

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ADAMS, Danielle	Thompson	NDP
ALTOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen	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, Hon.	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	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REYES, Jon, Hon.	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
<i>Vacant</i>	Fort Whyte	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, November 24, 2021

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Please be seated.

An Honourable Member: Madam Speaker, on a matter of privilege.

Madam Speaker: The honourable House leader for the official opposition, on a matter of privilege.

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): I rise on a matter of privilege today.

This is the first opportunity I have to present this matter in the House. The breach I will identify is unprecedented and requires research, confirmation of the facts and consultation with the relevant authorities prior to being presented for consideration.

The breach of privilege is straightforward, Madam Speaker. The text of the government's Throne Speech was provided to media before being read into the official record of this House. The Throne Speech is a confidence motion and one of the most important motions considered by this House.

I listened carefully to the Throne Speech yesterday and, apart from my profound disappointment at the missed opportunity to show change from a failed policies of the Pallister government, the speech was, for all intent and purposes, the same as reported in the media prior to being read in the Chamber. I made the point of confirming these facts once the text of the speech was distributed after the House rose.

I table, Madam Speaker, the media articles in question.

The authorities are clear on this question. The text of motions, bills and other matters for this House must be presented to the House itself first.

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, third edition, cite the example of legislation or motions being provided to media prior to being presented in the House as a paradigmatic example of a breach of privilege.

This is a matter for the House to resolve, Madam Speaker, and if—not for the government to sweep it under the rug. This is why it is important for a committee of this House to examine how the breach of the House's privileges took place yesterday.

As a result, I move, seconded by the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), to immediately empower an all-party committee of this House to investigate this serious breach of privilege and to make recommendations to the House on how to avoid this situation from ever taking place again.

Miigwech.

Madam Speaker: Before recognizing any other members to speak, I would remind the House that remarks at this time by honourable members are limited to strictly relevant comments about whether the alleged matter of privilege has been raised at the earliest opportunity and whether a prima facie case has been established.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I'm reminded of former NDP Government House Leader Jennifer Howard who once said in this House that when the opposition doesn't have any issue with the content, they go to process, Madam Speaker, and I think that that's a bit of an issue here today.

But there are really two issues that are at play here, Madam Speaker. There's the issue whether or not this is a serious matter and then there's the issue whether or not it is, in fact, a breach of privilege.

The government will not take any sort of quarrel with the issue that it is a serious matter. The Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) already stated that it is a serious matter and is taking action on that within government, Madam Speaker. There is no argument that it's a serious issue.

The issue about whether or not it's a matter of privilege is something entirely different, however, and I would cite a couple of sources. Speaker Hickey in this House in 2007, when addressing a similar matter, said that there are items that must be tabled in this

House, and, once tabled, those copies are officially made available to members.

However, Speaker Hickey said that in the case of a throne speech this is a bit of an anomaly in that no copy of the speech is officially tabled through the House. It is read into the House, but there's not an official copy tabled in the House.

In addition, there are no formal rules and practices of the House that dictate when the government is free to release the Throne Speech, so Speaker Hickey said: I note that in the case of the Throne Speech, copies are not tabled or given to members, so I must rule that there is no rule or practice that the Speaker could be enforcing in this instance.

That was NDP Speaker—well, Speaker of the House who was an NDP member, George Hickey.

There is also a precedent from Ontario, which I'll reference.

Speaker Abbott [*phonetic*] in Ontario speaking to a similar issue, and he said on October 23rd, 2007, ruling in the Canadian House of Commons, indicated that there is no procedural authority for the claim that the premature disclosure of the Speech from the Throne constitutes a breach of privilege of the members of this House. It is, in fact, a parliamentary convention but not a privilege.

So, Madam Speaker, again, the government does take this issue very seriously and the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) has already indicated that, but it is not a matter of privilege by the precedents that I've stated in the House.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, on the same point of privilege, I have a few comments.

First of all, I note that the government has repeated on many occasions in the last few days that it wants a more collaborative approach. This is an opportunity to follow through on that commitment and have a more collaborative approach in working with other parties to identify problems and to look for solutions.

The government has agreed that this is a serious matter. There's no reason why a collaborative approach should not be used in every reason, as the Premier has repeated to use a collaborative approach.

The question that has been raised by the House leader for the government is that this is not a breach of privilege because this document wasn't tabled.

Well, I submit, Madam Speaker, that putting the document in Hansard, it may not be tabling it, but it's every bit as any other way that you can make sure that it gets in the Hansard record. And I would suggest, as well, that this is Manitoba, it's not Ontario; you don't necessarily have to follow Ontario practice.

This needs to be looked at very carefully by yourself because it is, as both other House leaders have mentioned, it is a serious matter.

Thank you.

* (13:40)

Madam Speaker: A matter of privilege is a serious concern. I'm going to take this matter under advisement to consult the authorities and will return to the House with a ruling.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Madam Speaker: I do have a report to table.

In accordance with section 30(6) of The Advocate for Children and Youth Act, I am tabling the annual report of the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2021.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister for Health and Seniors Care, and I would indicate that the 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

National Addictions Awareness Week

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery): This past Sunday marked the beginning of Manitoba substance use and awareness week. The theme for this year is Driving Change Together. It is our hope that by observing this week we can rally more support to this cause.

A study from the centre of addiction and mental health noted that one in every five Canadians will experience mental illness or addiction in their lifetime.

Madam Speaker, this is an illness with symptoms often hidden by those living with it. They suffer in silence, sometimes to keep their loved ones from

worrying about them, sometimes because they feel if they speak up no one will listen.

Our government is committed to improving the health and well-being of all Manitobans. Accessible, evidence-based mental health services are a key component of our health-care system.

But if we are to address the problem of substance abuse, we must first confront the stigma toward people afflicted by it.

Today, on the steps of our Legislature, Overdose Awareness Manitoba has placed purple carnations in honour of those who have lost their lives to overdoses over the first six months of this year.

Their work takes many forms, Madam Speaker. Together, their members gathered over 4,000 pairs of socks for the Main Street Project Socktober campaign.

For that, and their ongoing work to raise awareness, I say thank you.

I also want to thank those working on the front lines: police officers, firefighters, nurses and paramedics, who remain some of our most important allies in this fight.

But I want to extend those thanks further to social workers, crisis counsellors, community outreach co-ordinators, case workers, therapists and countless others who have made the well-being of others their life's work.

For those who have recovered from their addiction and found peace in this new-found health, I am humbled by your strength and resilience. You stand as a shining example to those still struggling and proof to everyone that those challenges have not, and will never, define you.

