airline only flies Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

If you're fortunate enough to get your doctor to change your appointment, you can do it in two days.

I recently helped one of our 90-plus-year-old seniors who had to fly to Winnipeg on a Monday for an appointment on a Wednesday who couldn't go home until Friday. Now, you would think that—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 18 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, October 13, 2020

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