

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

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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, Hon.	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, Hon.	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, Hon.	Interlake-Gimli	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	Assiniboia	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMONT, Dougald	St. Boniface	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya	Notre Dame	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	McPhillips	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
MOSES, Jamie	St. Vital	NDP
NAYLOR, Lisa	Woleseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REYES, Jon	Waverley	PC
SALA, Adrien	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SMITH, Andrew	Lagimodière	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Vérendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 21, 2021

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): It is my duty to inform the House that the Speaker is unavoidably absent. Therefore, in accordance with the statutes, I would ask the Deputy Speaker to please take the Chair.

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

Please be seated. Good afternoon, everyone.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Introduction of bills?

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development Eighth Report

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Chairperson): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the eighth report on the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

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

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development presents the following as its Eighth Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on April 20, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. in Room 254 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 15)** – *The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act (Claim Dispute Tribunal)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société d'assurance publique du Manitoba (tribunal de règlement des différends en matière de demandes d'indemnisation)*
- **Bill (No. 22)** – *The Credit Unions and Caisses Populaires Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur les caisses populaires et les credit unions*
- **Bill (No. 30)** – *The Consumer Protection Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection du consommateur*
- **Bill (No. 48)** – *The Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la responsabilité financière et la protection des contribuables*

Committee Membership

As per the Sessional Order passed by the House on October 7, 2020 and further amended on December 3, 2020, Rule 83(2) was waived for the April 20, 2021 meeting, reducing the membership to six Members (4 Government and 2 Official Opposition).

- *Hon. Mr. FIELDING*
- *Mr. MICKLEFIELD*
- *Mr. SANDHU*
- *Mr. SMITH (Lagimodière)*
- *Mr. WASYLIW*
- *Hon. Mr. WHARTON*

Your Committee elected Mr. MICKLEFIELD as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected Mr. SMITH (Lagimodière) as the Vice-Chairperson.

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record

- *Mr. LAMONT*

Substitutions received during the committee proceedings:

- *Mr. MALOWAY for Mr. SANDHU*

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following two presentations on **Bill (No. 15)** – *The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act (Claim Dispute Tribunal)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société d'assurance publique du Manitoba (tribunal de règlement des différends en matière de demandes d'indemnisation)*:

Dean Scaletta, Private Citizen

Robert Dawson, Manitoba Used Car Dealers' Association

Your Committee heard the following two presentations on **Bill (No. 48)** – *The Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la responsabilité financière et la protection des contribuables*:

Molly McCracken, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

Shawna Finnegan, Private Citizen

Written Submissions

Your Committee received the following written submission on **Bill (No. 48)** – *The Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la responsabilité financière et la protection des contribuables*:

Kevin Rebeck, Manitoba Federation of Labour

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 15)** – *The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act (Claim Dispute Tribunal)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société d'assurance publique du Manitoba (tribunal de règlement des différends en matière de demandes d'indemnisation)*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 22)** – *The Credit Unions and Caisses Populaires Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur les caisses populaires et les credit unions*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 30)** – *The Consumer Protection Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection du consommateur*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 48)** – *The Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la responsabilité financière et la protection des contribuables*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

Mr. Micklefield: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Kildonan-River East (Mrs. Cox), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Food First Report

Mr. Dennis Smook (Chairperson): I wish to present the first report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Food.

Clerk: Your Standing Committee on Agriculture and Food—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Agriculture and Food presents the following as its First Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on April 20, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 36)** – *The Public Health Amendment Act (Food Safety and Other Amendments)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la santé publique (salubrité des aliments et modifications connexes)*
- **Bill (No. 62)** – *The Animal Diseases Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur les maladies des animaux*

Committee Membership

As per the Sessional Order passed by the House on October 7, 2020 and further amended on December 3, 2020, Rule 83(2) was waived for the April 20, 2021 meeting, reducing the membership to six Members (4 Government and 2 Official Opposition).

- Mr. BRAR
- Hon. Ms. CLARKE
- Mr. MICHALESKI
- Hon. Mr. PEDERSEN
- Mr. SALA
- Mr. SMOOK

Your Committee elected Mr. SMOOK as the Chairperson.

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

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record

- Hon. Mr. GERRARD

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following presentation on **Bill (No. 36)** – *The Public Health Amendment Act (Food Safety and Other Amendments)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la santé publique (salubrité des aliments et modifications connexes)*:

Phillip Veldhuis, *Direct Farm Manitoba*

Your Committee heard the following 27 presentations on **Bill (No. 62)** – *The Animal Diseases Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur les maladies des animaux*:

Miranda Desa, *Last Chance for Animals*
 Kaitlyn Mitchell, *Animal Justice*
 Tracy Groenewegen, *Private citizen*
 Brittany Semeniuk, *Winnipeg Humane Society*
 Jodi Lazare, *Private citizen*
 Debbie Wall, *Private citizen*
 Shawn Kettner, *Private citizen*
 Sandra Currie, *Private citizen*
 Patrick Falconer, *Private citizen*
 Elizabeth McCandless, *Private citizen*
 Corey Feere, *Manitoba Animal Save*
 Bill Campbell, *President, Keystone Agricultural Producers*
 Cam Dahl, *Manitoba Pork*
 Cory Rybuck, *Manitoba Egg Farmers*
 Kurt Siemens, *Siemens Farms Limited*
 Andrew Dickson, *Private citizen*
 Krista Krueger, *Private citizen*
 Kristin Lauhn-Jensen, *Private citizen*
 Carmen Asu, *Private citizen*
 Jessica Scott-Reid, *Private citizen*
 Christal Sudoski, *Private citizen*
 Tyler Fulton, *Manitoba Beef Producers*
 Janice Pennington, *Private citizen*
 Stefanie Allard, *Private citizen*
 Accalia Robertson, *Private citizen*
 Justin Reineke, *Private citizen*
 David Wiens, *Chair, Dairy Farmers of Manitoba*

Written Submissions

Your Committee received the following 16 written submissions on **Bill (No. 62)** – *The Animal Diseases*

Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur les maladies des animaux:

Brandi Vezina, *Private citizen*
 Ashoke Dasgupta, *Private citizen*
 Kristy Carroll, *Private citizen*
 Michael Prout, *Private citizen*
 Ann Walker, *Private citizen*
 Eugene Szach, *Private citizen*
 Danae Tonge, *Private citizen*
 Bonnie Brandt, *Private citizen*
 Ashley Chihonik, *Private citizen*
 Robert Driedger, *Private citizen*
 Larry Palmquist, *Private citizen*
 Julie Lafreniere, *Private citizen*
 Victoria Caldwell, *Private citizen*
 Shari Lee Block, *Private citizen*
 Scott Tinney, *Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals*
 Lynn Kavanagh, *World Animal Protection*

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 36)** – *The Public Health Amendment Act (Food Safety and Other Amendments)/Loi modifiant la Loi sur la santé publique (salubrité des aliments et modifications connexes)*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 62)** – *The Animal Diseases Amendment Act/Loi modifiant la Loi sur les maladies des animaux*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

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

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Tabling of reports? Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

School Bus Driver Day

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): I am pleased to rise today to remind all members that the third Wednesday of April each year is known as School Bus Driver Day in Manitoba. It was almost six years ago that I brought forward this legislation in which The School Bus Driver Day Act was unani- mously proclaimed.

As part of Education Week 2021, and in light of the ongoing pandemic, school bus drivers throughout the province continue to be on the front lines of the education system and have an important responsibility in the safe transport of students to and from school each and every day.

Bus drivers are often the first person that students see each morning before classes begin and one of the last that students see at the end of the school day. In addition, school bus drivers also transport students to and from field trips, sporting events and other activities.

I know first-hand the role that school bus drivers play in my own household over the years. My two sons benefited and relied on school bus drivers during their years in elementary, junior high and high school to safely bring them to and from school.

My youngest son, Jarvis, will be graduating from high school this June from École Edward-Schreyer School in Beausejour, and while he now has his own driver's licence and drives to and from school these days, he often shares with me what an important and invaluable service that bus drivers played over the years.

We often talk about teamwork, and this is especially true in the education context. Not only do parents, teachers, classmates and staff play an integral role in shaping one's learning development, but school bus drivers as well.

Finally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to remind all members that when you are driving near or around school buses that you continue to exercise caution and care. Please remember to slow down and stop whenever you see the stop sign marker extended or flashing red lights activated on a school bus. Getting kids to and from school safely is theirs and our No. 1 priority.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): The Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba is celebrating their 55th anniversary, and I am so pleased to recognize them in the Legislature today.

LDAM was funded in 1966 by a group of parents who found support in each other. It has since grown into a multi-faceted agency, serving 600 children, youth and adults each year.

One challenge that people with learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders face is that there are no physical indicators of a disability. Children are often misunderstood because they learn differently or are assumed to have behavioural issues. Parents can feel ashamed, desperate or powerless, and siblings can feel frustrated or overlooked.

In addition to the educational challenges with reading, writing and math skills, living with a learning disability can have an ongoing impact on friendships, employment, self-esteem and daily life. Mental health can be adversely affected if learning disabilities aren't diagnosed and appropriate supports provided.

LDAM works to end the stigma surrounding learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder so that children and adults in Manitoba can get the support they need with the goals of empowerment and fostering self-esteem. LDAM provides a wide range of responsive programming, from locally developed parent support workshops to international programs based on the latest neuroplasticity research.

* (13:40)

LDAM is the only agency in Manitoba that works specifically with learning disabilities and ADHD. Dedicated program staff express gratitude to do the work they do and are excited about the ways that programming has adapted and thrived over the course of the pandemic. They provide post-secondary student practicum opportunities, and their work is supported by many volunteers, fundraising efforts and the United Way.

Please join me in congratulating the Learning Disabilities Association on this milestone and thanking them for 55 years of service to families in this province.

Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce

Mr. Scott Johnston (Assiniboia): I speak today to the business successes in my community due to the involvement of the Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce. The Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce received its charter in 1959, and they amalgamated 10 years later with the St. James Chamber of Commerce to become St. James-Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce. In an annual general meeting in 1996, their name changed for the final time to become the Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce, as they are known today.

For 91 years, the St. James-Assiniboia's business community has been well represented by the

chamber of commerce, who have provided effective representation for more than 100,000 citizens and 4,000 businesses in west Winnipeg. The main objective of the Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce is to be an effective advocate for businesses and the community, with input from their members.

Under the CEO, Kristi Meek, and the guidance of their board of directors, St. James-Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce—or the Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce continues to work diligently with the provincial government, ensuring they provide the most up-to-date COVID-19 response information to their memberships and the overall business community.

Through the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, the Manitoba government is providing millions of dollars for a program that provides financial relief in the dine-in restaurants affected by the movement of critical red on the #RestartMB Pandemic Response System. The Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce were advocates of this initiative and certainly works with the business community within our community to help ensure that they're able to prosper.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to thank the Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce for their exemplary advocacy—

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

The honourable member for Thompson.

An Honourable Member: Leave.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there leave for the member from—I mean, for Assiniboia, to finish his member statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Johnston: I wish to thank the Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce for their exemplary advocacy for the businesses in St. James-Assiniboia and for the betterment of all Manitoba citizens.

Thank you.

Education Modernization Act

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): Bill 64, The Education Modernization Act, is a disaster for education in Manitoba. Bill 64 will completely dismantle the education system as we know it and centralize all power under the Pallister government. This bill replaces Manitoba's 37 school divisions with 15 regional councils, including combining all northern school divisions into one. It also gets rids of school

boards and excludes principals and vice-principals from their union.

This change removes decision making from the local level and puts it in the hands of this new authority hand-picked by the Premier (Mr. Pallister). This will reduce transparency, accountability, and the Province will now have total control over northern education. Education is not a one-size-fits-all, cookie-cutter approach, and having decision making at the local level is essential to our democracy. Unfortunately, this government doesn't seem to understand that and, in the face of widespread criticism to Bill 64, they don't seem to listen or even care.

Pallister government says Bill 64 will improve learning outcomes for Manitoba children. But on this side of the House we know poverty's the leading cause into lower educational results. This government didn't mention poverty once throughout Bill 64, which shows Manitobans just how disconnected they are—actually are from addressing the root causes of learning challenges.

It's hard to trust that the Province will take appropriate decisions regarding what is best for northern education when they have ignored our region for years. And the further away from north—education decisions get away from classrooms, harder it is to make proper decisions for our children. It simply doesn't make sense to have someone in Winnipeg deciding how schools are run.

Bill 64 empowers educators—Bill 64 won't empower educators, families or Manitoban children. This bill—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up. *[interjection]* The honourable member's time is up. *[interjection]* Your time is up. *[interjection]* The honourable member for Thompson.

RM of St. Clements

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Crown Services): I rise in the House today to bring awareness to the community profile of the RM of St. Clements.

The Rural Municipality of St. Clements is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Manitoba. The municipality's western boundary runs along the Red River and Lake Winnipeg from south of Lockport, then northward to Grand Beach Provincial Park. Eastward, the boundary site adjacent to the municipalities of Alexander, Lac du Bonnet, Brokenhead and Springfield.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the terrain is—in the RM of St. Clements is diverse, from rolling plains to rich forest and marshland to pristine beaches. The municipality is home to an ecological preserve and provincial parks, both rich and beautiful, with varied landscapes. Also housed within the RM are the communities of East Selkirk, Grand Marais, Libau and Lockport.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, known for its many parks and beaches—beach communities, the RM of St. Clements is the place to go for relaxation and recreation activities in every season, from swimming and boating in the summer to fishing, hunting and hiking in the spring and fall to snowmobiling and skiing in the winter. Sitting at the northern edge of the municipality is Grand Beach Provincial Park on Lake Winnipeg, Manitoba's most popular tourist destination on—in the province on the largest lake in Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, during these difficult COVID times, the RM of St. Clements provides one of the best staycation places in the province.

I would like to ask my colleagues to join me in acknowledging Mayor Debbie Fiebelkorn from the RM of St. Clements, who is joining us virtually today.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Health-Care System Nurse Staffing Levels

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Deputy Speaker, hallway medicine has returned to Manitoba, and now we know why. It's because of the cuts that the PCs have made to health care.

There are 1,300 fewer nurses working at the bedside than are needed right now. There are 1,300 vacant positions in Winnipeg alone at hospitals like the Grace. It's no wonder that we're hearing those terrible stories about seniors being left in hallways for five days. I'll table the document that proves that the government is leaving 1,300 vacant positions for nurses, positions unfilled.

When will the Premier stop his cuts to health care and fix the nursing staff shortage?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): There are presently 1,700 more nurses working in the province than was ever the case under the NDP. The NDP had close to

two decades to fix health care and they didn't do it. To put it mildly, they made the wrong choices.

When seniors needed personal-care homes they didn't build them. When patients needed shorter wait times, they got the longest wait times in Canada. So the member shouldn't run from his record or that of his party.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know what the Premier's done. He fires 3,000 nurses, hires back 1,700 and then puts up a mission accomplished sign. If only there was some way to cut through his rhetoric.

Well, in fact, there is. The very same document that I tabled and he refused to look at, I will table again. It shows that in Winnipeg there are 1,300 nursing positions vacant. What that means is that if the baseline for staffing was here, the amount that the PCs are funding is way down here at a level 1,300 nurses shorter than what is actually needed to care for patients in hospitals across the city.

When is the Premier going to stop these cuts? And when is he going to address the nursing staff shortage?

* (13:50)

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can only say to the member that 1,700 additional nurses have been added since June of 2019.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary question. [*interjection*] Order.

Mr. Kinew: Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the Premier gives his answer more slowly, it just means that he's wrong and slow. It doesn't change anything about the veracity of his statement.

When we dive into the numbers in the document that I tabled, we see that there are 20 per cent of nursing positions at the Grace vacant—20 per cent of nursing positions are vacant at the Grace. That is why that 93-year-old that we talked about yesterday had to wait in the hospital for five days. And it's because of their cuts.