To those still fighting their battle with addiction, those hundreds of people I have mentioned stand ready to guide you through your recovery and bear witness to the person we know you can be. The work of initiatives like the Spence Neighbourhood Association, Klinik Community Health Centre and the Tamarack Recovery Centre are essential to our efforts to combat addiction. We cannot do this without organizations like them.

Madam Speaker, this is why the theme is Driving Change Together. Those affected by addiction may believe they are alone, but this is just not true. We see you, we hear you and we will, and can, help you.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): It's National Addictions Awareness Week, and when I recently spoke about addictions issues, the Minister of Health called me emotional. I take it as a compliment. I hope that one day the members opposite will gain enough awareness about 'Manitobas' suffering from addictions to get emotional about the issue too.

Everyone knows that this PC government is failing on this issue. Manitobans suffering from addictions know it, like Spyder Porth, who said that he felt, and I quote, hopeless after being turned away from treatment. Families know it, like the family of Lee Earnshaw, who died after being turned away from treatment at least five times. And health officials know it, like the W-H-R-A staff who wrote that there is, and I quote, a lack of provincial leadership in dealing with the addictions crisis.

This government has frozen addictions—has frozen funding to addictions Manitoba during a pandemic, closed down Manitoba's only long-term treatment centre for teens with addictions and opposed safe consumption sites, and now we are set to record more overdose deaths this year in Manitoba than any other year prior. Overdose deaths have surged 44 per cent compared to last year's terrible toll.

If Manitobans—if Manitoba hopes to even begin grappling with this crisis, a large intervention is needed. We need safe consumption sites, barrier-free health care, more detox beds, treatment beds and, of course, wraparound services that include second stage housing and for this PC government to actually treat this as a public health crisis and to stop turning a blind eye and allowing Manitobans to die. These are preventable deaths, and this government has a responsibility.

Last week, my own brother-in-law became one of those—these Manitobans who passed away from an overdose, so I know the dire—how dire the addictions here in Manitoba is. I know that this government's words about awareness will hopefully lead them to immediate action, because it's needed now to save lives.

Manitobans need this government to take action and not just simply put words on the record. They need to hold an inquest into Lee's death, spend the money needed to get all of those struggling with addictions in Manitoba access to the supports that they need. They need to help save lives—and get emotional.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I ask leave to speak to the minister's statement.

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

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, this is National Addictions Awareness Week, Manitoba substance abuse and awareness week.

As the demonstration in front of the Legislature at noon today by Overdose Awareness Manitoba shows, we are ever more aware of the inadequacies of the present government's approach to addictions: 199 Manitobans died from overdoses in the first half of 2021–199 Manitobans.

Before the election in 2016, five and a half years ago, members of the present government campaigned to address mental health and addictions together and to magically solve all the major problems with addictions treatment that existed then. It has not happened. The situation, in fact, has gone from bad to worse.

The story of Lee Enshaw [*phonetic*] illustrates this. A respected commercial fisherman in British Columbia who'd been three years sober, he came to Manitoba in December 2020. Sadly, he started using fentanyl and became homeless.

He wanted to stop using fentanyl, but needed help. He made five attempts to get that help to get detox to get him off fentanyl. Three were through the Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine, or RAAM clinics. He tried initially at the Main Street Project. There were seven open beds for detox, but Main Street Project would not accept him because these beds, though empty, were designated for people seen at RAAM clinics. Next he tried the RAAM clinics. This time, though, there were detox beds available at Main Street Project, they were not designated RAAM beds, so they could not help.

After several more attempts to get help, on June 24th, he died from an overdose.

There needs to be an inquest into the death of Mr. Earnshaw. It will be instructive not only as to the problems with the current approach to addictions, but could also suggest some significant improvements. Such improvements are badly needed.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let us hope we can move on to a better world in which we have less addictions and substance abuse and less, much less, overdose as a result of this.

Thank you.

* (13:50)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CareImpact

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): Madam Speaker, if you have an unused kid's bike or bedroom furniture for a child's room, there may be a family nearby who could use what you no longer need. Since 2014, CareImpact, a made-in-Manitoba charity with national impact, has connected and equipped communities to effectively journey with children and families experiencing hardship.

Manitoba has many good people who do care but don't know what they can do. CareImpact bridges that gap by educating willing people to better understand poverty, trauma care, culture and reconciliation, all in the context of healthy collaboration.

CareImpact partners with child-welfare professionals who securely, confidentially and anonymously submit requests for needs of children, youth and families. Current requests include size 9 boots for a single mother as well short-term meal delivery for an individual with unforeseen gaps in her surgery recovery plan.

Individuals or community organizations view these needs and in turn respond both securely and in confidence. CareImpact has brought together 1,500 people in order to assist some 250 families, including more than 600 children with an estimated benefit of nearly \$250,000.

I was pleased to support CareImpact with application for funding in 2020. Their strategic use of resources resulted in many positive reports, including a 4.8 out of five rating by those who have benefited from their service.

Poverty is everyone's business. We can't all do everything, but we can all do something to lend a hand and share another's burden. I encourage all members of this House and anyone watching to visit the activate, individual tab of the careimpact.ca website. CareImpact promotes generosity and community, and I commend their work and service to this House.

Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation Family and Community Wellness Centre

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): Today, it is my pleasure to highlight the great work of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation Family and

Community Wellness Centre in Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, Manitoba.

This centre is the first of its kind to be established in Canada. It uses a holistic approach to wellness and health. It provides a wide range of health and family services designed to support physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellness, from conception and birth through to adulthood and elder care. I'd like to send a special shout-out to CEO Felix Walker and his staff for their hard work and dedication to the centre and its mission.

One of the accomplishments of the wellness centre and its success programs is the result of fewer children in foster care. Because of the work they do, children remain in the community with their relatives, families and the community is able to 'suppride' the supports that they need. The centre also provides daycare services and numerous activities for children of all ages.

When it comes to health care, the centre provides everything from a wide variety of services, such as immunization, mommy and baby visits, flu clinics and environmental inspections, including mould and water. There's also many important education programs available, such as baby nutrition and development, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, STIs and diabetes management, just to name a few.

A new program that is gaining momentum is the NCN Community Youth Cree Court, which will be a community-driven court system to evaluate and rehabilitate youth involved in minor criminal offenses. It's—once operational, the community court will have jurisdiction to handle youth crime and reduce overall representation of Indigenous youth in the Manitoba court system.

In every way possible the program at the Family and Community Wellness Centre focus on Indigenous traditions, culture, customs and language. It is a truly community-driven centre and reflects community values and beliefs.

Please join me in honouring the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation Family and Community Wellness Centre for all the good work they do.

Lisa Spring

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure today to present Lisa Spring. Lisa is the host of Painted Turtle Lake retreat near Giroux, Manitoba. She was named the most hospitable host in Manitoba by Airbnb.

Title of most hospitable is based on the amount of five-star reviews left from a guest. Along with the five-star reviews, Airbnb critiques include communication, check-in experience and cleanliness. With what is just a hobby to Lisa, her 'airnb' Painted Turtle Lake retreat was at the top of the list for the highest numbers of reviews at 100 per cent.

Two years ago, Lisa became disabled from a severe chronic illness. Being confined to a wheelchair, the work could not be done on her own. Lisa shows much gratitude to her co-host parents and cleaning staff. Lisa feels nothing short of privileged to have the opportunity to take over the family-owned land and run such a successful business.

It's easy to understand why Lisa has been given so many five-star ratings when her most favourite part of hosting is just having guests on her property, sharing stories and adding history to her family's land. She strongly believes in doing her share to build a strong, positive community as a whole and is always grateful to her 'gress'—guests who made her vision a possibility.

Please join me in congratulating yet another remarkable Dawson Trail hero, Lisa Spring.

COVID-19 Outbreaks in Schools

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): As our province enters the fourth wave of COVID-19 pandemic, a major concern has been the increased outbreaks among students in our schools. Manitoba has declared as many COVID-19 outbreaks in schools within the first seven weeks of this school year as it did in all of the previous school years, but this government is not taking enough action to support our schools and keep children and families safe.

One of the affected schools is Ralph Maybank in my constituency, which recently experienced a major outbreak where 16 students, or 10 per cent of the school, tested positive for COVID-19, while there were 66 cases in the Fort Garry region as a whole. I was contacted by a concerned parent who said they were not properly informed and not enough measures were taken to control the outbreak.

Ralph Maybank School is made up of mostly new Canadians and language barriers and lack of access to communication resources that many of us take for granted. This government should be doing—going above and beyond to give schools the tools and resources to connect with families, such as making sure information is provided in various languages and

rapid response teams are in place when outbreaks happen.

There is—also needs to be better emergency plan for remote learning, smaller class sizes, better ventilation to mitigate outbreaks. It is a scary thing for parents to find out that there are COVID cases at their child's school, but even more so when they are not able to get the answers they need in a timely manner.

After 20 months of this pandemic, this government should be better equipped to handle COVID outbreaks at schools. I'm calling on this government to take action and do more to keep our kids safe at school.

Ken Wiebe

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Bergman, Ching, Kinsman, Larke, McNaughton, McLeod, Penner. They are just some of the surnames of the local men and women who served their country in times of conflict from my area.

Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize chief warrant officer retired and former mayor of Morden, Ken Wiebe, for his work to establish a banner program commemorating the lives and service of local veterans.

Morden resident Ken Wiebe served in the Canadian forces for 29 years. He's a proud member of the Canadian Royal Legion Branch 11 in Morden. In 2018, Ken was reading a Canadian Legion Magazine about a street display of veterans memorial banners, and he thought about such an initiative for the City of Morden.

The Morden Legion Memorial Banner Program received the support of local Branch 11 and the mayor and council, and it began. The program is a partnership between the Legion that undertakes research and produces the banners, the families and friends of veterans who work to fund the projects and the City of Morden that affixes the banners to lamp posts each year.

Printed on the banner is the name and photo of a local veteran, details about his or her life both during and following their service, their rank achieved, tours of service. Those banners that bear a poppy signify a soldier who made the ultimate sacrifice and gave their life in service to their country and for the cause of freedom.

Banners were first went up in 2019 and every year since, and there is now 52 banners that are beautifully

displayed on both sides of Stephen Street and in storefront windows. Banners are raised in the week following Thanksgiving and taken down after Remembrance Day. Throughout the year, a banner is always on display at the Legion and rotated every Friday.

I invite all members of the Chamber to visit the Morden Legion website at mordenlegion11.ca and see the digital archive of these beautiful banners under the banners and bios section.

Ken, thank you for stopping by my constituency office to speak to me more about this important community initiative. Thank you for your leadership and your vision to preserve the memory of those who served their nation so bravely.

* (14:00)

ORAL QUESTIONS

New PC Leader and Premier Congratulations on New Role

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the new PC leader on her victory and to wish her well in her new role.

Now, anytime there is a new premier, that is significant, but the member for Tuxedo is also the first woman Premier. So I want to acknowledge her for that as well.

Now, we know that we have many differences of opinion, to say the least, in the Chamber. But we also know that when Manitoba's government succeeds, that's good for everybody in the province, and it is my view that a strong opposition should make government better, so we will be offering many, many, many opportunities for the PCs to do better.

I do have a question about the Throne Speech, but I figured I would begin with those comments.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Thank you, and I—thank you, Madam Speaker—and I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition. I think this is a great start and I look forward to more days of these kinds of questions. These are great questions before the Manitoba Legislature, and I look forward to those deliberations in the months and years ahead.

I do also want to wish the Leader of the Opposition well. We look forward to seeing him and welcoming him back into the Chamber very soon, as soon as it's safe to do so. So we wish him very well.

I also want to take this opportunity, Madam Speaker, to extend our thoughts and prayers to all of our friends and relatives out in British Columbia who are going through a very, very difficult time right now. And, obviously, they are in our thoughts and prayers at these times. We will continue—I have spoken to Premier Horgan. We will continue to—as Manitobans do—reach out and help in any way we can to our neighbours.

Thank you.

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

Throne Speech Cost of Living

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): There was a lot missing from yesterday's Throne Speech. There was no mention of our second biggest city, Brandon, Manitoba. The PCs may want to look at a map to find out where that is.

And, very concerning as well, there was nothing in the speech about the rising cost of living.

Now, this is the No. 1 issue facing so many families in our—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew:—province, and yet it appears that no map can correct how out of touch the PCs really are when it comes to the struggles of everyday families.

These are massive omissions, and they show serious problems with the Throne Speech. The price of everything is going up right now. Manitobans need a government that will make life more affordable, not less, like the PCs are wont to do.

Why did the PC leader refuse to mention the rising cost of living in her Throne Speech?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Well, I thank the Leader of the Opposition very much for that question.

And it was great to have Mayor Rick Chrest here as part of the Throne Speech yesterday. We had a great discussion. Only just a few days on the job, I was out visiting in Brandon, along with my colleagues from the Brandon area. And we met with Rick Chrest, we met with the chamber, we met with the Brandon Sun. We will continue to work together with those and our friends in Brandon.