We know that there's a 22 per cent vacancy rate for nursing positions at the St. Boniface emergency room—22 per cent. That's more than one in five nursing positions that are left vacant. The people left holding the bag are the patients.

Meanwhile, the Premier's making his plans to jet off to Costa Rica.

Before he leaves, will he fix the staffing shortage of nurses that he has caused with his cuts?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable First Minister. *[interjection]* Order.

Mr. Pallister: I've never been charged with a crime, but if I was I'd show up for my court date, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

All I can say to the member: he references wrong and slow. Well, he's wrong in each of his preambles, but the NDP was never slow. No, wait, they were always slow.

When it came time to invest in personal-care homes, they were slow. When it came to shorten wait times, they were slow. When it came time to lower ambulance fees, they were slow. They've been slow forever, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when it comes to putting patients first.

We put patients first on this side of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a different question.

Mr. Kinew: Let's speed things up for the Premier's benefit on the other side there.

The 20 per cent vacant nursing positions in the Grace Hospital emergency room, that's why the 93-year-old woman had to wait in the hospital for five days. The 22 per cent vacant nursing positions at the St. Boniface emergency room, that's why people are speaking up about the rough conditions for patients in that hospital.

And when we look at the reasons why, it's not only because of the failed consolidation plan that this PC government has implemented; it's also because of the cuts that they agreed on at the Cabinet table.

In the budget that they tabled this year, there are \$13 million less for emergency rooms, \$13 million less for bedside care in the ERs. You wonder why more than one in five positions are empty in some of these ERs? It's because they cut the funding, leaving the nurses to try and hold our health-care system together—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable first-leader's time is up.

Mr. Pallister: Three quarters of a million—of a, sorry, of a billion dollars more invested in health care than ever under the NDP is hardly descriptive of what the

member is referring to. Seventeen hundred more nurses since June of 2019.

The member is wrong and he knows he's wrong, but he has nothing else to go on, so I expect he'll continue to be wrong while we stick up for Manitoba patients.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

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

Mr. Kinew: So, again, the patients are speaking out; the conditions that they are being forced to endure in emergency rooms under the PCs are terrible. It is the return of hallway medicine to Manitoba.

Manitobans are speaking out. They want a strong health-care system, and they know that they won't get it with this PC government in place. And the facts themselves are speaking out. I will table again, because the Premier refuses to face the facts. Perhaps this time he will have the courage necessary to look at the document that shows that there are 1,300 nursing positions vacant in Winnipeg hospitals alone.

When is the Premier going to stop the health-care cuts and when will he end the nursing staff shortage?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I've got the courage of—I never beat anybody up, but if I did, I wouldn't blame them, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I don't need a lecture on courage from the member opposite.

On the issue of emergency rooms, all I can say is that they were functioning only as waiting rooms under the NDP, with the longest waits in the country. The longest waits in the country for emergency services were under the NDP.

And the fact the member doesn't acknowledge that, or doesn't understand it, which is even worse, shows that he's not ready to be accountable for his own actions, for his own decisions, for his own behaviours. And certainly he's trying to run away from those. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: But as he runs away, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he's running away from understanding what we understand: that cleaning up the NDP mess is what we're about and recreating it is what he's about.

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

COVID-19 Pandemic Response Workplace Transmission Data

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, some of the members opposite have been here long enough to know what it's like to see a government that has nothing left but ad hominem attacks to share as a message, and now they're certainly seeing a repeat of that with this Premier in office and with this Cabinet in place.

So, again, we know—[*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —what is happening in the emergency rooms. It's terrible. We know that it's a result of the cuts to health care. But when it comes to the pandemic response, what is needed is an accurate snapshot of what is happening with community transmission. That can only happen with the public release of workplace transmission data.

The information that's on the record is months old, and yet the Premier goes out and relies on anecdotal information, trying to blame parents, trying to blame people in the community for causing spread. We know, in fact, that we should have a clearer picture of what's happening with workplace transmission.

Will the Premier announce today his commitment to release up-to-date statistics on workplace transmission of COVID-19?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Yes, there are a lot of members here who saw a tired, old government that had run out of ideas and started to rebel against itself, and it was called the NDP government—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Pallister: And then the member—and the member opposite throws Greg Selinger—[*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —right under the bus again. There he goes again. It's everybody else's fault but his.

But, you know, all I can say to you, Deputy Speaker, is this, that we're going to continue to stand up for better health care for Manitobans. The NDP created a massive problem: long wait times, doctor recruitment was miserable, people were staying in places in hospitals when they should have been in seniors homes they never built.

We're building seniors homes. We're shortening wait times. We're lowering ambulance fees.

And this is the middle of a pandemic, and all the Leader of the Opposition can do is try to make political hay out of it. Isn't that a shame, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Winnipeg Hospitals Staff Vacancy Rate

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): There are nearly 1,300 nurse vacancies in health facilities in Winnipeg. That's a rate of nearly 17 per cent, and that's not including personal-care homes that face tremendous staffing challenges during the pandemic.

There's not—that's just not the care that we need by the bedside. Needed funding is certainly not getting to the front lines, and since the start of this pandemic, more and more positions are empty. The problem is getting worse, not better.

When will the minister address this and finally staff up Winnipeg hospitals?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): We're addressing it each and every day. In fact, we are implementing the Peachey report that I know members opposite didn't have the courage to move forward with, and, as a result of that, they shut down 17 rural hospitals in Manitoba.

There was—you know, the member opposite wants to talk about hallway medicine. Under the previous NDP government there were dozens upon dozens upon dozens of patients in the hallways in our hospitals, Mr. Speaker. In fact, there were so many that they were forced to go onto the highway to be able to get medicine.

We will take no lessons from members opposite when it comes to health. [*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

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

MLA Asagwara: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 1,300 cases Manitobans are looking for care by the bedside, only to find an empty space. Nurses are missing in nearly 17 per cent of spaces in Winnipeg hospitals. That's concerning to us and should be concerning to the minister.

St. 'Bonace'—St. Boniface emergency room has a vacancy rate of 20 per cent. We've heard concerning patient stories, and while an overburdened staff, they're doing their absolute best beside the beds, there's too many circumstances where patients are just not getting the care they deserve. Emergency care has

had this problem increase since consolidation. It's a system that has been run too thin for far too long.

* (14:00)

Why is the minister not ensuring care by the bedside in our emergency rooms?

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, we are working very closely with our health regions to address these issues and eliminate bottlenecks in patient flow so we can ensure Manitobans get the care that they need, unlike members opposite, who force people into not only hallways but onto highways in order to get the care that they needed.

We're going to ensure, through our changes in our health-care system, that Manitobans have better health care sooner and closer to home.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Union Station, on a final supplementary question.

MLA Asagwara: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's a nursing shortage in Manitoba. That's what Lanette Siragusa says. The minister can see it in the data: 20 per cent vacancy at Grace emergency room, 22 per cent vacancy at St. Boniface ER.

The minister can also see it—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: —in surgical sites, which we previously brought attention to in this House. There is less care by the bedside in surgical sites than before this pandemic. Other provinces have pushed their surgical wait times down. Manitoba doesn't have the staff to keep up with the normal surgical backload and workload before this pandemic, and it's long time past the minister staffed up.

Will the minister finally deal with this, and will she commit to doing so today?

Mrs. Stefanson: We've hired 1,700 nurses since June of 2019, and we'll continue to hire more nurses each and every day.

We're working hard to increase our capacity within our hospital systems. Thirty-seven registered nurses have recently completed the Critical Care Nursing Orientation Program. All of them have been offered full-time, permanent positions in Manitoba ICUs. Forty more registered nurses are signed up for the Critical Care Nursing Orientation Program. The first class that—started just, in fact, a couple of days ago, Mr. Speaker.

Again, members opposite were—at of time when they had doesn't of people in the hallways, dozens of people on the highways. We don't want to go back. Manitobans doesn't want to go back to those dark days—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time is up. *[interjection]*

Order. Order.

Glucose Monitoring Devices Pharmacare Coverage for All

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): In January of this year, Diabetes Canada made the following recommendations to the government of Manitoba: publicly fund advanced glucose monitoring devices for Manitobans with diabetes who would benefit and eliminate the age restriction on the insulin pump program.

Diabetes is a lifelong disease, but for some reason this government capped the age of coverage to 25.

Will the minister make coverage available for all Manitobans, including those over the age of 25? *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): The member opposite will know that in the recent budget that was introduced by our Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding), it offered continuous glucose monitors for those individuals up to age 25, as well as insulin pumps to those up to age 25. And that was a significant increase over the previous NDP government, who did absolutely nothing for these individuals in 17 years.

Members opposite voted against this. Shame on them. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The Speaker's actually standing right now, just to remind everyone.

The honourable member for Notre Dame, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Marcelino: Investing in preventative health care saves money in the long run. The cost that the government pays to treat just one person who requires dialysis is approximately \$60,000 per year, while the cost of a year of continuous glucose monitors for one person is somewhere between 3,000 and 6,000 dollars per year.

In the long run, publicly funded diabetes equipment for all Manitobans will save this government money and, more importantly, it will save lives. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Marcelino: Will the minister commit to extending this coverage to all Manitobans with diabetes?

Mrs. Stefanson: In fact, we did extend the coverage of continuous glucose monitors, as well as the insulin pumps, to age 25.

I'll remind members opposite that they did nothing in the 17 years that they were in government. They had a chance to do something to help these individuals out; they did nothing.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, just this week we were able to vote—or maybe that was last week—we were able to vote on the budget, and members opposite, each and every one of them, voted against the increase for the continuous glucose monitoring and the insulin pumps for those Manitobans suffering with 'diabilites'—diabetes. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Clock's ticking.

The honourable member for Notre Dame, on a final supplementary question.

Ms. Marcelino: Manitobans with the lowest income have almost double the rate of diabetes compared to Manitobans with the highest income. We know that many Manitobans who struggle with diabetes simply cannot afford to spend thousands of dollars a year on this equipment.

Manitobans who are full time, making minimum wage with no benefits would have to spend over 10 per cent of their pre-tax income to gain access to this life-saving equipment.

Will the minister commit to eliminating these cost barriers for all Manitobans with diabetes?

Mrs. Stefanson: I, along with many of my colleagues on this side of the House, had the opportunity to—*[interjection]*—had the—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —had the opportunity to meet with many Manitobans and hear their stories when it comes to diabetes. And we listened to them, Mr. Speaker. That's why we introduced, in our budget, an increase in the coverage for the insulin pumps as well as the

introduction of the coverage of the continuous glucose monitors.

Members opposite—now, we recognize there's more work to be done, but we've certainly done a lot more than the NDP ever did when they were in power. Mr. Speaker, we will take no lessons from members opposite. We will continue to protect those Manitobans with diabetes. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

Rising Carbon Price Government Position

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Premier is wasting public money on a doomed legal fight over a rising price on carbon. It's needless, as every major political party, including Conservatives, have now proposed a rising carbon price of one kind or another. The Premier's posturing on this issue never made sense; it makes less sense now.

Does the Premier support a rising carbon price as proposed by their federal cousins, and would he continue legal proceedings against a Prime Minister O'Toole, yes or no?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate): I appreciate any questions coming from members opposite about our Climate and Green Plan. We have maintained that it is specific to Manitoba and it is best for Manitobans, and we will continue to advocate for Manitobans, as we have throughout the years that we've been in government, unlike the NDP, who had written their plan for climate and emissions reductions on the back of a napkin.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will do better. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for Wolseley, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Naylor: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Pallister government is in a losing legal fight, arguing that they can reduce more greenhouse gases by fiddling with the timing of a carbon price. But this argument is now irrelevant as every major federal party has now proposed a rising carbon price into the future.

* (14:10)

The Premier and his clerk's on-again, off-again carbon pricing plan is offside with the proposals of

every major political party in Ottawa, including their own. It's time to end the theatre.

Does the Premier support a rising carbon price as proposed by their federal cousins? Yes or no?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, we are in—at the Supreme Court level with our defence of Manitoba's interests. We believe that Manitoba deserves respect and credit for our green record, our green investments. And we think that that's the right thing to do.

We don't think it's right, as apparently the NDP members do, to see the average homeowner pay \$885 more for natural gas every year. We think that's a bad idea. Think people in the North wouldn't like that. We think people who have houses that need heating wouldn't like that.

So—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

The—I just want to remind the member for Flin Flon, if—you're not allowed to heckle from the virtual site.

Mr. Pallister: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair, and I apologize for the choking here, I'm just so excited about the fact that the NDP and Liberal parties have joined together to decide that Manitoba should be punished, while every other province to the east of us from Quebec throughout the Maritimes should be given an exception with a plan that is less stringent than the one our government has developed with the help of Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Wolseley, on a final supplementary question.

The honourable member for Wolseley, if you could unmute your mic.

North End Water Treatment Plant Provincial Funding for Project

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Manitobans are exhausted by the lack of action from this government. It's been five years. It's time, and this government, all they do is waste public money on a losing court fight. They're leaving serious priorities unaddressed.

Costs for the North End water treatment plant have climbed by over \$65 million before a foot of concrete has been poured. This government's fantasies regarding public-private partnership have delayed

investment and real action on a project that must get done.

Will the Pallister government get back to the table and ensure this project proceeds with matching dollars and without delay?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): It's apparent the NDP's position is to do what Ottawa wants. Our position's to stand up for Manitobans. We don't think that it's advantageous in a province that depends on agriculture to punish farmers. We don't think it's 'advantageinse' a promise—with lots of northern residents to punish them for having to drive somewhere or to heat their own homes. And we don't think it's advantageous to invent a plan which doesn't work, and Ottawa's done that as a backstop, when we have a better plan.

So while the NDP decides to take sides with Ottawa, we'd decided to take sides on behalf of Manitobans.

Catalytic Converters Theft Prevention

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): My question—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Maloway: —is to the Premier.

My constituents report a notable increase in catalytic converter thefts. Organized criminals are climbing under parked vehicles and cutting out these units, selling their valuable metals for scrap. The trade in scrap metal is basically a cash transaction that requires no ID. The problem has increased as the price of exotic metals has skyrocketed. To stop this, transactions in scrap metals need to be tracked.

Will the Pallister government take action to help prevent these thefts?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I think I'm catching on to the NDP theme in this question period.

The member for Elmwood should take responsibility for not supplying insulin equipment to people under the age of 25 in our province. The member for Elmwood should share the responsibility, most certainly, of the health-care deterioration that we're cleaning up. And I do understand now why the member for Elmwood took NDP right off his signs when he ran for office.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

The honourable member for Elmwood, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Maloway: I have to remind the Premier, and we have told him this before, he's welcome to come on over to Elmwood, and I will be happy to show him hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of signs with NDP on them. And they'll be up in the next election.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when these—
[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Maloway: —when the catalytic converters are stolen, when these thefts happen to Manitobans, not only are the people inconvenienced by the damage to their vehicles, they also have to pay for the costs out of pocket. MPIC won't cover full value. So this further penalizes hundreds of Manitobans.

Sellers of such metals should provide photo ID and records of all transactions to be held for five years. We can curtail these crimes, but only through decisive action.

When will this government—

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

Mr. Pallister: I—when I was referring to the member taking the words New Democrat off his signs, I was referring to his provincial campaign, not his federal one.

So, just to be clear, I know that he was referring to old signs, but I was referring to the Kinew ones.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

I'm standing right now. Should be quiet. I'm unable to hear the member for Elmwood even ask his question. So I want silence for—until the question's answered.

The honourable member from Elmwood.
[interjection] Oh, wait; just one second.

Also, I want to also just to let the members know that a name of the person in the Chamber should not be mentioned. And it should be—people should be directed—either their positions or their constituency names.