Madam Speaker, perhaps the Leader of the Opposition read a different Throne Speech than what

was presented here yesterday, but, certainly, there was a great deal to do with economic recovery within that Throne Speech. I would refer him back to the Throne Speech to maybe have another look at it.

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

Health System Reform Pandemic Preparedness

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, Madam Speaker, two days now without any mention of the rising cost of living facing Manitobans.

Another issue that was very present in the Throne Speech yesterday is that the new PC leader won't condemn what Brian Pallister did to health care in Manitoba. There are so many thousands of Manitobans waiting for surgery. Seniors are being moved hundreds of kilometres away from their homes because of this government's failures. ICUs are overloaded. We need a different approach if we want different results. Instead, it sounds like more of the same from the current government.

Will the new PC leader acknowledge that the cuts made by Brian Pallister, and her as Health Minister, made the pandemic worse and have damaged our health-care system?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): I just want to take this opportunity to thank all of those who are working in our health-care system, those on the front line who are helping to—helping Manitobans, keeping them safe, keeping them healthy, Madam Speaker, and all the incredible work that they do.

In fact, this was mentioned in—a great deal and was highlighted in the Throne Speech that was delivered here by Her Honour yesterday, Madam Speaker. We touched on COVID. We are still in the middle of a pandemic, in the middle of the fourth wave. There are some challenges with respect to surgical and diagnostic backlogs.

I want to thank the Minister of Health for the incredible work that she's doing, along with her officials, along with those on the front line who are helping to address some of those issues.

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

**Surgical and Diagnostic Backlog
Request for Government to Address**

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, still no condemnation of Brian Pallister's cuts to health care.

Now, when we talk about the surgical backlog, everyone in the province seems to know somebody who's waiting for a surgery or for an important diagnostic test. But did we see a plan to fix this in yesterday's Throne Speech? No.

Doctors Manitoba were very clear, they said that, quote, Manitobans caught in this massive backlog, they need hope. They need to see action and unfortunately, they were left waiting again. End quote.

Of course, the PC cuts to health care have only made this situation worse. Manitobans have waited too long for the PCs to take action.

Will the new PC leader commit to a date when the surgical backlog will be cleared?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): The Leader of the Opposition and members opposite will know that, obviously, through COVID, it has caused some challenges within our health-care system; that's created significant backlogs with respect to surgical and diagnostic procedures.

That is nothing that is unique to Manitoba, Madam Speaker. That is something that we're facing all across the country. In fact, I was on a council of federation meeting just the other day, where—we want to ensure that we work together with the federal government to deal with these surgical and diagnostic backlogs.

I think, if we take that collaborative approach, as the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) says, Madam Speaker, I think we can get through this together.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, Madam Speaker, since assuming office, the new PC leader has said many, many times on the surgical backlog, just wait for the Throne Speech, wait for the Throne Speech; don't worry, when you see the Throne Speech we'll address the surgical backlog there. But then yesterday came and went and there was nothing in the Throne Speech to fix the problem.

Doctors Manitoba is calling for a date to clear the backlog. Nurses, patients, families are calling for one,

too, and when we look at other jurisdictions, as the Premier just invoked, other governments have set dates as well.

Manitobans have waited long enough. They want to know when the province will actually get to the job of clearing the surgery backlog.

Will the new PC leader take action today? Will she set a date when the surgical backlog will be cleared?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, in fact, Madam Speaker, we are already taking issue with dealing with those backlogs. In fact, we have contracted with organizations and partners to perform over 11,000 additional procedures to begin to address the backlog that has been caused by COVID-19.

We recognize that's a start. Work continues to happen, Madam Speaker. We will continue to work with Doctors Manitoba, those working on our front lines and our health-care system, our clinicians, all those working at Shared Health, all of those working in the departments.

This is going to take all of us working together to get through this, and we will work together and make that happen.

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

Mr. Kinew: Let's be clear: the surgical backlog was made worse by the cuts that the member for Tuxedo made as Health Minister, and that were ordered by Brian Pallister.

Now, today, we have 136,000 Manitobans waiting for surgeries and diagnostic tests, and a big part of the reason why is because of this PC government's cuts to health care. That's tens of thousands of Manitobans waiting in pain.

* (14:10)

If we don't set a date to get rid of this backlog, it will show that the new PC leader's approach is no different from Brian Pallister's.

Will the PCs take action? Will their new leader set a date to clear the surgical and diagnostic backlog?

Mrs. Stefanson: What I will say to the member opposite is that there's something that has been going on, not just in Manitoba but across the world. It's called a pandemic, the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused surgical and diagnostic backlogs not just

here in Manitoba, Madam Speaker, but across this country, and indeed in many places—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —around the world, and it will take all of us to work together to ensure that we tackle those backlogs.

I just mentioned in my previous answer, Madam Speaker, that we're already starting to do that. We're—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —contracting out 11,000 services out there to address the backlogs.

We will continue to take action to deal with this very important issue, Madam Speaker.

An Honourable Member: Now the real leader of the party.

Madam Speaker: Order. The honourable leader for saint—oh.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen) threw me off.

Manitoba's Pandemic Response Call for Independent Inquiry

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): During this pandemic, Manitoba registered the second highest death rate across Canada. We sent 57 intensive-care patients out of province, where some of our relatives died, Madam Speaker.

Now, in the fourth wave of this global pandemic, Manitobans continue to be separated from their families due to insufficient ICU capacities, seniors are being moved across the province to make space for COVID-19 patients and care homes are still feeling overwhelmed as outbreaks pop up and staff depart.

Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) call an independent inquiry into Manitoba's pandemic response today?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): I thank the member for—from St. Johns for the question.

Our commitment as a government is to address the needs of all Manitobans, even during the COVID pandemic, which has been a very, very difficult time for everyone. We want to ensure that Manitobans receive the care that they need right here in the

province, and we will continue to work with our health-care professionals across our five regions to ensure that equitable, safe and accessible service is available today and in the future.

Ms. Fontaine: Instead of focusing on addressing the provincial pandemic response and learning from mistakes, this new Premier is focused on her own internal conflicts.

She won't commit to an independent inquiry into the provincial pandemic response because she's preoccupied right now investigating who leaked her Throne Speech yesterday.

Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order.

I would just remind the member that because the—that issue of a leak of the Throne Speech is before me for—as a matter of privilege—and therefore the topic cannot be brought up in the House.

Ms. Fontaine: My apologies.

Madam Speaker, Manitobans deserve answers to how this government, this PC government, utterly failed at protecting Manitobans and Manitoban loved ones.

Madam Speaker, will the Premier do the right thing and commit to an independent inquiry into Manitoba's pandemic response?

Ms. Gordon: Madam Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring that, as I said previously, Manitobans receive the care that they need, and one of the commitments we have made is to ensure that all 17 recommendations from Dr. Stevenson's report are implemented and that Manitobans and—who are residents in our care homes, all 125 of them, receive safe, equitable services.

And that is our commitment as a government, and we will be moving forward with those commitments. And I would ask the members opposite to get on board with our government in achieving those goals.

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

Ms. Fontaine: Members opposite continue to say that there's no playbook in handling a pandemic, and yet we're almost 23 months into a global pandemic. There are lessons to be learned, but only if the members opposite listen to experts and, certainly, if they cared enough to call an independent inquiry.

This government cut health care, sent our sickest patients out of province and ignored the warning signs of nurses, doctors and health-care providers, and worse still, they don't want to be held accountable for the mess that they've created.

Experts need to tell us what went wrong so that we can build a more resilient, responsive health-care system for Manitobans.

Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) do the right thing today and call a independent inquiry?

Ms. Gordon: Madam Speaker, we are listening to Manitobans. We've had the benefit of sitting around tables with First Nations, Indigenous, Inuit, Métis individuals to hear their feedback about care in the North and in rural communities. We are meeting with legal-health experts and individuals from right across our province.

We are listening. We are taking action, and we will continue to move forward in ensuring that Manitobans receive the care that they need.

Surgical and Diagnostic Backlog Request for Government to Address

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, the backlog of surgical and diagnostic procedures has swelled to over 136,000 Manitobans. That's totally unacceptable. The Conservative government's promises have come too late and without necessary action. They aren't making any progress. For families facing waits of months and even years, the Minister of Health offers, and I quote, thoughts and prayers. End quote.

Manitobans deserve so much more, and Manitobans know that.

I ask the minister: Why has her party been so focused on internal politics rather than the priorities of Manitobans?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health and Seniors Care): I thank the member from Union Station for the question. It gives me an opportunity to put on the record that in Budget 2021, our government invested \$50 million to address the surgical and diagnostic backlog. We are also meeting with experts around the table, health experts.

We are also committed to ensuring three requests that came forward from Doctors Manitoba are met. The three were: to name a task force; to indicate a time for the task force to achieve their goal; and to carry out transparent reporting to the general public. And

we are committed to meeting those goals, and stay tuned because there's more information to come.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, while the minister asks people to stay tuned, Manitobans are dying while they wait for diagnostic procedures and surgeries. They've been leaving Manitobans behind as that wait-list continues to grow—and other provinces intervened far earlier to address these issues. Manitobans like Allison Marion are still waiting. She spoke to media and explained that she has waited 26 months for hip surgery. Thoughts and prayers are not enough; she needs concrete actions.

When can Manitobans like Ms. Marion expect this to be addressed? When will the minister take real action?

Ms. Gordon: Our government has taken concrete actions. We have contracted with organizations and partners to perform over 11,000 additional procedures to begin to address the backlog, and the October RFSAs, request for supply arrangement, that closed was the fifth that we had put forward requesting supports from service delivery organizations.

So, we are already carrying out procedures with our service delivery groups such as hand procedures, foot procedures, cataracts, pediatric dental, plastics, to name many, many more. And we will continue to move forward with ensuring Manitobans get the care they need now.

* (14:20)

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, the wait-list has only grown despite what the minister says. Other provinces use the time between waves of this pandemic to aggressively deal with this issue. Manitoba did not, in part because our health system had been cut short of capacity right before the pandemic.

The minister continues to praise her party on what they did or what they have done, according to her, but it's actually meant less nurses in intensive care and less surgical capacity right when it was needed most. You know, her responses of we could have, were going to and maybes—that's not good enough.

When will this government start fixing its own mistakes?

Ms. Gordon: I want to remind the member opposite that our first line of duty was to correct the mess that they had left for us in health care.

And we have invested \$50 million, Madam Speaker, to address the surgical and diagnostic backlog; \$13.7 million has been spent and allocated to date and 8,300 procedures contracted—\$8.1 million for the first request for supply arrangements that I mentioned, \$5.6 million in service delivery organizations on priority procedures, including hips, knees and cataracts.

Thank you.

University of Manitoba Labour Dispute Collective Bargaining Negotiations

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Madam Speaker, yesterday lawyers for the government of Manitoba said that this Province's actions in 2017 at the University of Manitoba were wrong, unconstitutional and deserving of a remedy. That's remarkable that this government's actions cannot be defended by its own lawyers.

Now the faculty at the University of Manitoba are on strike, driven there by this government.

Will this government release their mandate on negotiations and allow free and fair bargaining, or will it just be more of the same?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): We, of course, are not the employer in this.

We do encourage both parties not only just to go back to the table, but take the advice of the recommendations of an independent mediator to end the strike immediately and go back to binding arbitration. That way, we can ensure that children—young adults that are in university get the education that they need most.

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

Mr. Moses: Madam Speaker, being wrong and unconstitutional, that's this government's approach. And despite this government's theatre, nothing has changed. The mandate still remains. Faculty at the University of Manitoba are still on strike. Students are still not back to classes.

Will they remove the mandate and allow free and fair bargaining for the negotiations? Will they stop being unconstitutional and bring a resolution today? Yes or no? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Fielding: Of course, we're not the employee. That's something that's decided between the employer and—

An Honourable Member: Employer.

Mr. Fielding: —the 'ployer', thank you very much.

What we would—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fielding: —encourage all members, including UMFA, is to urge them—both sides—to take the recommendations of the independent mediator to end the strike immediately, go to binding arbitration so our children—our young individuals, our young youth will have the opportunity to have their university that they're needed.

That's a perfect opportunity. It's a balanced approach. We believe that everyone should go to the bargaining table or go to the arbitration that has been put forth by a independent arbitrator.

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

Mr. Moses: Professors and faculty don't just get created out of thin air. Teachers and trainers and workers of the future don't just get created out of thin air. We need to work and commit to making a plan to make that happen.

Consider those that—those who train the nurses in our province. We need the university to Manitoba to work full capacity to train those nurses. But we know that that's in turmoil because of this government.

Two strikes in five years, a government that doesn't care if they're competitive with other jurisdictions and it's leaving all of us behind.

Manitobans need a new approach. This government can remove the mandate, but will they do that? Will they do so to help allow free and fair negotiations for the faculty in the negotiations? Will they do so today? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): I'd like to thank the member from St. Vital for the question.