Mr. Maloway: The Premier is not answering the question. I mean, what is the point of asking a question—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Maloway: —if you can't get an answer. Either he doesn't know or he doesn't want to answer.

Precious metals like platinum are worth \$1,300 an ounce. Scrap metal dealers pay cash for catalytic converters, but there's no requirement that these transactions can be tracked.

The Premier knows this is costing every Manitoban. Simple action such as requiring transactions to be tracked will help curb this.

Will this government take action to curtail these thefts? And they're ever-increasing thefts, at that.

Mr. Pallister: Thanks for the warning on the name thing, there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'll work harder on that.

But I am cognizant that the NDP, when they scream about rules, doesn't have much of a leg to stand on because they're the ones who blockaded this Legislature, because they disrespected the rules on harassment, and because they disrespect the public health rules as well.

So when it comes down to rules, Mr. Speaker, I think there's a little inconsistency—no, major inconsistency. And the NDP leader, who's never obeyed a rule in his life, now talking about obeying rules, that's a contradiction.

And I think we'll stand up for the rule of law and protect people and we'll look into the issue the member's raised today as well.

Conditions at Grace Hospital Constituent Case Concern

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): We've heard some extremely alarming complaints about what appear to be system failures at the Grace Hospital. Now, ministers of Health complain when we ask questions about what they want to call casework, instead of keeping it hush-hush. I was asked to make this public.

A senior was taken from his seniors home to Grace Hospital in severe pain. We were told he spent six days lying in a gurney on—in the ER, even though he was diagnosed with bone cancer on the second day, then sent to Seven Oaks without his family or power of attorney ever being told.

Now, this news may come as a surprise to the Premier, but a foul-up like this should be on his desk long before I have to ask about it.

How long has this government known about the brewing crisis at Grace?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): How long has the federal Liberal government known about the crisis in health care? How long has that been?

* (14:20)

They just put out a budget that did nothing for health care. And they're getting panned on it. And there's a reason that the NDP support us in calling for greater supports, because every other opposition party—except the Liberals in this province—in the country supports their premiers in fighting for more support for health care, except one leader.

The fact of the matter is The Globe and Mail has said it's a glaring omission, it's a lack of a significant effort to refinance the health-care system. It's shocking. The health-care system is stretched. The population is aging. It's about time that a federal government did something about it. It's about time the Liberal leader did something about it, too.

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

COVID-19 Pandemic and Second Wave Timing of Health-Care Reform

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): CIHI figures show that in the second wave, Manitoba had the worst death toll in long-term-care homes in Canada. The worst.

If there is a single decision that shows that this government stubbornly refused to get ready for the second wave, it was when, on September 17th, 2020, they announced a massive restructuring of health care over the months of October, November and December and January: hundreds of positions cancelled and the government said outright, there would be disruption. This is a colossal, tragic lack of foresight and judgment for which no one has been held responsible.

Is the reason for the catastrophic negligence we're seeing at Grace Hospital and elsewhere because this government has learned nothing from the second wave and just keeps cutting?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): Well, Mr. Speaker, talk about lack of foresight and judgment. The—his federal counterpart, the Prime Minister, had an opportunity to ensure that all Canadians had access to—and adequate access, in a timely fashion, and that didn't take place. And so now we're having to deal with things as we deal with them.

I would suggest that the member opposite should get on board and work with us to ensure that we move towards a system that will—and offer those vaccines for all Manitobans and all Canadians.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, on a final supplementary question.

Lead Water Pipes Timeline for Replacement

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, President Biden recently announced spending of \$45 billion to replace all lead water pipes in the United States to prevent lead poisoning of children. Newark, New Jersey, has nearly completed replacing its lead pipes. Regina in Saskatchewan will replace all lead water pipes by 2025.

I table information showing there are 23,000 homes with lead water pipes in Winnipeg. Based on a sample from two years ago, about 20 per cent of these homes have high lead levels in their water.

When will the Province replace all lead water pipes in our province and by which year? And has the Province even completed replacing all lead pipes to all schools and all daycare centres in Manitoba?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): Well, I want to thank the member opposite for mentioning President Biden. And we want to actually extend our congratulations and thanks to President Biden for offering, for ensuring and authorizing North Dakota to be able to vaccinate more than 4,000 of our truck drivers here in Manitoba.

And, certainly, Mr. Speaker, I know, on the other issue that the member opposite mentioned, I know that we're working diligently to ensure that we protect all Manitobans when it comes to our water system, and we'll continue to work on that.

Hudson's Bay Company Building Preservation Fund Announcement

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government recently announced a creation of a \$25-million Bay Building Fund.

Can the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage update the House on this significant investment and how this funding will benefit our great province?

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): Thank you to the member from Lagimodière for that excellent question.

Recently, I was proud to join the minister of—the Minister of Municipal Relations (Mr. Johnson) to share our government's recent investment of \$25 million for the creation of The Bay Building Fund to support the preservation of Manitoba's cherished landmark. Our government recognizes we must protect our past and invest in our future, and that \$25-million fund will assist in restoring, preserving and maintaining the heritage elements of our historic Hudson's Bay building.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we encourage all levels of government, as well as the private sector, to step up to protect this iconic heritage building, to unlock The Bay's full potential. The member's opposite did nothing to preserve or protect our Manitoba's rich heritage—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up—the minister's time is up. *[interjection]* The honourable minister's time is up.

Manitoba Hydro Labour Dispute Collective Bargaining Negotiations

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): The Pallister government's interference in Hydro will cost Manitobans and it's putting Hydro at risk.

We've recently learned that the vast majority of volunteer emergency response crews at Hydro sites have now resigned their posts in solidarity with the ongoing strike. That's nearly 200 people that respond to fires or oil spills. They're now gone at sites such as Grand Rapids, Jenpeg, Kelsey, Limestone, Radisson, Heday and Keewatinohk and more.

This government is taking chances with billions of dollars of infrastructure. It's reckless.

Will the Pallister government get back to the negotiation table and bargain a fair deal in good faith?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Crown Services): Certainly, we respect the process when it comes to bargaining, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that's exactly what we're doing, unlike the members opposite that tripled the debt at Manitoba Hydro over the last several years.

We'll ensure that the Crown jewel of—owned by Manitobans will be protected for generations to come.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. James, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Sala: Only the PCs could say that they're protecting a process when they're forcing an unconstitutional wage freeze on those same workers.

Got—nearly 200 volunteer emergency response crews have withdrawn their services at sites across the North. Hydro has only found coverage with four people hired privately for Keeyask. That's four people to replace nearly 200, and Hydro is paying these crews more in a day than what volunteer emergency response crews made in a year of service.

That is absurd. But so is this prolonged strike that the Pallister government has forced with IBEW workers.

It should be resolved through a fairly negotiated contract: Will the Pallister government do so today?

Mr. Wharton: Again, if the members opposite would just simply get out of the way and allow the process to unfold, we know that both the members and Hydro, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will move forward in a collaborative way and ensure that Manitoba ratepayers to Manitoba Hydro are protected, not only for today, but for tomorrow too.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for question period has expired.

Petitions?

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable first—honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a point of order.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Yes, just on a point of order. I just want to return to the issue of time in question period. So, you had called that the Minister for Sport, Culture and Heritage's time had expired, which was, you know, it is what it is; nothing personal with the minister. I don't know if they couldn't hear you or what was going on there, but they did continue to speak for a significant amount of time. The net result was that the member for St. James was deprived of being able to ask their third question.

So, (1) I want you to just recognize that it is a breach of the rules when somebody speaking ignores the Speaker who is standing. And then, of course, I would leave it up to you if you want to consider whether we should get that additional time back and the ability to ask a final question.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I know that during this question period we saw members opposite who were asking questions who went over their time. We saw members opposite

who were heckling virtually, which you rightfully admonished that member for, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm sure that these things all net out in the end.

If the member opposite felt that he had a good question to ask, he should have asked it in his first six, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, okay, on the point of order, members should be listening to the Speaker, but if—the discretion of the adding time belongs to the Speaker, and when the members of both sides cause disorders of—the Speaker may or may not add the time on.

* (14:30)

So, in this case here, I would say that we did have a delay of time here, and I thought with the respect of the—for the Speaker the—I was—told a couple of times to the minister that her time was up.

So I will give another—one more question for the member for St. James (Mr. Sala), on the third and final question.

The honourable member from St. James—one second. There was a point of order, and we are going to give the last question to the honourable member for St. James.

* * *

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. James, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Sala: The Pallister government is taking unnecessary risks, leaving billions of dollars of infrastructure exposed to the threat of fire or other emergencies.

Nearly 200 volunteer emergency-response crews have resigned their posts in solidarity with striking workers. IBEW's workers want a fair deal without unconstitutional legislation being held over their right to bargain. Hydro is profitable, but Hydro has work underway currently that is being curtailed by this strike. That costs all of us. It's time for a fair deal.

Will the Pallister government commit to a fair deal and allow arbitration today, yes or no?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): The NDP government tripled the debt at Manitoba Hydro without any respect for the real owners of Hydro, who are the people of Manitoba.

But I would encourage that member, who just benefited from your ruling, Mr. Speaker, to understand also that there are other rules in this Chamber

and in this place to protect people, rules that protect people against harassment, for example. And I would encourage the member, if he wants to see, you know, these rules respected by all, as he should, to also show the same kind of respect for the rules when he doesn't like them as when he does.

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

PETITIONS

Public Child-Care Grants

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

(1) The pandemic has further emphasized the need for quality, affordable, accessible child care and has demonstrated that the government has failed to ensure child care is accessible to all Manitoba families.

(2) Over 90 per cent of Manitoba children receive child care through non-profit, licensed centres, and yet funding has been frozen since 2016. These cuts have resulted in many early-childhood educators leaving the sector.

(3) While child-care centres have faced increased costs associated with lost parent fees due to COVID-19 closures and spent thousands on PPE, when open, to keep kids safe, the provincial government has yet provided no additional financial support.

(4) The government spent less than 1 per cent of the \$18-million temporary child-care grant, and instead gave KPMG double their contract, nearly \$600,000, to conduct a review that will raise parent fees and lay the groundwork for privatization.

(5) The provincial government's cuts to the nursery school grant is doubling parent fees for hundreds of families, making child care less affordable and accessible.

(6) The provincial government passed bill 34, the budget implementation and status act—amendment act, which removes the cap on child-care fees for private sector businesses.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse changes to the nursery school grant and to end the freeze on child-care's operating grants while committing to keeping child care public, affordable and accessible for all Manitoban families.

This petition is signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In accordance with rule 133-6, when petitions are read they must be deemed to—received by the House.

Lead Water Pipes

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Many renters and tenants living in Winnipeg are unaware of the potentially high levels of lead in their drinking water due to lead water pipes.

Drinking water with lead levels higher than 5 micrograms per litre is above Canada's national standard for drinking water quality and may be damaging to health, especially for children and expectant mothers.

According to medical research, 'rennants'—renters and tenants unaware of the potentially high lead levels in their drinking water because of old, lead pipes are at risk of experiencing greater levels of mental illness.

High levels of lead in drinking water due to lead pipes disproportionately affects Indigenous and lower income communities. A 2019 intrinsic study used data on lead exposure to predict that many children living in Point Douglas will have high and worrisome lead levels in their blood.

Lack of knowledge of lead levels in water may result in the continuation of ongoing lead-poisoning-related health issues for thousands of renters and tenants living in Winnipeg and elsewhere in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to immediately act by requiring landlords to inform renters and tenants if their rental units have lead water pipes.

(2) To urge the provincial government to provide an adequate number of water filters on an annual basis for tenants where there are rental units with lead pipes.

(3) To urge the provincial government to immediately act by requiring the City of Winnipeg to replace all lead water pipes in Winnipeg by 2027, as the City of Regina is now doing.

This petition is signed by Ben Kramer, by Hilary Druzman, by James Favel and many, many other Manitobans.

Diagnostic Testing Accessibility

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Until recently, diagnostic medical tests, including for blood and fluid supplies, were available and accessible in most medical clinics.

(2) Dynacare blood test labs have consolidated their blood and fluid testing services by closing 25 of its labs.

(3) The provincial government has cut diagnostic testing at many clinic sites, and residents now have to travel to different locations to get their testing done, even for a simple blood test or a urine sample.

(4) Further, travel challenges for vulnerable and elderly residents of northeast Winnipeg may result in fewer tests being done or delays in testing, with the attendant effects of increased health-care costs and poorer individual patient outcomes.

(5) COVID-19 emergency rules have resulted in long outdoor lineups, putting vulnerable residents at further risk in extreme weather, be it hot or cold. Moreover, these long lineups have resulted in longer wait times for services and poorer service in general.

(6) Manitoba residents value the convenience and the efficiency of the health-care system when they're able to give their samples at the time of the doctor visit.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately demand Dynacare maintain all of the phlebotomy blood sample sites existing prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency, and allow all Manitobans to get their blood and urine tests done when visiting their doctor, thereby facilitating local access to blood testing services.

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Public Child-Care Grants

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The pandemic has further emphasized the need for quality, affordable and accessible child care and has demonstrated that the government has failed to ensure child care is accessible to all Manitoba families.

(2) Over 90 per cent of Manitoba children receive child care through non-profit, licensed centres, and yet funding has been frozen since 2016. These cuts have resulted in many early childhood educators leaving the sector.

* (14:40)

(3) While child-care centres have faced increased costs associated with lost parent fees due to COVID-19 closures and spent thousands on PPE, when open, to keep kids safe, the provincial government has provided no additional financial support.

(4) The government spent less than 1 per cent of the \$18-million temporary child-care grant, and instead gave KPMG double their contract, nearly \$600,000, to conduct a review that will raise parent fees and lay the groundwork for privatization.

(5) The provincial government's cuts to nursery-school grants is doubling parent fees for hundreds of families, making child care less affordable and accessible.

(6) The provincial government passed bill 34, the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, which removed the cap on child-care fees for private sector businesses.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to reverse changes to the nursery school grants and to end the freeze on child care's operating grants while committing to keeping public child care affordable and accessible for all Manitoban families.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Dauphin Correctional Centre

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government plans to close 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 27, 2020, Manitoba's justice system was already more than 250 inmates over-capacity.

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.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The provincial government plans to close the Dauphin Correctional Centre, DCC, in May of 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 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 DCC and proceed with the previous plan to build a new correctional and healing centre with an expanded courthouse in Dauphin.

And this has been signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Any other petitions?

Now we'll go on to grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Could you please call for debate this afternoon second reading of Bill 71.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been called by the honourable Government House Leader to call on Bill 71, The Education Property Tax Reduction Act (Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act and Income Tax Act Amended).

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 71—The Education Property Tax Reduction Act (Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act and Income Tax Act Amended)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. Boniface has two minutes remaining.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I yield the remainder of my time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. We'll go on to—now to the honourable member for—Lagimodière—sorry—the honourable member for Selkirk.

Mr. Alan Lagimodiere (Selkirk): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to speak virtually to this exciting bill, Bill 71, The Education Property Tax Reduction Act. The passing of this bill will result in the rebate of education property taxes for property owners' annual property tax bills.

This is something Manitoba homeowners, farmers and businesses have asked for—to be removed for years, and, currently, in Manitoba, the higher the tax assessment on your property, the higher your educational property tax bill. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are many great areas of Budget 2021 that were presented, but the rebate of the education tax from property taxes is a highlight that benefits all Manitobans.

Bill 71's rebate program continues to deliver on the government's promises made, promises kept commitment. It's about protecting Manitobans and advancing Manitobans. That's why we are protecting Manitobans' incomes by reducing the amount of taxes Manitobans pay on their hard-earned money.

Our 2020-tax-rollback promise to Manitobans has been met by our government and is not stopping there. We are continuing on our path to remove the

education tax from property tax. Lower taxes, including lower education property taxes, will leave more money in the hands of Manitobans, where it is needed the most.