As the member, again, needs to rise above his standard lines that he's been saying over the last couple of weeks, Madam Speaker. Will they, indeed—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: –put students first, Madam Speaker?
[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: Respecting the neutral mediator's advice to move forward to arbitration, Madam Speaker, we on this side of the House are standing up for students whilst the NDP and their former political staff politicize the process.

Get out of the way, stand at our side, get the students back to class, Madam Speaker.

Indigenous-Government Relations Former Premier's Comments–Apology Request

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): The Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) speech was silent on many things yesterday, but it notably fell short on an apology to Indigenous people here in Manitoba.

On a day in which there was an opportunity for the new Premier to separate herself from her predecessor, Brian Pallister, and reset the relationship with Indigenous people, she fell short. After years of racial rhetoric from Brian Pallister—from night hunting, residential schools, 'colonism'—she refuses to address her government divisive and harmful comments.

Will the Premier apologize immediately to Indigenous Manitobans for her predecessor's racial and divisive comments?

Hon. Alan Lagimodiere (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations): The member opposite knows that we are actively engaged as a government and committed to reconciliation and moving forward to build ongoing—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lagimodiere: –and meaningful engagement with our Indigenous communities—or, with the Indigenous communities and people in Manitoba. And we will continue to work on that on a daily basis.

Reconciliation is a priority for this government.

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

Mr. Bushie: Unlike the current Premier, her leadership rival, Shelly Glover, committed to apologizing to Indigenous communities and Manitobans.

In fact, she said, and I quote: When I win, that'll be one of my first statements in the House, an apology from—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bushie: –the party, an apology from the government for some of the insensitive and harmful things that have been said over many months.

While there was no apology made by the Premier who actually won, in her first statement yesterday, will the Premier apologize immediately to Indigenous Manitobans for her government's response and her predecessor's racially insensitive comments?

Mr. Lagimodiere: Perhaps the member opposite missed the news reports following the Throne Speech yesterday, where all of the First Nations leaders and the grand chiefs commented on the commitment that we have to move forward with reconciliation.

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

Mr. Bushie: Once again, a play on words and a misconstruing of the facts.

The PC government has been in place since 2016, and this minister has been a member of that caucus for the entire time.

So I ask the minister, is the ability to reconcile with Indigenous peoples in you? Is it truly in you? And if it is, look up in that camera right now and tell Indigenous peoples today what concrete actions—actions—you're, in fact, going to take to further reconciliation today.

Madam Speaker: I would just like to caution the member that when putting questions forward, they should be through the Speaker and not directed at a member, as that leads to further tensions in the House.

* (14:30)

So, I would ask the member to please pose the questions in the third person, not directly to a member.

Mr. Lagimodiere: It appears that the member opposite is not aware of the meetings that have been going on face to face with our grand chiefs and with our First Nations leaders and our new Premier.

They are engaging. They are welcoming. Indigenous and First Nations people are commenting daily to us on how pleased they are with the process that we are currently taking and—

An Honourable Member: Land acknowledgements.

Mr. Lagimodiere: –our land acknowledgements in the House. Everything we are doing they are supportive of and want us at the table with them.

University of Manitoba Labour Dispute Collective Bargaining Negotiations

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I table documents obtained by the Manitoba organization for faculty associations and from a U of M senate meeting showing this government has handcuffed Manitoba's universities and colleges with a mandate that orders them not to pay people what they are worth.

People who want to stay in Manitoba are leaving and others who would come to Manitoba won't because this government is ordering post-secondary institutions not to give them what they need to do to do their jobs. We could be graduating nurses, doctors, psychologists who could be helping to clear backlogs in health and mental health, but instead we have a strike at the U of M that's been dragging out for weeks.

Why does this government think they know better than the University of Manitoba what professors and researchers should be paid? Will the Premier rescind the mandates and let the U of M bargain freely today?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): I thank the member for St. Boniface for the question. Of course, we are listening to the independent mediator who is working with the parties, who has recommended that they end the strike immediately and go to binding arbitration. So we are encouraging those—both sides—to go to binding arbitration, which has been recommended by the independent mediator.

This is what is in the best interest of children who we want to ensure they get back into the classroom.

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

Mr. Lamont: The University of Manitoba, its research, training and teaching offers a path out of this pandemic. They innovate, they graduate. I table a letter from a U of M researcher, who reached out to me, whose work has had global impact. He wants to stay in Manitoba but fears he'll have to leave.

The Throne Speech talked about labour shortages but didn't once address the reality that plenty of people are turning down work because wages are too low for people to pay their bills, their mortgage, or their student loan or they can get paid much better somewhere else. The U of M has already been fined millions of dollars because the previous premier thought he knew better than some of the world's top researchers what they should be paid.

Why is this mandate, which is a relic of the Pallister PC era, still in place?

Mrs. Stefanson: Unlike the previous NDP government, who actually did interfere in a process in the past, Madam Speaker, we are ensuring that—and encouraging members opposite to listen to the independent mediator who is involved with both sides of this—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —Madam Speaker, who is recommending that this go to binding arbitration. That is what is in the best interest of those students, and we stand by those students.

University of Manitoba Labour Dispute Impact on Students and Staffing

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, for 22 days, a strike has been causing chaos at the University of Manitoba. Major researchers and teachers are so upset with the chaos, uncertainty and lack of support from this government that some are considering going elsewhere.

Recruitment has been extremely difficult because of the uncertainty and the lack of support for the university and its star teachers and researchers by this government. Students are caught in the middle of the chaos created by this government. The Premier has had 22 days in office as Premier to provide the leadership and to end the chaos. She has not.

Why has the Premier failed to act to show support for exceptional teachers and researchers and for the students at the University of Manitoba?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): Madam Speaker, I understand that the member never lets facts get in the way of his rhetoric.

Will he and his party stand up today and confirm that both sides should be listening to the mediator, end the strike immediately and resolve their differences through binding arbitration?

Individuals Experiencing Homelessness Shelter and Warming Spaces Announcement

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): Madam Speaker, for many of us, the descent of winter upon Manitoba brings with it a return to snow shovels, winter parkas and sub-zero temperatures.

For 'Manitobas' facing homelessness during the winter, this bitter cold weather brings misery and potentially dangerous living conditions.

Can the Minister of Families please advise this House what steps our government is taking to keep Manitobans facing homelessness safe and to support them during these cold months?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I thank my friend from Rossmere for that question.

On Friday, I was very pleased to attend an announcement with our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), as well as End Homelessness Winnipeg CEO Jason Whitford, as well as Grand Chief Arlen Dumas from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, for a new investment in shelter spaces to get people in from the cold this year.