This bill will see the education property tax rebate is starting with a 25 per cent decrease in educational property taxes for residential and farm property owners and a 10 per cent decrease in commercial property taxes in 2021-2022.

For most business owners and personal property owners, the education tax component of their annual property tax bill accounted for roughly 50 per cent of the entire tax bill. For the average Manitoba homeowner, passage of this bill will leave around \$800 in their hands over two years and the entire amount of the education tax back in their control when fully implemented, monies Manitobans can decide to spend in areas most important to them.

In my constituency of south St. Andrews, a new low-pressure sewage system is being stalled. This poor sewage plan is placing an enormous financial strain on our seniors who are on fixed incomes and our young families trying to make ends meet. The elimination of the education property tax will help provide some relief to those stressed to the breaking point by the forced higher costs now needed to remain in their homes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the opposition condemned tax reductions for Manitobans. I feel I need to remind Manitobans of the NDP legacy. They are a party that, for 17 years, misled and misinformed the voters; a party that implemented a 1 per cent tax increase after promising not to; a party that had trouble balancing the books and kept adding to our provincial debt; a party that fudged the books, created fake funds and used the money to make our deficit seem smaller; a party that overstated the value of fixed assets on the balance sheets; a party that raised taxes while increasing the yearly deficit and adding significantly to the provincial debt, and thus the debt of each and every Manitoban; and a party that promised year after year to build hospitals, schools, personal-care homes, bridges and roads, but never delivered.

In fact, there was a hospital in Selkirk that sat for years with no progress occurring, and there was a sod-turning ceremony for a personal-care home in Beausejour that was announced over and over and over again.

And they are a party that was so poor at balancing and managing the finances of the Province it resulted

in two credit downgrades, which took millions out of the funds available for our schools, our hospitals, our low-income Manitobans, our seniors programming and daycare programs—promises made but never kept.

* (14:50)

Our party made promises to the people of Manitoba. They were simple and focused. We promised to fix Manitoba's finances, promised to restore the services and we promised to rebuild the economy. Manitobans now have a government with integrity, one that is honest and one they can trust, one that keeps the promises they make.

Our government has the skills and depth and ability to properly assess consultants' reports and use this knowledge to move forward for the betterment of all Manitobans.

Opposition are quick to condemn reports as being irrelevant. They obviously do not understand the science involved in report preparation. It requires data collection and analysis. This information is used to prepare options. On many occasions, it involves engaging thousands and thousands of Manitobans and evaluating subjective and objective value; this was done in the K-to-12 review.

Manitobans have a government that makes the tough choices needed to get our province back on track. Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we introduced The Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer Protection Act, we promised to create a balanced and sustainable path to balance the budget by the end of our second term.

Manitobans are pleased to see that once our budget is adjusted for the effects of COVID, we did not fulfill promise, we surpassed it, while increasing spending on health care, education and our families.

People are asking, how are we able to do this when the NDP spent 17 years increasing deficits and increasing taxes while providing poorer and poorer service? The NDP governed and led in a manner that stifled our provincial economy. After years of out-of-control debit spending by the previous government, the Province is now on track and operating with a value for money spending regime with sustainability as the end goal.

Simply put, we're shopping smarter for Manitobans and getting better results at the same time. We, like all other Manitobans, respect where the monies government spends comes from: the pocketbooks and kitchen tables of all Manitobans.

We are government that appreciates and feels responsible for the tax money taken from hard-working Manitobans. Manitobans expect us, as their elected representatives, to respect this and to get the best deal we can for the money they entrust us with. as a government, we owe Manitobans a duty to utilize their money wisely and responsibly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have consulted with and listened to the concerns of Manitobans. Thanks to a focused fiscal prudence, we have exceeded our goals and because of this, our province, once again, has one of the most stable economies in Canada, and our economic growth is now one of the highest in all of Canada.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Manitobans have not forgotten NDP fiscal mismanagement was costing Manitobans over \$700 million annually by 2016. Manitobans have not forgotten the NDP raised taxes on Manitobans 15 times in 14 years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, after years of overtaxation and broken promises by the NDP, Manitobans are getting the tax breaks they deserve. The elimination of the education tax from property taxes is one of the most exciting budget announcements for the constituents of Selkirk. It will leave millions of dollars in the pockets of Manitobans on an annualized basis, instead of in the hands of government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if our coffee shops were fully open and not at limited capacity due to COVID, they would be buzzing with this news. Members opposite would like Manitobans to believe this tax elimination is not significant and favours only more affluent Manitobans. This thinking is narrow-minded. The facts are, 658,000 homeowners in Manitoba will benefit from this tax cut.

Members opposite appear to have lost connection with the very people they profess to represent. Those most at risk of losing their homes due to financial pressures are our young families and our seniors. These groups are requesting tax breaks to help; we are delivering.

Lowering taxes for Manitobans will result in greater consumer spending and greater demand for goods and services within Manitoba. Lowering taxes for Manitoba result in businesses and property owners seeing greater investments in their businesses to meet this growing demand.

The end result will see more opportunities for expansion and the creation of jobs and opportunity,

which will stimulate the economy. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the NDP failed to acknowledge that all families have basic needs that they must pay for to survive. Currently, it's estimated the average Manitoba family is left with less than \$200 at the end of the month, once basic needs are covered.

These are the people hurt the most by high and rising taxes and increased debt loads. The rebate of the education tax from property tax will leave around \$800 in the average homeowner's hands over two years and more in the future.

That's money which belongs to the homeowners in the first place. It's money that Manitobans can spend as they see fit: to improve their standard of living, to purchase much-needed essentials, to save for a rainy day, to put into a retirement fund, to help pay for extracurricular activities or buy needed prescriptions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Manitobans asked for lower taxes, to move the tax burden placed on them from the former NDP government. We promised to decrease their taxes and we are delivering on this promise: promises made, promises kept.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let's get this bill passed so we can get the rebate cheques in the hands of Manitoban homeowners suffering financial stress, our young families and our seniors.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Am I coming across okay?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, you are. Can you hear me?

Mr. Bushie: Yes.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for a chance to put a few words on Bill 71, The Education Property Tax Reduction Act, property tax and insulation assistance act and income tax amended.

Before I get into that, I would like to give a thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I had the privilege yesterday to receive my vaccination here in my home community. So I'd like to give a special shout-out to the health staff and all the First Nation health teams around the province, as well as all the staff and other volunteers that contributed to being able to make that a reality, which is still a reality today—we have a vaccination site going on today in our community—and as well as the other staff members that have transitioned from other areas, whether it be health or

whether it be just social services or other aspects of the community, that stepped up and provided and helped volunteer in that, and, in particular, the health centre and the Jordan's Principle staff.

Mr. Dennis Smook, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

So, before I begin, I did—wanted to thank you for that opportunity and thank you for them to making our communities and our province a better place and a safer place to be.

So, in regards to Bill 71, I think I'd be remiss if I didn't mention and didn't thank the member from Selkirk for putting his full 10 minutes and 30 seconds or so in support of this supposed fantastic piece of legislation that they're bringing forward. You would think they would take that opportunity to actually spend their entire 30 minutes to speak about how much in support they are of this government and what they're standing for. But I understand that a certain amount of praise that they're trying to put upon themselves runs out after 10 minutes, so I fully understand that and respect that ability or that inability to be able to do that.

What's interesting, though, in regards to the bill and the education property tax, and taxes in general, is how the member had talked about being able to reduce deficit, adjusted for COVID—of course, he had that disclaimer in there to mention that—adjusted for COVID, and how we are able to do, but while we still adjusted for COVID.

Well, simple matter—the simple fact of the matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that any new investments that were created and passed on from the federal government to specifically deal with COVID and specifically get to the bedside just didn't make it there.

Instead, this government has chosen to put it into general revenue in their coffers to be able to try and supposedly come out of the pandemic on the high economic end. But, again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's at the expense of Manitobans. So, that's very unfortunate that they have a claim to fame to be able to reduce those things at the expense of Manitobans.

* (15:00)

And with Bill 71, The Education Property Tax Reduction Act, property tax and insulation assistance act and income tax amended—well, that is a mouthful, Mr. Deputy Speaker—that is not new investment. So it begs the question exactly what that is. And then even the wording of the text in the title of this really calls into question and the confusion that this government

is trying to put forward and confuse Manitobans to almost bait and switch them into, you know, this is—this what this looks like. This is not new money, and let's be clear: this is still Manitobans' money.

So this is Manitobans' money that they're playing with, that they're claiming to be giving back. And I've heard those words time and time again when—especially now in the last couple days, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in reference to Bill 71, when they talk about giving back, giving back, giving back, giving back. I've heard the word back—give back. But that also means if you're giving back, it's because you've taken, and it's because you've taken from those same Manitobans that you claim to be giving back from.

So this is not a new investment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is just a recycled description for this Pallister government to be able to say, we're giving back, we're increasing, we're giving more to you than ever before. And that's not really the case. We have this government, time and time again—when it's convenient, mind you—blaming the pandemic for the shortfalls and their shortfalls and their inability to actually budget properly, to govern properly, to actually invest in Manitoba and in different aspects of Manitoba, whether it be conservation, justice, education, health care, and that inability has come with a little disclaimer to always say, we're going to blame the pandemic. And while the pandemic is here, it's a reality—we've been through one, two, now in our third phase and, heaven forbid, never a fourth phase—that argument also wears very thin.

So, with Bill 71, to be able to say that, well, we're able to do this and we're able to give back, is just—it's an insult. It's an insult to Manitobans; it's an insult to Manitoba families; it's insult to Manitoba property owners, because it's not a new investment. When this was first announced, and they talked about eliminating the education property tax, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you've heard the timeline of 10 years of being able to eliminate that over a 10-year process, but now it's being fast-tracked, and we're all fully understandable as to why that is, including all Manitobans. They're well aware that it's being fast-tracked for political gain and nothing else.

We've had the opportunity, we've had the privilege and honour of being able to participate in numerous question periods where the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has cited issues being brought forward for political gain, you know, partisan politics and those types of things. Well, this is a prime example of

that, including being able to say, we're doing this now. So this 10-year plan is all of a sudden being able to be condensed during a pandemic over a matter of months.

So it begs the question: is there a secret stash of money somewhere? Is there—are you hoarding something someplace else? Or is it just a simple fact that all monies being received for various programs are not being spent in those programs, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

And it is clear in the case of health care, and we see that every day. We see the failures of this government every day, with being able to say, we're doing this; we're trying to do more; you know, we're doing more with less. And while that may be true in their definition and in their minds, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at some point in time you do—instead of doing a little more with less, you do less with less, which is exactly what this government is doing.

And Bill 71 would be the education property tax—is a prime example of that. It's just being able to—it's a knee-jerk reaction to low polling polls for this government, low polling polls for the Premier. And so this 10-year plan that was announced a while back, now it's being condensed over a course of a few months, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It really begs the question exactly what that is.

So it—like I said, it's a knee-jerk reaction to be able to say, we're going to do this over this short period of time. So the question is, why wasn't this announced long ago to be able to be done over a short period of time, rather than being done over 10 years, when it was originally announced? Now it's being done immediately.

And, again, it's for nothing but political gain, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it's a sad political attempt to buy votes. Just like during a pandemic, again, the Premier had talked about showing support for elders, earning support for seniors. Well, here's a \$200 cheque. Here's a \$200 cheque personally signed by the Premier. And I don't know how out of touch the Premier is with elders and seniors in Manitoba, but a lot of them, while they could use the \$200, laughed at the concept of to—what that came with. You know, it came with a personal letter, and I don't know what—we can use the Premier's personal name in there, but we all know what his first name is and, I mean, that was the signature on the letter.

So it begged the question of, well, here's \$200. Thank me. Thank me personally. And, no, I didn't see

the Finance Minister stepping up and saying, can I get my signature on that cheque, too, or any other members of the caucus being able to say, well, can I get my name on there because, you know what, Mr. Premier (Mr. Pallister), in a couple of years, when election time comes around, you're not going to be here, so I want the thank you and I don't think it's fair for yourself to get that.

So with the Bill 71 and the education property tax, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's just another reincarnation and recycling of that same attitude and that same thought process. And now we're going to say, here again is another cheque from the big man.

You know, here's a—maybe that's how he should sign it, so everybody knows exactly who he is. But being able to say, I've now given you now not just \$200, I've given you another whatever the amount may be. And I'm sure it varies for different members and different Manitobans, but the fact of the matter is it's still a personal signature, personal signed cheque from the Premier, which is just ridiculous because the Premier is elected to govern Manitobans as the Premier and as a representative of all Manitobans. And taking this time to look for personal gain—let alone political gain—at the expense of the finances of the Province of Manitoba and the taxpayers of Manitoba is just shameful.

And when—so there was other options available. There are options available for people to get their Education Property Tax Credit or whatever kind of tax credit they may get, there was other options available for people like that to be able to do, but the Premier's insisting on doing that over the course of a physical cheque, which is, again, shameful.

Again, a cost measure that could be saved—suppose this government is all about saving costs but at the same time, don't do that; don't do that, by their own definition; don't do that, by their own actions, which is embarrassing and shameful.

So now, during a pandemic, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when people are expected to step up and do their part to stay home when possible, do their part to social distance, do their part to only go out for essential reasons—pre- or post-vaccine, it's still going to be the norm for some time now—now, potentially, and as—and I'm speaking more from—for elders and seniors, the Premier is now going to mail them a cheque.

So with that cheque, a senior or an elder, who is not comfortable going out now to get that money in their bank now have to go out, now have to go out and

they have to drive to their local bank. And for those of us in rural and northern Manitoba—which I know the Premier is very unfamiliar with and this government is very unfamiliar with, northern Manitoba, including today, talking about natural gas in the North, which just doesn't exist—being able to now have our seniors leave their home, drive to the bank, risk COVID exposure, possibly having to—unintentionally, mind you—violate public health orders just to put their money in the bank. All because this Premier has to have his name put on a cheque to remind people where it came from.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Bill 71, The Education Property Tax Reduction Act (Property Tax and Insulation Assistance Act and Income Tax Act Amended)—well, that's a long paragraph to be able to stick on the memo line of a cheque, but I'm sure that the intention is that the Premier not be able to do that anyway.

If he had his way, it would just be: here's a cheque from the government of Manitoba signed by yours truly and no description as to what this is, because it is a blatant attempt to be able to tell people that I, as your Premier, or as the big guy, am the sole person and the sole reason why you are getting this money. And that is just shameful to be able to do that.

Perhaps these cheques, Mr. Deputy Speaker, including the \$200 cheques that went out some time ago from the Premier, at the time, and now these education property tax rebate cheques that are going to be—are now going to come out there, and then perhaps they should come with a pen.

* (15:10)

Perhaps they should come with a pen, again, with the Premier's name on that, too, because that's again another way for him to advertise himself.

But perhaps with a pen and a little note and little disclaimer saying, oh, here's your property tax cheque.

By the way, here's your property tax cheque; by the way, here's a pen, so now endorse it back over to Manitoba Hydro because I've raised your Manitoba Hydro rates—so now this money that I'm giving you, you have to give it back.

And that's every intention of being able to say this money is not for Manitobans and this money doesn't belong to Manitobans, by the Premier's definition. Because this, again, is recycled money. If this was money meant for Manitobans, it would be given to them in any ways—in any means necessary and as

quickly as possible. And that's not happening. There's this other step that it has to go through to be able to get to the hands of Manitobans that need it. And it comes—again—with a personal letter, personal signature from the Premier (Mr. Pallister).

So I'm—perhaps the Premier is hoping that, you know, individual Manitobans will reach out to him to give him a pat on the back and a thank you, but Manitobans need to know that that's not even possible, and that's not going to happen because first of all, the Premier wants nothing to do with Manitobans. He turns his back on Manitobans every day.

I watch in the Chamber—we watch in various different public events, the Premier turns his back on Manitobans every day, both symbolically and physically turns his back on Manitobans, turns his back and disrespects Manitobans every day. And this is another example of doing just that; turning his back on Manitobans and disrespecting Manitobans.

Because Manitobans can see right through exactly what this is. This education property tax rebate that's going to be coming forward in the form of a cheque for Manitobans, people see that for what it's worth. It's worth nothing than the paper it's printed on, while people are desperately in need because they've lost their jobs, they've lost their occupations, they've lost their homes; for some people they've lost loved ones.

The real thank you and the real investment that the Premier should show Manitobans is to step up, step up and truly represent Manitobans, represent all of Manitobans by improving health care and true investments in health care. And that's not happening in this time of pandemic, in this time of global pandemic which is—it's hitting various degrees of demographics in Manitoba to different—I don't even have a word for exactly what that is and how hurtful some of that is for some people.

And this education property tax in Bill 71 is a true reflection of the disconnect that this Premier has with the people of Manitoba. And by definition this—exactly what this does, is this now helps better-off Manitobans. This does not help the more vulnerable, the people with lower incomes, and that entire demographic of Manitoba, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And there's been shots given back and forth in the Chamber and in the House and even in the media where members opposite are talking about million-dollar homes and great homes that are out there and, oh, by the way, this person will get this, this person will get that.

But there's still no talk from members opposite about low-income families and low-income earners and low-income residences. So when we talk about million-dollar homes, and I think it was the member from Lac du Bonnet who had talked about million-dollar homes, and it must be nice. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with Bill 71, the education property tax—there are no million-dollar homes on reserves in Manitoba. And, of course, members opposite wouldn't know that because they've never stepped foot on a reserve. I mean, I've heard the Premier talk about growing up next to one, but then we've heard of exactly what that means in terms of—I won't go down that road—in terms of the people of Long Plain and what they think of the Premier's claim of growing up next to a reserve and knowing what reserve life is like, and how the Premier actually treated the people in those surrounding reserves and surrounding communities.

But the fact is, stepping foot on a reserve to be able to see a million-dollar home is just non-existent. The only way this tax helps and affects those people is if you come to this so-called million-dollar home—and the only thing that makes that home worth \$1 million is if there's \$1 million of cash sitting in a briefcase on the kitchen table in that home—and we all know under this government that there is nothing on those kitchen tables. There is nothing going to be on those kitchen tables.

And, by the way, in all our homes in northern Manitoba, all our homes in Indigenous communities, we own those kitchen tables. They're not rented for the purposes of being able to get a tagline in the media to be able to get a little claim to fame and say, oh, here it is, we're going to put money on this kitchen table. There's nothing on that kitchen table.

For most, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's a hard time to put food on that table. It's a hard time to put necessities on that kitchen table, let alone being able to put hundreds or thousands of dollars on that kitchen table. That's just not happening. And that's the reality of what it is for all of Manitoba.

My colleague from Notre Dame had talked about her constituency being one of the poorest in the country, let alone in Manitoba, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And so we have this government and this we have this Premier standing up and touting about all these great things they're doing for the lower income families in Manitoba.

And this is existing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the constituency of Notre Dame and existing in a lot of

Indigenous communities and northern communities in Manitoba. This is existing in Notre Dame, for example, a mile from the Chamber in which the Premier (Mr. Pallister) stands up and touts exactly how great this government is doing and how much they're representing everything to go forward, which is—I can't believe that's happening in today's day and age.

We're sitting here in 2021 being able to sit there and have this government say this is what we do, this is how we're going to invest.

And the priorities of this government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have been lost for some time and the pandemic is really showing that and really showing the desperation. So with Bill 71, The Education Property Tax Reduction Act, property tax and insulation assistance tack and income tax act amended—I'll definitely get the hang of saying that, or maybe I won't, because they're also trying to ram this through awfully quick. So maybe I won't get the—able to memorize that whole title without having to look at my notes really quick.

But being able to bring that piece of legislation in the time of a pandemic to say, here, we're going to give back. Again, it's a knee-jerk reaction to be able to try and say we're giving back to Manitobans.

But it's not thought out properly to be fair to all of Manitobans, which is unfortunate and it just shows the priority of this government and the pieces of legislation that are brought forward by this government, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And when we think about the priorities, I know it was announced, I believe it is for tomorrow, the PMR, the private member's resolution being brought forth tomorrow—I believe it was by the member from Portage la Prairie. And the title of the PMR is going to be Keeping More Money on Manitoba Tables. So I don't know if that's meant to coincide with Bill 71, if it's meant to coincide with another cheque run to be done by the Premier to be able to say this is what we're going to do.

But pieces of legislation to properly respect and show the sacrifices of Manitobans are what this government should be doing and instead they're just doing taglines for themselves, being able to say we've done this, we'll—can you speak up and pat us on the back because we're doing something for you?

When the fact of the matter is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they're doing nothing. They're doing nothing. They're not matching the same sacrifice that

all of Manitobans are making during normal times, let alone during the course of a pandemic.

So now, I mean, we've—now I think we've seen or heard the word table or kitchen table or Manitoban's tables so much times over this past year. But the fact of the matter is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are less tables in Manitoba to be able to put food on, to be able to put money on. For those people that even have that ability to do either of those things, there's just fewer and fewer Manitobans around to be able to try and help. And that's because of this government. And during this pandemic we've had people lose their lives because of the inability of this government to step up.

And we each know and I've heard members opposite always sit there and when they're looking for a reaction or an emotional reaction from Manitobans, they go back and they cite certain things within their personal lives. And while that is a fact for some, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's—take that to heart that if you've had Manitobans—and I'm talking to members opposite here. In regards to Bill 71, for an—as an example and it's just one example.

If you've had friends, family, associates that have been negatively affected by the decisions of this government—and yes, of your government—speak up. Speak up and be able to represent the people, represent the family, represent your friends, represent your friends, represent the people that have chosen for you and the people that have believed in you.

* (15:20)

Speak up. Speak up and truly say, hey, what's going on here is wrong. I can't believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that there would be members opposite that would believe in the aspect of Bill 71 where it says, here's a cheque from this one guy in our caucus, this one leader in our caucus. What about the rest of us? Where am I?

I've heard it mentioned today, thrown under the bus. Are members opposite being thrown under the bus by the Premier just for his personal gain, just so he can actually try and say, I'm going to leave here with my head held high and this is going to be my legacy going forward?

I'm sorry to say to the members opposite and to the Premier that if their Premier left today or if he leaves and loses and leaves at the end of the next election, his legacy is already tainted. His legacy is already tarnished. It's all about that individual, and that individual being able to say it: I've done this, I've done that.

You know, there's a lot of rhetoric and a lot of policy, lot of legislation brought forward—including Bill 71, Mr. Deputy Speaker—that are all about the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and the Premier alone. So, when the Premier comes and talks about putting money back and this education property tax with Bill 71, being able to say, I'm giving back. I'm going to put money back on the table of Manitobans.

Well, that's what it is, exactly. It's not the government; it's not the PC caucus. It's the individual, and it's the individual that's going to sit there and claim to fame and say, I've done this. I don't care what this caucus has done. They may have supported me behind the 'stanes', but I'm the face of this approval; I'm the face of this cheque. I'm the face of why, when you deposit this cheque in a bank, you have money. Not you, not anybody else, not the PC caucus, not my team. It's going to be about the Premier himself.

And that's exactly how this comes across, and how this comes across to everybody in Manitoba, how this comes across as members opposite, how it comes across to members of this Chamber, and it's something Manitobans can see through.

And it's unfortunate that the Premier thinks so little of the people of Manitoba to think that they can't see through this, and they can't see exactly what this piece of legislation is bringing forward and what this piece of legislation is attempting to do.

While it may be attempting to try and put money in the bank and food on the table, money on the kitchen table of Manitobans, it's a payoff. It's a payoff by the Premier to the people of Manitoba to say, hey, I've done this. Nobody else—if it wasn't for me, you wouldn't have this.

And again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the perfect example you can think of is how, on a daily basis, this government is transitioning and changing their course of action in different ways. Bill 71, with the education property tax, is a perfect example of that. Again, something that was going to be phased out over a 10-year period. But now, look at the polls come out, the ratings are lowest they're—never been. If there was election today, I'm out of here—that's exactly what the Premier thinks. So what am I going to do? I'd better hurry up and try to get people some money somehow.

And they're giving people money at the expense of—I don't care what. I don't care what it is. I don't care if it's going to be sacrificing the 1,300 nursing shortage; the 18,000 wait-list on child care. And those kind of—I don't care what that's going to—what it costs.

Because I'm going to double-talk my way out of this in some form, and I'm going to get money, and because people are going to remember me giving them money. That's exactly how the Premier's thought process is on this, and it's very shameful and it's very embarrassing and it's very disrespectful to Manitobans, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that can see through that every day.

Those polling numbers, as much as the members opposite may think that it's part of the opposition party who are the only ones in those polls, the fact of the matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is those polls are being done of Manitobans. Those polls are being contributed to by Manitobans.

So, Manitobans, on a daily basis, can see that. And not only on a daily basis are they being able to see that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but they're able to raise their concerns and voice their concerns. So, now those polls that leading towards a change in government, in—next year, next month, who knows when that's going to be—but those polls are being led by Manitobans because Manitobans are smart, Manitobans are articulate and Manitobans know exactly what they want for their families, for their communities and for all of Manitoba, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And they see that every day. They have sacrificed tremendous amounts in their lives.

So, this Bill 71, the education property tax, again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is nothing but a political ploy by the Premier to try and gain back support that he's lost, try to gain those back. And I think it was mentioned or perhaps it should be mentioned that this is something that's an advertisement for the Premier.

So, this should go on a frank of his own that he puts out there, or a radio spot that he puts out there, and those should be maybe spent on from his caucus, from his constituency allowance or whatever he chooses to do. But this shouldn't be an expense paid for by the people of Manitoba. So, Manitobans that—while Bill 71 is claiming to give back to Manitobans and put money on the tables of Manitobans, it's also coming at the expense.

So, the \$1.3 million—but you don't hear him talking about that, the cost of being able to do a cheque run and those kind of things. You don't hear that cost brought out, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but again, because that cost is coming from Manitobans.

So, again, when Manitobans were given these \$200 cheques in the past from the Premier—with a personal letter from the Premier, mind you—and now

they're going to get these again. They should come with a pen, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because what's going to happen is those same Manitobans are going to have to give that money back that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and the government are claiming to give them as new money, and give that back to the government because they've increased costs for Manitobans and the cost of living for Manitobans across the board.

So with those few words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you for your time.

Miigwech.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): It's certainly a treat to be back in the House today. I want to thank all the legislative staff for the great work they've done on the virtual broadcast and things and it's great; everything works really smooth, but you certainly can't replace being in this Chamber and seeing everybody's faces live here.

It's my pleasure today to put a few words on the record about Bill 71, the education property tax reduction bill. I'll just shorten the name; it's a pretty long title.

Our government has committed to phase out education property taxes. That was an election promise—nothing surprising here—and it'll save homeowners thousands of dollars when fully implemented.

The MLA for Keewatinook just told us that it's an insult that our government wants to give more money back to Manitoba taxpayers. I say it's an insult for the MLA from Keewatinook to say that. Our government is committed to making life more affordable for Manitobans. I don't know what part of that the opposition doesn't understand. This is new money going back to Manitobans.

By balancing the budget in 2020, pre-pandemic, and freeing up dollars no longer allocated to debt servicing and reinvesting even more in priority areas like health care, education, infrastructure and tax relief, our government is moving Manitoba forward towards a better, brighter, more affordable future.

We remain focused on reducing the tax burden for Manitobans. For years and years, under the previous government, Manitobans were taxed to the max. Since we were elected in 2016, we've not raised any taxes. I know the opposition likes to always say cut, cut, cut, but instead we've managed government. We run a smaller government now but yet spend more on the

essential services that Manitobans look forward to. We made an election promise to make life more affordable and we are making good on our promise.

This Bill 71 will provide \$248 million in rebates of education property taxes and community revitalization levies to 658,000 property owners across the province. Rebates will be for 25 per cent for residential and farm properties and 10 per cent for all other properties in 2021, and higher rebates will be able to be set by regulation in future years.

I'm just going to give you an example of a few of these rebates here. The average homeowner rebate on \$1,540 worth of school tax is \$385. That's no small change. The average business rebate is \$800 on \$8,000 school tax. Again, businesses have been hit hard by the pandemic here, and this assistance will certainly be appreciated by the business owners I've talked to anyways.

* (15:30)

And farmers, let's talk about farmers. They've been asking for years that there be something done about school tax on their property. Increasing property values and land values has pushed up this education tax every year. So their average farm rebate is \$1,900; that's based on \$7,600 school tax. And the average apartment landlord rebate is \$1,700 on \$6,800 school tax.

So, any funding requirements not met through local taxes will be provided through the provincial coppers, as is a predominant practice in other provinces. All property owners in Manitoba will benefit from the rebate. This will ensure all property owners are treated equally.

We do not want to discourage Manitobans from returning home to Manitoba, immigrants choosing to settle in Manitoba or businesses from choosing to invest in Manitoba because they do not qualify for the school tax rebate as a property owner. We want fairness. We want everyone to benefit from this tax.

Bill 71 also provides for corresponding reductions in various existing education property-tax-related credits and rebates to ensure that all property owners are paying 25 per cent less on residential and farm properties, regardless of whether an owner qualifies for existing credits and rebates.

Manitoba has one of the most complicated and uneven education property tax regimes in the country, which has resulted in Manitobans paying thousands of dollars on their property tax bills to fund education.

Manitoba's property tax system, as it had stood, can be an impediment to future private sector growth and investment throughout the province.

The phase-out of the education portion from taxes on property will be completed over a maximum of 10 years.

I'm going to talk a little bit here about the previous government, yesterday's NDP. The NDP raised 15 taxes in 14 years, including increasing the PST without the required referendum to 8 per cent. Over the 17 years the NDP were in power, tax increases culminated in costing Manitobans over \$700 million annually by 2016, the equivalent to raising the PST to 9 per cent. The NDP expanded the PST base to more goods and services, including home insurance and haircuts. The NDP, during their tenure, took money off the kitchen tables of Manitobans and put it onto their own Cabinet table.

Delivering on our promise of cutting the PST, we are providing relief to all Manitobans, especially when they need to make the large purchases in life, like a car. Manitobans work hard to support themselves and their families. Our government believes it is our role to help Manitobans accomplish their goals and make life more affordable, and reducing the PST helped to do that.

Where the NDP failed, our government has provided Manitobans with a long-overdue tax break. In the 2011 election, former premier Greg Selinger told Manitobans, it's ridiculous—ideas that we're going to raise the sales tax. That's total nonsense; everybody knows that. He gave his word. He said, our plan is a five-year plan, with no tax increases, and we'll deliver on that.

Manitobans were already taxed to the max. Manitobans are not the NDP's ATM.

The NDP believes that Manitobans should work harder for government. Our government believes that government should work harder for Manitobans. Our government is committed to making sure that the tax environment in this province is efficient, competitive and affordable.

The member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) is one of the trustees who raised property taxes in Winnipeg school division 1 to astronomical heights. While the member was chair of Winnipeg 1, property taxes increased by 36.61 per cent from 2012 to 2019. This direct increase made the less—made life less affordable for all Winnipeggers that were impacted.

The NDP as a whole missed every budget target when they were in power, resulting in annual structural deficits. This resulted in Manitoba's debt doubling in just six years and debt servicing charges reaching record levels of over \$1 billion.