We have invested a—\$1.5 million to have an Indigenous-led, low-barrier option for people to get in from the cold for new shelter spaces. This announcement—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: —follows on the heels of—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: —the first-ever homelessness prevention initiative that our government announced previous this year, a \$5.6-million rent bank to help people maintain their housing and to keep people in housing options in the province of Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Yelling across the House isn't a very productive way to demonstrate democracy in action, and I'm going to ask people that are in this House—I didn't think decorum would go down so fast, but I'm going to ask everybody, let's show 'shome' respect for the people that are asking the questions and answering the questions.

And I'm going to ask that and indicate that yelling across the Chamber is really an unproductive way to do business by adults that are elected by many, many thousands of people.

So I'd ask for everybody's co-operation, please.

Rolling River School Division Custodial Staff Labour Dispute

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): It's a sad day when this government cannot keep up with the number of front-line workers who have been currently striking over this same government's interference and mandates.

Because of this government's ongoing wage interference and mandates, custodial staff in Rolling River School Division are now in a fourth week of striking. They do essential work in our schools for students and staff and they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. And this government needs to get out of the way.

So, if this government wants a fresh start with workers, how about starting with the workers and custodial staff in Rolling River School Division?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education): I do appreciate the question from the member opposite. It does give me the opportunity to acknowledge all those that work in K-to-12 education. This is custodial staff, this is teachers, these are educational assistants, these are administrators who have been going above and beyond the call in dealing with COVID over the last 18 months.

Our government is working very closely with school divisions across the province. We're working closely with public health on this. Our goal is to keep our students as safe as possible and keep our staff as safe as possible.

And this is paramount for us. These—this is a challenging time for sure. But we're going to keep making sure that our students and staff say 'stafe' in schools.

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

Mr. Altomare: I'll just ask the minister, I mean, instead of acknowledging staff for all the stuff that they've been doing, how about some real, concrete action? How about some real support for schools? How about making sure that rapid tests are available—*[interjection]*

* (14:40)

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altomare: —and paid for by government? Instead this is what we get: platitudes, acknowledgements, thoughts and prayers. It's simply not enough.

So I'll ask the minister again: Will they withdraw these wage mandates and letters and get to real negotiating with people that need their contracts settled?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker, we're going to continue to thank Manitobans as we battle through the COVID-19, and they deserve a pat on the back for everything they've done for us.

Now, members opposite should know that we are not the employer. The school division is the employer. They can negotiate. We allow them to mediate. If we got involved that would be the first thing members opposite would do, saying that we were interfering with the process.

Madam Speaker, we encourage the process to unfold as it should.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Madam Speaker: Are there any petitions?

If there are no petitions to be read—oh, of course.

Louise Bridge

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Over 25,000 vehicles per day cross the Louise Bridge, which has served as a vital link for vehicular traffic between northeast Winnipeg and the downtown for the last 110 years.

(2) The current structure will undoubtedly be declared unsafe in a few years as it has deteriorated extensively, becoming functionally obsolete, subject to more frequent unplanned repairs and cannot be widened to accommodate future traffic capacity.

(3) As far back as 2008, the City of Winnipeg has studied where the new replacement bridge should be situated.

(4) After including the bridge replacement in the City's five-year capital budget forecast in 2009, the new bridge became a short-term construction priority in the City's transportation master plan of 2011.

(5) City capital and budget plans identified replacement of the Louise Bridge on a site just east of the bridge and expropriated homes there on the south side of Nairn Avenue—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Maloway: —in anticipation of a 2015 start.

(6) In 2014, the new City administration did not make use of available federal infrastructure funds.

(7) The new Louise Bridge Committee began its campaign to demand a new bridge and its surveys confirmed residents wanted a new bridge beside the

current bridge, with the old bridge kept open for local traffic.

(8) The NDP provincial government signalled its firm commitment to partner with the City on replacing the Louise Bridge in its 2015 Throne Speech. Unfortunately, provincial infrastructure initiatives, such as the new Louise bridge, came to a halt with the election of the Progressive Conservative government in 2016.

(9) More recently, the City tethered the Louise Bridge replacement issue to its new transportation master plan and eastern corridor project. Its recommendations have now identified the location of the new bridge to be placed just to the west of the current bridge, not to the east as originally proposed. The City expropriation process has begun.

(10) The new Premier has a duty to direct the provincial government to provide financial assistance to the City so that it can complete this long overdue vital link to northeast Winnipeg and Transcona.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the new Premier to financially assist the City of Winnipeg on building this three-lane bridge in each direction to maintain this vital link between northeast Winnipeg, Transcona and the downtown.

(2) To urge the provincial government to recommend that the City of Winnipeg keep the old bridge fully open to traffic while the new bridge is under construction, and

(3) To urge the provincial government to consider the feasibility of keeping the old bridge open for active transportation in the future.

And this petition has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with our rule 132(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

National Drug Plan

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Canada's public and private drug plans leave many patients with little or no coverage, resulting in one out of 10 patients not taking their prescribed medications because of affordability.

(2) It is estimated that Pharmacare would save Canadians between \$4 billion and \$11 billion per year.

(3) There have been repeated calls to include prescription drugs in Canada's universal health-care system, including National Forum on Health; commission of the future of health care in Canada; several national organizations, including Canadian Nurses Association, Canadian Medical Association, Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to encourage the federal government to amend the Canada Health Act by adding prescription medicines prescribed by a licensed practitioner to the definition of covered services in accordance with an established formulary.

(2) To urge the provincial government to develop, jointly with the federal government, a universal, single-payer, evidence-based, sustainable public drug plan that contains: purchasing power to secure best available pricing, a list of essential medicines addressing priority health needs and the ability to expand to a comprehensive permanent plan that would promote the health and well-being of all Canadians.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further petitions?

Cochlear Implant Program

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

into the skull that relays the information to the inner ear, the cochlea.

The technology's been available since 1989 through the Central Speech and Hearing Clinic founded in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The Surgical Hearing Implant program began implanting patients in the fall of 2011 and marked the completion of 250 cochlear implant surgeries in Manitoba in the summer of 2018. The program has implanted about 60 devices since the summer of 2018, as it is only able to implant about 40 to 45 devices per year.

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

Alberta has one of the best programs with Alberta aids for daily living, and their cost share means the patient pays only approximately \$500 out of pocket. Assistive Devices Program in Ontario covers 75 per cent of the cost up to a maximum amount of \$5,444 for a cochlear implant replacement speech processor. The BC Adult Cochlear Implant Program offers subsidized replacements to aging sound processors through the Sound Processor Replacement program. This provincially funded program is available to those cochlear implant recipients whose sound processors have reached six to seven years old.