The NDP refused to be accountable for their fiscal mismanagement. They watered down balanced budget legislation twice to avoid ministers taking a 20 per cent salary cut. Greg Selinger was named the worst premier for fiscal management in 2012 by the Fraser Institute, due to overspending, record deficits and spiraling debt. This is the NDP's financial record in history.

Under the NDP, Manitoba families paid the highest income tax in Canada west of Quebec. Manitoba's small-business tax threshold was the lowest in Canada under the NDP. Thus, small businesses were taxed at corporate rates sooner here than anywhere else in Canada. Manitoba's only one of four provinces left in Canada that has a payroll tax. It kills job and investment in the province.

I'm pleased to say our budget addressed that again this time and, to make life more affordable for businesses moving forward.

Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, I want to urge today's NDP to do the right thing and let Bill 71 pass second reading and let Manitobans have a say on whether they want more money on their kitchen tables in committee.

Thank you.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I appreciate the opportunity to put a few words on the record in regards to Bill 71. My understanding is that this bill actually doesn't need to be brought forward at all for the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his Cabinet and caucus to do what they want to do by way of rebate. But I certainly can understand that, given the diminishing popularity of the Premier, he's wanting to put a bill forward to probably try and earn back some of the confidence of Manitobans.

Unfortunately, this bill reflects sort of the lack of understanding that this Premier and his Cabinet have of the issues that Manitobans are facing. I can certainly appreciate, as can members of our caucus, that Manitobans are struggling and that many, many Manitobans are in need of financial support. Many Manitobans are in need of support that helps them feed their families, helps them pay their bills, that helps them contribute to their communities, helps

them thrive and not just survive, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker.

The thing is, although the government tends to say that we're the party of status quo, they continue to reflect the fact that they are very much status quo and lack creativity, lack ingenuity, lack original thought when they bring forward pieces of legislation like this. Anyone who has meaningful conversations with folks across all of our communities who are struggling and asks those folks the ways in which they really need support right now would understand that there are several reasons why this bill misses the mark.

And, you know, there's a few things that, for me specifically, as the representative for Union Station, that I'm concerned about. I think about the impacts that some of the changes will have on folks who rent. Significant—a significant portion of folks who reside in Union Station are renters. And, you know, there have to be solutions brought forward that will address some of the income disparities that people face, that factor in renters, beyond a rent freeze, a rent freeze that doesn't even account for the fact that folks who are applying for rent increases based on renovations are having those applications granted at an alarming rate.

I get phone calls at our constituency on a regular basis from folks who are going to be essentially homeless in a matter of weeks, matter of months, basically being 'renovicted', because their landlords are applying for astronomical rate increases for basically changing out things like toilet paper holders, like really sort of insignificant renovations that are having catastrophic incomes on people who have a difficult time finding affordable, safe, dignified places to live. This legislation doesn't address that issue. There wasn't really anything in the budget that meaningfully addressed that issue.

* (15:40)

And when I bring up renters, the other thing that comes to mind for me, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, and something that kind of disturbs me when I read Bill 71, is the fact that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is choosing to send Manitobans signed cheques that will cost an additional \$1.3 million. I mean, that, to me, is—there's really no greater representation for just how—just who is being centred in some of what this bill is purporting to address than that detail: an additional \$1.3 million being spent for signed cheques.

And it's interesting because, you know, I mentioned renters. I think about \$1.3 million and how

that would impact the many international students who are renters, not only in my constituency but many constituencies across our province—international students who had their health care cut by this government—\$1.3 million? That \$1.3 million is nearly half of the cost of what was international student health care in Manitoba.

I think about the renters in my constituency who are students who will be impacted by this. And I think about the folks who have reached out because they don't have Manitoba health care—they've had to pay for private insurance—and how this \$1.3 million could have contributed to those folks not having to have GoFundMe accounts to raise money for health care they're having to pay for out of pocket because we've created a two-tier health-care system for those folks, and now they're being rejected by their private insurance and have to raise money on whatever platform possible so they don't go absolutely broke and destitute trying to access critical health care.

I can't believe that this money is being spent so the Premier can sign some cheques while Manitobans, Manitoban students, are having GoFundMe fundraisers to deal with health-care issues that would otherwise see them financially ruined.

You know, the other thing that—I mean, I could go on and on about that, because the realities for renters in this pandemic have increasingly become very precarious for many, many folks. And, you know, the—Bill 71, again, an opportunity, really—an opportunity to kind of creatively—could have creatively actually outlined some plans.

And I've had conversations with members of our caucus. I'm a smart person. We've got smart people. All of our MLAs are smart people in our caucus, but there are some folks in our caucus who really were able to articulate and extrapolate information from this bill for me in a way that outlined that there are some really creative ways that those needs could have been addressed.

The MLA for Fort Garry and I had a conversation either yesterday or the day before about the ways in which this government could have brought forward a piece of legislation like this and not left out the needs of folks that represent so many residents in my constituency, many of his constituency and many of our constituencies. So, again, it just really and truly reflects the lack of creativity, lack of original thought, lack of willingness to meaningfully engage and consult and listen to the needs of Manitobans.

And I'm not saying that Manitobans don't need financial supports and don't need a break. I fully believe that Manitobans do need increased financial support and—for there to be ways and opportunities for them to have some more money at the end of the month or at the end of the week, end of the pay period or whatever it is, so they can better provide for themselves or their families.

Those solutions, though, have to actually centre the needs of Manitobans. Those solutions have to actually reflect the needs of Manitobans. And this bill misses the mark. This bill just continues to see something that is really disturbing, that has been amplified during this pandemic. This bill actually contributes to those people who have the most having more. This bill actually contributes to those folks who actually don't need—who maybe don't at all need this kind of tax break getting more money in their pocket.

And we all know the trickle-down effect doesn't work. We all know those at the very, very top aren't necessarily streamlining funds back down to those folks, especially, who are living in poverty, who are very socio-economically disadvantaged.

And so, again, you know this could have been—this could have been—a really great opportunity, a creative opportunity to develop something that would recognize the fact that not everybody is working with the same income, has the same properties, you know, has the same needs. Like, this could have been an opportunity where the government really showed Manitobans that, yes, we get it, we see you, we see the folks who are struggling, we see that the folks who aren't struggling, quite frankly, are willing to forgo maybe some of that tax break and make sure that those who are really struggling have more support so that they can thrive through this pandemic, so that they can thrive, their kids can thrive beyond this pandemic.

You know, as somebody who—I know what it's like in adulthood to really financially struggle; I know what it's like to literally not have a kitchen table, and I know the challenges that one faces in those circumstances. That's why every time members opposite talk about putting money on a kitchen table, I think back to the time in my adulthood when I didn't have a kitchen table. I think back to the time where, you know, I was really struggling; it for me was a day-to-day struggle. And, you know, I think about how fortunate and blessed I am to have moved past that time in my life, and how I recognize that there are many people struggling, and I am happy and willing to forgo maybe, you know, getting some sort of

significant amount of a rebate if it means that those folks who are really struggling, who are going without entirely, have a bit more support.

I think that there are many people in this Chamber who would subscribe to that. I think that's a value that's Manitoban, quite frankly. We see it all the time. We see stories of Manitobans stepping up and showing up for their neighbours who are struggling and going without the same level of resource. And I just think that this was, you know, an opportunity where we could have really reflected—the government could have really reflected those values, the values that Manitobans have, and could have established something that recognized the disparities that are growing.

The income disparities in our province and beyond our province are not lessening, they're actually growing exponentially during this pandemic. We have to be able to recognize that, and we've got to be able to responsibly allocate resource in a way that doesn't leave people who are already behind even further behind and out of being able to, you know, achieve the things that they want to achieve and have access to the opportunities that they should be able to access.

And so, you know, one of my key points is really and truly that this bill just lacks a fundamental understanding of the disparities that are faced by Manitobans. It lacks any actual creativity. It kind of reflects the self-centredness, I guess, of the Premier (Mr. Pallister) by including the \$1.3 million in the budget that would—because he's signing cheques—doesn't seem like that makes any sense; certainly could see that money be put to better use during the time of a pandemic.

But I also want to talk about a couple of other things. You know, I've just been talking a little bit about the fact that this bill does give wealthy Manitobans the same rebate as somebody who is of lower socio-economic status, and, you know, that's something that can be rectified. I think that the interesting thing and the good thing about where we're at with this bill, is, you know, these areas where the bill really falls short can actually be rectified, you know? There are amendments that can be brought forward, there are decisions that can be made to actually make this something that supports Manitobans.

I hope that that's something that members opposite are open to. I'm not going to keep my hopes up. I'm not going to hold my breath; I think that outcome would be not very good for me. But I just

think that, you know, it would be nice to see them reflect on the feedback that they're receiving and maybe make a decision that actually does centre the needs of all Manitobans, not just some, doesn't just disproportionately benefit a few. But maybe it would be okay to see this bill—or piece of legislation like this—actually disproportionately benefit those who are most disadvantaged. I don't know. I don't know if that's like something that's completely otherworldly for some folks, but I think that that's an approach that we can look at taking.

* (15:50)

So, anyway, I do think it's also important to talk about small businesses. Many, many small businesses in the constituency that I represent, Union Station. I love it. They make our communities beautiful and vibrant and exciting. I look forward to us getting through this pandemic and seeing the energy return to downtown, the way that it was. And probably even, you know, bigger and better energy.

You know, it was kind of eerie for me, to be honest, at the beginning of the pandemic, walking around and—on the weekend and not really seeing anybody out. It made me sad. I really do look forward to seeing the community members out and businesses, you know, open in a way that reflects that they've been adequately supported during this pandemic and can thrive beyond it.

And so, you know, that's the other piece that is concerning for me in regards to Bill 71: the fact that small businesses are going to lose out from this tax cut because they're not going to see any money from it if they're renting.

Again, going back to the rental aspect. There are many, many, many small businesses that I could name right now that I know are renting. You know, folks who really, really need support in order to make it through this pandemic and who aren't going to benefit at all from this because they're renters. And that's pretty unfair.

You know, we need to make sure—a lot of those business owners, just so I'm clear, not only have businesses in the constituency of Union Station, but they also live in the constituency of Union Station.

You know, many of them rent space to run their business and, lo and behold, they rent to live in the area as well. And they're just getting double-excluded from benefitting from something like this. And that's disappointing, right.

There's no real incentives for landlords to pass on their savings to renters. There's virtually none, and this bill makes that okay, and that's wrong. There needs to be incentives in place, and, quite frankly, like, businesses that are renters should be able to benefit from a law that is seeking to return funds to folks who, this government's saying, you know, folks need it. We're agreeing; folks do need financial support. But this doesn't support small businesses who, many of which, you know, really need that support right now.

You know, I want to give—you know, in talking about small businesses who need support, I want to give a shout-out to the small businesses in Union Station, many of which who have gotten very, very creative to make sure that they can stay engaged with communities and continue to keep their staff employed, continue to contribute to downtown being as vibrant and as wonderful as it is.

And I want to let those folks know that we're going to keep fighting for you. You know, on this side of the House, we're listening to you. We see the fact that this government continues to fall short in delivering supports to you, and Bill 71 is a good example of that. And you folks can trust that on this side of the House we're listening.

And we're going to continue to put creative solutions forward. We're going to continue to, you know, meaningfully engage and consult and hope that maybe, at some point, the government will heed some of our concerns and hear some of our creative ideas and put them to good work because, ultimately, we should all be on the same page. We should all want the best outcomes for citizens across the province.

You know, there's only a few other things that I'd like to make sure I put on the record in regards to this bill. You know, the other thing that does come to mind is the impacts that this legislation would have on education and social inequalities.

Currently in Winnipeg, there are six school divisions, and I know that; Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, you're probably already aware of that. You know, the reality of it is that there is another bill in front of the House, Bill 64, that would see these divisions no longer have elected school trustees to advocate for them and for their communities, rather.

Ultimately what this means, you know, is that some neighbourhoods are going to be forced to pay more while having less of a say in what happens at their schools. And that, to me, is not okay.

There was a member—I can't—don't want to misspeak so I'll just say there was a member opposite who was talking about, you know, who should contribute to policy being developed for schools and for our education system. And I think I might actually be the only person in our caucus who doesn't have any kids. I could be wrong, but I think maybe I'm not wrong.

But, you know, does that mean that I shouldn't have a say in the education of kids in our communities, in my community? I don't think so. I think it's actually really important that folks are invested in the schools in their communities, that folks feel like their voices matter in terms of the education that kids in their neighbourhoods are receiving. I'm invested. I want kids in my communities to have the best opportunities at a good education. You know, I want kids in our communities and my neighborhoods to have the wonderful support of educators that I was fortunate to have growing up; educators that I'm still connected to to this day, many educators who are still teaching, you know, in the schools where my entire family was educated.

And, you know, I think it's a disservice when we imply that because people don't have kids—or, you know, choose not to reproduce or don't or whatever the circumstance may be—that their voice shouldn't be as relevant or relevant in conversations about how curriculum—not how curriculum is delivered rather, but how our kids, you know, benefit from our education system. I'm thrilled at the opportunity to be able to contribute to our schools, and that is something that we should want for all members of our communities to want to be engaged in.

So, you know, I think that it's interesting that, you know, this bill is brought forward during a time where we're seeing a lot of harmful pieces of legislation brought forward in this House. Bill 64 is a bad one. A bad one. That's why we see—I think hundreds of people from our communities, they're going to speak to that bill because it's bad, because they're not happy, because they want what's best for students. I know lots of people who are going to speak to that bill who don't have kids. They recognize it's bad, and they should have their voices heard on it, you know.

And so Bill 71 is—you know, when you factor this in and alongside the other pieces of legislation, that you see a trend with this government, a government that claims to be putting the needs of Manitobans first, a government that claims to be making decisions in the best interests of Manitobans. But in reality, when

you look behind the smoke and mirrors of what they're saying and doing, you see very clearly what their agenda really is. And unfortunately, it's not an agenda that makes Manitoba a better place for everybody. It's an agenda that further prioritizes those who are already in comfortable positions.

I've had conversations with many folks who are doing quite well financially, who are very well off, quite successful, and they see it too, you know. And it's interesting that, you know, we're in a time now, I think, more than ever—and stats show this, research shows this, Manitoba-based research actually shows this—that folks who are, you know, I would say maybe in the upper percentages of earning and all of that, folks who would disproportionately benefit from Bill 71.

So I think I referenced that earlier that the—and I'm going to go back in my notes here because I just want to make sure I get it—I want to make sure I get it correct, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker, that—there it is—that, you know, this—Bill 71 gives wealthy Manitobans the same 25 per cent rebate on their second property and their third and their fourth property. I actually missed that the first time that I referenced that stat; I actually missed that. I should have emphasized all of that because that's wild.

This bill gives wealthy Manitobans the same 25 per cent rebate on their first property, their second property because—their third property. I'm just going to put it out there: if you've got three properties, you've got to be somewhat wealthy—and their fourth property. There's no limit. I think that means if you've got six properties, 10 properties, my goodness, you get the same rebate as somebody with one property? That's—maybe even half or a third of the cost that that wealthy person's first property.

I don't even—I'm not even—I just—I mean, when you articulate that, when you read that for your own self, come on. Come on. You know who this bill benefits. You're telling me with all of the smart people that this government knows, that no one could have found a more creative and equitable way to put this piece of legislation together? That's ridiculous. Of course somebody could have. In fact, somebody should have. Because the people benefitting from this don't need any more benefits.

* (16:00)

Are you kidding me? Like, if there's anything we've learned during this pandemic—and I'm grateful, I'm not saying that I don't like the fact that if I'm sick

I can stay home or that I have a safe and respectful place to rest my head. I'm grateful for those things. I think all Manitobans who have access to that are grateful for those things.

I think what we're recognizing during this pandemic is there's too many people—even one is too many—but there's too many people who don't have access to those resources. And, are you joking me, that multiple properties, same rebate? Nobody could have come up with a better bill than this?

So, I'm glad I went back to that point. That being said, there is a better way. And this pandemic has exposed the fact that it's because decisions like this are made that people are suffering, that people are struggling.

So, I mean, I would implore this government to just listen to the Manitobans across the board. And, like I said, research backs this up, that people of all financial statuses, people are wealthy, people with a half a dozen homes who are getting—who are going to potentially benefit from this, those folks, too, also want for us to do better by those folks who don't have that wealth. Those folks are saying they believe we need to make sure that folks who are financially disadvantaged have greater financial supports.

We all see that. We all see that when folks don't have that, it hurts all of our communities. It impacts absolutely all of our communities.

So, you know, this bill is disappointing. Can't support it, just can't support it; won't support it. And I hope that this government seriously reflects on who's at the heart of the legislation they bring forward.

It's really easy, it's very easy to say on the surface we're doing this because we care about Manitobans. It's very easy on the surface to say we want to put money back in the pockets of Manitobans, we want to give people back some financial resource. I would really encourage them to stop using that kitchen table analogy. It's bad, it's not good. But what I would say is that, you know, that's a really surface, shallow statement. Like, that's a statement that really lacks an awareness of what's going on across all of our communities.

I see folks who represent different constituencies at the provincial level and at the municipal level talking about the challenges they're seeing in a new way in their own communities: an increase in unsheltered folks, homelessness, poverty.

And, you know, the pandemic has exposed something and amplified an issue that's always been there. And we have a responsibility, this government has a responsibility to, you know, meet those needs adequately and not just make broad, sort of, we're-helping-all-Manitobans statements as if no one's going to actually look at the details of what they're bringing forward, as if nobody's going to do the research behind what they're bringing forward by way of policy.

Manitobans are smarter than that. They know that. Manitobans are looking into what they're saying and they're evaluating and they're saying this falls way—it doesn't even fall way short. This intentionally benefits some and leaves others behind, and Manitobans don't want that. Maybe, like a very few people; I don't know those people. The people I'm talking to don't want that. Manitobans we're hearing from don't want that. Manitobans that we're talking to and we're hearing from, overwhelmingly, overwhelmingly don't want people left behind anymore.

So, it's with that that I'm just going to make a couple of final comments. You know, I can't say enough how outstanding it is to see people in our communities rise to the occasion during this pandemic, time and time and time again. Like, what a time for us to be living in. I couldn't—you couldn't have—I was talking with a friend yesterday who I used to work with and we were just sharing stories about the kids we work with—just outstanding personalities, lovely kids. And she was like, you know, if you and I had—we never could have guessed in a handful of years that we would be navigating living in a pandemic. Couldn't have guessed that, but here we are, and it's humbling on a daily basis to see the ways in which Manitobans continue to rise to the occasion that is this crisis. It is absolutely humbling to see people who have some of the least resources available to them do the absolute most for their neighbours, for their loved ones, for their communities.

It's a lesson that I think would serve all of us well to pay attention to. I think a lot of us, certainly on this side of the House, I know all of us learn those lessons. We see what's going on; we take it to heart. We participate in those efforts. I really do think that there is a serious lack of matching that commitment on the part of the government that is truly disheartening, and there is no better time than the present for the government to turn that around.

This bill doesn't cut it. This bill falls way short. This bill leaves people who are already left behind completely out of the equation, and that's unacceptable.

So, my call to this government would be to rethink this completely. Start talking to people. Find some creative solutions to make sure that the support you're claiming to want to provide to Manitobans is actually equitable and benefits those who truly, truly need it. This is an opportunity that cannot be wasted, especially in the midst of this pandemic.

Thanks.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak virtually here today to debate Bill 71, as it appears that it will create a further divide within our province, just very simply put.

Mr. Speaker, we're supposed to be breaking down barriers. We're supposed to be creating opportunities for all Manitobans and bringing people together, and this bill does the complete opposite. This bill puts up barriers and it takes away opportunities for people to be able to save and purchase property if they want to. It also creates a much further divide because, if this bill passes, anyone who owns property will save a bit of money at the expense of people who choose to or have to rent.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this government needs to give Manitobans more credit, as Manitobans can see straight through what this government is attempting to do here. The reality is this government could have—and this is just firstly—introduced this in the budget the way that revenue in our province is typically introduced. It's painfully obvious that the reason the government chose to introduce this separately is because, one, they wanted the flashy attention for it, and two, they want to be able to say that NDP and Liberals did not support it.

But, Mr. Speaker, of course we can't support this legislation. In good faith, we cannot support it because this bill hurts way more people than it actually helps. The government is just trying to frame this as good legislation, and that's why they keep broadcasting the people can pay less property tax and failing to broadcast the rest of the legislation. They're failing to broadcast that the savings of revenue are at the expense of—these are just a few examples—these savings of revenue are at the expense of farmers, who don't always get their rebates; seniors, who often have lower incomes and often new bills developing as they

get older; and anyone who rents, as their rebates will be tangibly and negatively affected by hundreds of dollars a year.

And let me just give you an example—paint a little bit of an image. If this legislation passes, a renter—and imagine an everyday typical renter—maybe they're renting a suite downtown; maybe they're renting a room in a house in the North End, Mr. Speaker; maybe they're a student renting some property close to University of Manitoba—but imagine a renter who is receiving a \$700 rebate on their income taxes due to renting. Well, now they're only going to receive about \$500, and this is because those who own property will be paying less property tax, therefore providing less of a tax break for those who do not own property.

* (16:10)

Ultimately, the government is choosing to give those who own more property a break. And those who don't, well, the government's charging them more. And another way to imagine it is the government is reaching into the pockets of renters—they like to say this—they're reaching into the pockets of renters, they're reaching into the pockets of seniors and farmers and many, many more Manitobans and giving their money to homeowners who pay property tax.

Mr. Speaker, we need to be more focused on equality. And property tax is arguably the most progressive tax we have, and the government wants to take that revenue away.

Ultimately, this bill favours those who own more property and harms anyone who rents or is a senior or a farmer, as I've mentioned, Mr. Speaker.

I think that this government needs a little learning lesson here. Equality here in Manitoba is not forcing renters to pay more and allowing those who can afford and choose to own land pay less. We need financial equality.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

And Manitobans see through this move that the government is making and from what we have heard, they are willing to pay their property tax, especially when it means the rest of the economy is helped, not hurt.

So, Mr. Speaker, the last thing that I just want to touch on with respect of this legislation is the rent freezes. We are completely for rent freezes and it's a form of protection for renters that allow people to plan ahead, it allows them to know what to expect with their finances. That is why we don't understand why it

doesn't come into effect until January 2022 if this bill passes.

And if this government actually cared about renters, they would have this come into effect immediately, they would consider and take care of everyone who is currently renting.

And, Mr. Speaker, we can tell this government has no problem backtracking because they're more than willing to backtrack to those who will benefit from the property tax changes will get a refund for 2021, but they won't do anything for renters who are fearful and nervous about what could happen between now and January '22–January 2022. Again, it's complete double standard and it's shameful.

And I guess I'll end my remarks there, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): I'd like to put a few words on the record regarding Bill 71, The Education Property Tax Reduction Act.

Bill 71 is turning the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) education property tax rebate into a political ploy. If the Premier and his government care about getting money in—to Manitobans, they could do it right now. They could have done it yesterday or a week ago, but they didn't choose to.

The Premier and his government are entirely capable of getting this money to Manitobans without any legislation, but doing it that way doesn't let the Premier sign the cheque or send the cover letter with a face on it. So it is Manitobans' money, given back to Manitobans, with the Premier's signed—and maybe a card going to them.

But, on the other hand, we are borrowing this money and—borrowing this money to give it to the rich people, to the wealthy people. Who will benefit the most? It will be the wealthy people.

Well, it is obvious. We have seen the polls, not recently, but even the one before: the Premier's popularity is going down. So he just wants to get his popularity back, like, by giving—thinking, like, giving the money—borrowing the money and giving back to people, especially to the wealthy people and little money to the average Manitoban.

He thinks he will buy the votes, but he's mistaken. Manitobans are smart. They know what he's doing.

His government previously said—this government said they would phase out the education tax over a 10-year period after they balance the budget.

Well, now, they are doing it over the accelerated period when we are facing record deficit due to a pandemic. Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are borrowing money and where we are borrowing money and we are putting a future generation into debt.

It is no coincidence that they are introducing this tax break when the Premier's popularity, again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is an all-time low. And we are two years away from the election.

Premier is also choosing to send the money—send Manitobans signed cheque that will cost additional \$1.3 million. Again, earlier, we heard from member from Union Station—we can send this—this \$1.3 million can help international students with health-care coverage. We force those people to get private health-care coverage. Who will benefit? Well, again, those private companies.

And also, earlier, I heard that bill does nothing for renters take away their rebates. In fact, it will even hurt renters even more and leave them with less money in their pocket.

The way the Tory Cabinet have decided to make the changes benefit the wealthy more and shift the burden to lower income Manitobans, all while cutting education for Manitobans.

This is irresponsible and expensive attempt to buy popularity and the support of Manitobans. Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said earlier: all Premier is trying to do is buy the popularity. It won't happen, let me tell you that. People are smart.

The pandemic is a test of leadership, and this government is failing it. They are just not focussed on what matters most to Manitobans. They're attacking working families while giving themselves a pay rise. They are continue to cut health care and education, and they are making life more expensive for the families.

And another thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker: this government claims to be investing in health care, but the numbers don't lie. The funding they claim to increase is below the rate of inflation, meaning they've had to cut.

Overall spending—overall, operating funding was 1.4 per cent, gone up. While I was looking at inflation rate, is around 2.26 per cent; that means we are cutting it.

Long-term care: from 643,754 to 653,873. So that's 1.6 per cent. Again, that's a cut because inflation rate is higher than the budget—increases.

Home care: from 386,163 to 392,720. That's 1.7 per cent. That's another cut.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they actually decreased the budget for acute-care emergency services by \$13 million during the pandemic. Again, they are claiming to be investing into the health care, into education, while they are doing a cut.

They also froze both the physician recruitment and retention program and the nursing recruitment and retention initiatives; this is at a time when the vacancy rates have shot up and desperately need to encourage more health-care workers to stay in our province.

He cut—Premier cut 56 inpatient surgical beds during COVID-19 came to Manitoba—before COVID-19 came to Manitoba.

* (16:20)

Now, who is turning to private, for-profit care to replace the capacity he cut? Again, who is he giving a benefit to? The private companies. Well, what the private companies will do? They will probably hire 20 minimum wages so they will make more profit.

The Premier (Mr. Pallister), in 2019, closed 130 beds across Winnipeg and 27 just as the virus struck. He left us unprepared.

Also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let's see how many cuts he made during his first term. He closed three emergency rooms: Victoria; Seven Oaks, which is in my riding; Concordia and 18 ICU beds.

Another thing we have seen during the question period, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are hearing health care close to home soon. Well, how is that health care close to home soon, when actually closing the emergencies, people in The Maples have to travel to Grace Hospital where we have seen there's 20 per cent vacancies for nurses. People are in the hallways.

He also closed an urgent-care centre at the Misericordia, closed five QuickCare clinics, closed the primary community clinics, and Mr. Deputy Speaker, he also closed the Mature Women's Centre, privatized Lifeflight, pushed for the closure of 26 of our 53 Dynacare locations.

I have raised this issue in the House, did a members' statement on Dynacare, an article in the Times. This is when we need the most of those Dynacares where people can go and get their bloodwork done. They're waiting two or three hours in the lineup, going from all the way from the front at 2211 McPhillips, all the way to the back of the

building in the minus 45 or plus 45. These are our seniors who're standing outside; they want to get the bloodwork done.

And also, during the pandemic, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he also closed CancerCare locations at Seven Oaks and Concordia. Again, is this health care close to home? No, not really. People have to travel all the way to Victoria hospital, it's probably 45 minutes from The Maples. Closed the Community IV clinic at Transcona ACCESS Centre. Again, is this health care close to home? Not really.

And also, during his first term, he also cancelled some projects, but I want to highlight it: a new facility for CancerCare Manitoba, a personal-care home in Lac du Bonnet, the St. Vital primary-care access clinic, The Pas primary care clinic, Bridgwater primary care clinic. So these are all the cuts. So this is nothing—there's no health care close to home.

Since their first budget, they have continued to not only cut their health-care strategic infrastructure budget, but they continue to underspend it.

In 2019-20 budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they budgeted for \$256 million. How much actually they spent? One hundred and eighty-two million dollars; that's \$74 million less than budgeted for.

We also saw in the education, where we are—they are saying—the Premier is saying that they are investing more money. But we have seen that the \$8 million was cut during the last year budget. They actually spent \$8 million less than they budgeted for. Also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government's first budget, health-care spending has been cut by 59 per cent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in their budget speech—or, in their budget, there's no mention of Maples Personal Care Home or the review and the recommendation following the tragic deaths that occurred in 2020.

The Pallister government cut long-term care and left seniors especially vulnerable to this pandemic. So this is during, again, not investing in the personal care home.

Personal-care homes have seen the basic costs of accommodation rise over—by over \$5,000 per year. Yet, the PCH funding was cut a total million over two years from 2017 to 2019. So how can that be prepared for this, for the pandemic? So there was no preparedness.

And even during the pandemic, when they should have shoring up long-term care, they choose to cut it,

including \$586,000 cut from the northern region and \$1.6 million from the southern region.

They saw the horrible effect of the virus in other provinces, yet they failed to reinforce support for seniors during the summer when they had the chance. The result was tragic.

Also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, vacancies in many personal care homes were in crisis when the virus struck. We saw alarming reports, including a location where the majority of the positions were vacant.

Vacancies in home care just as dire, including 15 per cent in Winnipeg, 27 per cent in southern and 26 per cent in Prairie Mountain.

Seniors bear the brunt of declining quality in home care. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) handed a \$15-million contract to for-profit home-care companies, CBI and paramedic with no evidence whether the private contractor delivered the value or quality.

The Premier cut the home-hospital home-care team, 10 nurses in charge of caring for around 550 chronically ill Winnipeggers in their homes. The Premier also cut caregiver tax credits by more than \$300 per person for 2017, making life less affordable for seniors and family members who care for them.

So, again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we are seeing from this—there's so many cuts, and all we are seeing is a benefit to the wealthy people. Who will benefit from Bill 71? It will be the wealthy people.

The Premier also has shown disrespect to our veterans with cuts to their services for two years in a row. The Premier has made cuts to the Deer Lodge Centre. He first cut 15 nursing staff and then targeted recreation therapy volunteer services and sports staff.

* (16:30)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Premier is cutting deals with insurance brokers at the expense of MPI and the interests of ratepayers.

The leaders at MPI want to move some of these simple transactions online, allowing MPI to work directly with customers and saving ratepayers over \$23 million over five years.

Through freedom of information, we revealed that the Pallister government directly intervened during MPI to renew a contract with IBAM and move \$23 million of Manitobans' ratepayer money to the brokers.

So, again, is—what the Premier is doing is making life harder for everyday Manitobans, helping the wealthy people, helping his donors.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, two days after MPI signed the deal with IBAM, the Pallister government demanded a two-year wage freeze for MPI employees.

Again, I don't know with this—I have sat in a committee on bill—I think it was 13. All I was hearing from the government is that—I don't know why they hate unions. What the unions are trying to do is protect Manitoba jobs, good-paying jobs, and what the Premier is trying to do is he wants to bring, like, throw away all those good-paying jobs and bring in \$15-, \$13-paying jobs into Manitoba. The Premier is also setting a bad precedent by indicating that he will remove the ability of MPI to negotiate freely by ordering everything to conciliation. The interference is costing Manitoba money: \$23 million, to be exact.

Another thing that we have seen the Finance Minister said, around \$400 of money going back to Manitobans with the education tax cut. But, on the other hand, I think it was in—last year, late last year, the Pallister government increased Manitoba Hydro rates by 2.9 per cent on all Manitobans.

So giving a \$400–\$80 in one hand and taking it away, actually taking it in advance—giving it later and taking in advance.

I also want to talk a little bit about MBLL. Mr. Deputy Speaker, among the western provinces, Manitoba has the highest revenue and net government income per capita from the sale of alcohol beverages while also doing the most to mitigate the harm done by alcohol. Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries' profits are around \$200 million every year. That means higher public investment, good jobs and less harm from alcohol.

Again, there, we see Manitobans getting a benefit of the Crown corporation, but the Premier saying, no, we are going to privatize this; we can allow the private player to come in, hire minimum-paying people and keep them in poverty.

And also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, despite these known facts, the Pallister government is moving ahead with allowing the private sale of liquor, again, as I said earlier, profiting—giving a profit to the private players.

Who will be those people that will get the private liquor stores? Maybe the member from St. James can

highlight those ones. Well, that's lots of money going to private players, and, hopefully, when the bill comes up, this would be something where this is, like, you cannot hire a person under \$20 or so, so people can benefit from the privatization.

This change will make money—take money away from our schools, addictions services, hospitals and sports, moving it to private hands; again, what I said earlier, just giving the money to their own friends, to wealthy friends, to their donors, as they did with the Manitoba Public Insurance's and IBAM's contract.

Just a little bit going back to the IBAM, even if somebody were to use online services and they don't go to any of those independent people, they will still get 2 per cent, even though they haven't done anything on this one.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I'll just bring it back to Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries, the privatization move—this move doesn't help the—sorry—the real issue in the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is horrible is managing of our assets. Again, he sold Teshmont, so that's Manitoba Hydro, there.

Just look at what's happening with the cannabis sales. States in America have seen massive revenue from cannabis. Colorado, which is about four times the size of Manitoba, of course, annual net income of over \$200 million. What are we seeing here with the private players? The Manitoba government, only \$7-million revenue with the private players.

Let's talk about a little bit about education, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They're underspending on education by not keeping up with inflation and enrolment. And last year, they underspent their education budget by \$8 million. Again, inflation is 2.6 per cent and they are—even though they are saying they are spending more, but if we look at the inflation rate, they're actually spending less.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, how can we trust this government to spend all of this money when they underspent the federal funds they were given for education? The Premier refused to provide a real plan for investing federal dollars in schools, and the Province still has not spent the majority of the \$85 million of federal funds for schools while our schools are critical stays of teachers, substitutes and EAs.

This money will not likely be allocated properly to divisions as needed since the government's new model aim to level the playing field and ensure that all schools get the similar funding. This will affect—

impact schools with additional needs, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

For the first time in a generation, education funding is not keeping up with student enrolment and growth in an economy. The Province's provincial funding for the '20-21 school year was increased by 0.5 per cent despite an increase in student enrolment by 1 per cent and 2 per cent increase in inflation. So, again, this means cut, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

* (16:40)

They misled Manitobans into thinking they were investing \$100 million into schools when nearly half of that was saving from the laying off thousands of school staff in the spring. The Province directed school divisions to cut management staff by 15 per cent. The Province failed to provide schools with adequate and safe masks and PPE; in fact, they gave schools expired masks.

Instead of meaningfully supporting teachers, Premier said 15 per cent rebate for teachers who purchased school supplies for their students is a good thing.

When questioned about whether it's bothering him that teachers have to purchase supplies themselves, this was the Premier's response: This doesn't bother me at all. I just think this is a good, fair initiative to encourage other teachers to do the same. There's a lot of room for initiatives and teachers have initiative.

Again, we are seeing Bill 64 with this education, also Bill 71. Premier is saying, no, it's okay for teachers to purchase supplies and get only 15 per cent, not 100 per cent of their money back. I think it's—soon the Premier's going to say to the parents, you know what, let's—you have to purchase the books too, you have to purchase the other supplies too, we may give you 10 per cent or 15 per cent of it.

So with this, I'll finish my speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I guess the next speaker is the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard)? No, he's not—

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Miigwech, Deputy Speaker. It's clear why the Premier has decided that now is a 'trime' to bring forth a legislation like this; his poll numbers are slipping. This Pallister government and his premier—his ministers and his

party are running scared. They know if an election was called today that they would be gone and an NDP government would have majority in this province.

This is the reason why this government is bringing this forward. They think that by giving wealthy Manitobans a tax break that that's going to increase the poll numbers for them. Well, I can tell you, Deputy Speaker, that Manitobans care about their services in this province.

And this government continues to deplete these services. They cut the health care, chopped it right up. And we're in this crisis right now where we're in a pandemic and people can't get vaccinated enough—or fast enough. People can't get their surgeries because there's not enough nurses, there's not enough doctors; they've left this province because this government has failed to respect them. They've continually disrespected them by firing 3,000 nurses and now they've hired back 1,700.

Bill 71 is turning the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) education property tax rebate into nothing more than a blatant and shameful political poll-ploy. The polls are available for all Manitobans to see and Bill 71 is not going to change those poll numbers. This is simply about this Premier trying to gain the confidence of Manitobans by thinking that he's going to give his wealthy friends a tax rebate.

Well, not all Manitobans, you know, have the luxury of owning a home in this province, Deputy Premier. We look at, you know, the constituency that I represent: only 15 per cent of our constituency are owned property owners; the rest are renters. And these folks are low-income folks that have no choice but to live in this community because the rents are cheaper here.

And now what's this Premier going to do? He's going to even take away their rent rebate, which is going to make it even harder for, you know, these low-income Manitobans to make it every day.

But does this Premier care? Does his Cabinet ministers care? Does his PC party care?

No; they don't care about, you know, the people that are suffering, that are struggling every day, that don't own homes, that don't own apartment blocks.

And we know some of the members on the other side are apartment owners and that they're going to reap the benefits of, you know, having this big tax break and get a big cheque from their boss with their boss's name on it, just like the Premier is going to sign

his own cheque and, you know, cash his own cheque. How fair is that to Manitobans?

Bill 71 is nothing more than a ploy to boost this government's poll numbers. Well, Manitobans aren't going to have it. Manitobans—the polls are there for everyone to see, including this party, this Pallister party. Everyone can see if an election was called today—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. I just want to remind the member for—when you're referring to any members in the House, either from their position or their constituency name.

Mrs. Smith: Miigwech, Deputy Speaker.

So, when we're talking about the confidence of Manitobans, they would likely, you know, the Pallister government would likely lose every seat in Winnipeg if an election were called today, and these trends, you know, can start to go outside of the perimeter of Manitoba.

These, you know, elected officials aren't speaking up to their boss, to the Premier of Manitoba, on behalf of their constituents. They are sitting silent while this Premier continues to stick his ear-fingers in his ears and not listen to Manitobans what they're asking for. And having a property tax rebate is not going to, you know, help the everyday Manitoban; it's going to help wealthy Manitobans.

So, you know, this Premier needs to think about, or this Pallister government needs to think about the direction that they're taking with Bill 71. If this Premier is so concerned about saving Manitobans money and, you know, not his own poll numbers, hopefully, he'll be able to answer this: Why is he planning on spending \$1.3 million of Manitobans' money to print his own signature on these cheques, Deputy Speaker? Why? Why would he spend \$1.3 million during a pandemic when Manitobans are struggling, when small businesses are struggling, when our homeless population is going up, when there's people who are dying of addictions, there's people who are being cut off of EIA by this government, and what do they do? He's going to spend \$1.3 million on putting his signature on these cheques and sending them out.

Well, Deputy Premier, I can tell him that—I could tell the Premier that there's other ways to spend that money that actually would help the everyday Manitoban.

And I wish, you know, members on the opposite side would stand up and speak up for everyday Manitobans and speak up against the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and this—the Pallister, you know, their Bill 71. They know—the members opposite know that this is not a good bill, that this isn't going to help the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. I just want to remind the member, also, to refer to any members of the House as their constituency name or their positions, either ministers or first minister or Pallister government.

Mrs. Smith: Miigwech, Deputy Speaker.

Certainly it's—this isn't about helping Manitobans and is nothing more than political theatre. The government would have made this bill a priority, you know, a long time ago, but here we are; the polls are down and, you know, this is their real reason why this is being brought forward.

It calls to memory last summer, actually, when the Premier pulled a similar political stunt. He actually put his name on cheques to seniors—\$200 cheques. Actually, he received it too—the Premier received his own signature on his own cheque for \$200 from his own government.

Picture that, Deputy Speaker, going to your mailbox, you know, you're the Premier of Manitoba, opening your mailbox, taking out the cheque, opening the cheque, you know, the smile on your face that you get a \$200 cheque from yourself. It's signed by yourself. How selfish is that?

When Manitobans have been struggling, when business has been struggling, when the everyday Manitobans been struggling, we have a Premier who would have the audacity to send a cheque with his own signature on it. That Premier spent weeks—the Premier spent weeks bragging about it.

* (16:50)

And there's a few points that I remember about these cheques, Deputy Speaker. First of all, there was absolutely no need to legislate—no need for legislation when it came to these cheques. The money was allocated, the cheques were printed and the cheques were sent. All without any need for a change in legislation that would give this government an excuse to hack into the education system and our children's future.

And here we have a Premier who's saying there's—it has to be legislated. Well, we didn't need legislation for him to send \$200 cheques out to seniors; we certainly don't need legislation and being here

debating this and trying to put a wedge into, you know, democracy.

This Premier, if he wanted to do it, he could do it today. He doesn't need to, you know, bring it and make—try to change legislation to have that happen.

And the other thing I remember about those cheques, Deputy Speaker, is that they were all printed with, you know, whose signature on it? The Premier's signature. It was almost as though it's not so much about providing, you know, support to Manitobans' needs and it was more about providing a boost to actually the Premier and to his—the Premier's—ego, and, you know, to his Tory government's rapidly disintegrating popularity.

And here we are again, you know, the polls were down then, they're certainly down again and here we are, you know, the Premier pulling another political stunt, trying to say that we need legislation for him to send out cheques and make this change when we know that it doesn't have to happen. Didn't happen then and it doesn't have to happen now.

I think that the Premier is trying to use, you know, Manitobans' own money to buy votes. That's all this is about. He wants to boost the popularity of the PC caucus. Well, I don't think Manitobans are going to buy it. I don't think Manitobans—you know, the everyday Manitoban is worried about, you know, how they're going to pay their rent, how they're going to pay their daycare, when this government continues to raise daycare fees.

You know, daycare workers have to work in more than one daycare in order to provide for their family—and that's what this government has done. Mothers, fathers; they can't go home after work, after working in a daycare with their children; they often have to go to another job, just to pay for their daycare, to pay for their rent, to pay for a kitchen table.

You heard the member from Union Station talk about, you know, when they were starting out, that they didn't have a kitchen table. Well, I can tell you, Deputy Premier, that a lot of my constituents don't have kitchen tables. One only has to drive down Main Street and drive past Main Street Project, Salvation Army, Siloam Mission. Those, you know, folks don't have a kitchen table.

They could use help. Is this government helping them? No. What are they doing? They're instead helping the wealthy Manitobans that don't need the extra support at this time.

Could they survive without having to pay this extra property tax, without having to get this cheque? Absolutely, they could. But yet, this Premier thinks that, you know, he's going to boost his numbers by giving these cheques out.

How about trying to help the actual people who need it? The people who are sleeping on the benches in these, you know, bus shacks? Yes, it's warmer now but people are still continuing to sleep in there. You want to know why? Because there's a lack of shelter in this province because this Province has continued—this Pallister government has continued to sell off housing. Housing that's needed for people.

And I can tell you, I drive by—when I come to my constituency office every morning, I drive by shuttered Manitoba Housing buildings. And I know they're Manitoba Housing buildings because I myself lived in these very places.

The place that I lived in is shuttered. It's all boarded up. And I know the person who moved out of there because she was one of my constituents and she ended up moving out of there because the Province wouldn't do nothing to fix the issues that were wrong with her suite. So she moved out.

You know, when you have a cockroach-riddled apartment, when you have an apartment riddled with bedbugs, and this government does nothing about it and lets people live in that? Of course, they're going to move out. And this government is happy for them to move out, because now they can sell off more of the social housing, which puts more people on the streets because they can't afford the rents in Manitoba.

And let's talk about the rents in Manitoba. Is Bill 71 going to do anything for the renters? Absolutely going to do nothing for the renters.

In fact, rents have continued to go up in this province. People that have gone before, you know, the rental—to go and talk about, you know, the rents going up, and one of the members talked about just a toilet being fixed.

And I think it was the member from Union Station that was talking about, you know, one of her—one of their constituents coming to them and saying to them, you know, my rent's gone up exponentially and all they've done in there is change the toilet out, and they were allowed to increase my rent.

Well, that's not okay. Is this government doing anything about that? No. They keep allowing above-guideline rent increases for Manitobans. How is that

helping everyday Manitobans? It's doing nothing. Again, it's putting people on the street.

This government, with Bill 71, they could be spending money to, you know, help people who are on EIA. You know, there was an announcement today made about, you know, helping people to get into work.

Well, I can tell you, Deputy Speaker, that I've had people come into my office that this government has forced to go into an employment program that are disabled, that, you know, have no—they don't have the capacity to be working. And their parents have actually had to come and advocate, you know, in my office and have advocated in the minister's office.

But they're tone deaf. You know, this Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) is dead set on getting people that—back to work, when they don't have the skills. And this government isn't providing the skills. They're not even providing shelter benefits while these folks are trying to get back to work.

Another constituent came to see me and said, you know, Bill 71, what's that going to do for me? I'm trying to get back into the workforce; I was put out of work due to COVID.

And then we talk about, you know, helping people who own houses. Well, this young person was working in the restaurant industry. They don't have a job to go back to because this government has provided very little support to little mom-and-pop shops that are trying to survive and, you know, make ends meet and provide for their families.

I think about a restaurant in my community here, Luda's. That restaurant's been closed for a whole year. That was a restaurant that was—generations owned that restaurant. So it was the grandmother, then the mother, and then the mother and daughter and now the grandson was working there. That restaurant has been shuttered since, I think, May of last year. And that was a community hub for members.

And how is Bill 71 going to help open that restaurant back up? How is Bill 71 going to help employ those people that were employed in that restaurant? How is Bill 71 going to help the restaurants that don't own their buildings that they're renting? They're no longer going to receive, you know, rebates. They're not going to get a cheque to help them.

And this government, you know, thinks that, you know, Bill 71 is so great and so grand, that it's going to lift up everyday Manitobans.

Well, I can tell this government that it's not going to lift up everyday Manitobans. Everyday Manitobans don't own one home, two homes, three homes, four homes.

As the member from Union Station pointed out, that, you know, people are going to receive multiple rebate cheques, not just on one property, but if they own two properties, three properties, four properties, five properties, they'll get unlimited, you know, rebates from this government.

And, you know, it's a shame that this government, you know, is not looking out for the everyday Manitobans or listening to the everyday Manitobans.

You know, they claim to listen, but I think they have earplugs in when they're listening and they have

blinders on. They're pretending that they don't see the issues that are happening here right in front of their eyes.

You know, one only has to come down to my constituency. Come down Main Street. Drive down Main Street. Come anywhere from—let's say come past Logan and drive to Selkirk Avenue. You will see. Go by the University of Winnipeg. You will see people are living in bus shelters. Does that not bother the members on the other—does that not bother the Pallister government that there's—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. When this matter is before the House, the honourable member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) will have 14 minutes remaining.

The House is—the hour being 5 p.m., the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, April 21, 2021

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are also available on the Internet at the following address:

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