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

* (14:50)

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Signed by Thomas Barkmanovich [*phonetic*], Maddy Foreman and Michael Bartmanovich and many, many other Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Any further petitions?

If not, orders of the day, government business.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Could you please proceed to the debate on the Speech from the Throne.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider debate on the Throne Speech, so I will now call for that debate on the Throne Speech.

THRONE SPEECH (First Day of Debate)

Mr. Andrew Smith (Lagimodière): I move, seconded by the member for Seine River (Ms. Morley-Lecomte), that the following address be presented to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor: We, the members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, thank Your Honour for the gracious speech addressed to us this Fourth Session of the 42nd Legislature of Manitoba.

Motion presented.

Mr. Smith: It is truly an honour to rise in the Chamber for the first time in this legislative session to speak to our government's Throne Speech: Path to Progressing Together.

Merci, madame le président. C'est un grand plaisir de prendre la parole aujourd'hui au sujet de notre discours du trône.

Translation

Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a great pleasure to speak today about our Throne Speech.

English

First, though, I would like to take a moment to thank our Lieutenant Governor, Her Honour, for her

years of public service as viceregal representative. Having been a social worker, philanthropist, community activist and members of the Order of Canada and Order of Manitoba, she has long been a respected member of our community. As a spouse of a former premier, she has been no stranger to politics, and I believe that Manitoba has been better off because of her service to our province in all of her capacities.

As yesterday's Throne Speech will likely be her last, I know that I speak for everyone in the Chamber when I say thank you to Her Honour.

And speaking of service, it's hard to believe that it's been over 5 years since the 2016 election, which saw many MLAs in this Chamber get elected for the first time, myself included.

Although the process of a Throne Speech now is very familiar to us, for me today feels much more like the first Throne Speech debate all over again. That is because it feels like a fresh start, and that's exactly what it is.

Today, Madam Speaker, we have a brand-new Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) who will take our province on a new path and down a new direction. Under her leadership, we will be a government that will work side by side with Manitobans to build stronger, healthier and better province for all.

While Manitoba still faces difficulties, our new Premier and her team are ready to meet the challenges that lie ahead of us with a renewed sense of openness. Our new Premier has the honour of being the 24th person to occupy this position, and while the changing of premiers is not unusual in this building, what is unique is that the member from Tuxedo has made history by becoming Manitoba's first female Premier ever.

Congratulations, Madam Premier.

Our new Premier will bring a style of governing to our province, a new style of governing to our province, a government that is willing to listen, one that is open, engaging with Manitobans and committed to the grassroots of our great province.

I look forward to this new style of governing that is embarking on a path in a new direction. Our government will reach out and work side by side with people across this province towards building a better Manitoba.

Mr. Dennis Smook, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

I would be remiss if I did not thank the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) for his service as the 23rd premier of Manitoba. During his time, he helped establish the future tone of our government, a tone that has set the course for our government in many years to come. I know that his family and his colleagues are proud of him, as he served our province with grace and respect.

Thank you to the member from Steinbach.

To the residents of Lagimodière, I thank them for placing their trust in me to represent them in the Manitoba Legislature. I know that it's been a very challenging 22 months; however, the people of our province have proven once again to be resilient. And in keeping with our friendly reputation, Manitobans have demonstrated their willingness to help those in need.

Throughout the pandemic, Manitobans rallied together to help feed front-line health-care staff. They offered their expertise through volunteerism and makes—personal sacrifices to help slow the spread of COVID while rolling up their sleeves when the vaccine became available.

While we cannot ease up on the fight against COVID, there is much reason to be optimistic, as there is light at the end of the tunnel. Our province has had an incredible vaccine uptake, thanks to Manitobans' willingness to take the jab, the great work of our vaccine task force and all those who work tirelessly on the front line. This took a concerted effort, and I commend everyone for doing their important part.

This has been a once-in-a-time—life-time pandemic, and while there is no rulebook for this, we know that governments across the country, including our federal government, worked hard to try and protect Manitobans and Canadians from the threat of COVID while balancing the needs of small business and the economy.

When asked, many Manitobans would say that aside from COVID-19, health care in general remains an important issue, and our government agrees. We believe that it is our responsibility to take necessary measures to ensure the safety of all Manitobans. Our health-care professionals have done incredible work to improve processes and improve the capacity in our ICUs and guarantee proper care is there when we and our loved ones need it.

Many of these same professionals have done incredible work to improve the processes and improve our capacities in ICU. However, so they can

'commodate' any public health crisis we face in the future, our government does understand more needs to be done.

Our government is creating the task force to address the surgical and diagnostic backlogs. We need to shorten wait times and support health care for our most vulnerable citizens. Our nursing strategy will target the nursing shortage and increase training spaces with the goal of 400 additional nursing seats. Our province must have the capacity to fill the demand for nurses and retain them going forward. More nurses will be trained, developing their skills by working with and in institutions as part of their curriculum. We will ensure every graduate receives a job here in Manitoba.

While cancer is a disease that affects everyone either directly or indirectly, our government recognizes there are occupations and dangerous work conditions that are particularly susceptible to this illness. Firefighters often put their lives at risk to help save us from the dangers of fires. Some of these dangerous—or dangers from fires are often seen around this time of year as we approach Christmas and Hanukkah. These same men and women in uniform are often exposed to many toxic chemicals simply by doing their job.

That is why we will expand the list of presumptive work-related cancers for firefighters. Our province will lead Canada with this groundbreaking step by recognizing these public workers should not suffer because of workplace conditions.

* (15:00)

Earlier this year a stand-alone government department was created dedicated to mental health, wellness and recovery. Since then, our government has engaged with thousands of Manitobans and hundreds of organizations, clinicians and front-line service providers to discuss how to make the system more responsive and reliable to support Manitobans who are struggling.

The Manitoba economy has shown its resilience, and although—though we are not out of the woods yet with respect to COVID, I know, through our resiliency and determination, we will emerge from this once-in-a-lifetime pandemic stronger and more prosperous.

I've heard from constituents the effect of this pandemic has been especially challenging for small-business owners. The balance between keeping customers safe while continuing to provide a service

is a difficult balance to achieve. It's not lost on me that businesses that require in-person service, like restaurants and gyms, were particularly impacted by the pandemic.

We have heard from the business community, and there are a number of issues that are affecting our economy. Our government is committed to address economic issues and committed to a renewed partnership with the Government of Canada as we pursue our mutual economic objectives. We will only succeed as a nation if we work together.

Businesses have told us that it's difficult to attract talent amid a national labour shortage, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. To help address this challenge, we will increase our investments in education and training and focus our work with business to attract workers from all around the world to fill in our labour gaps.

Manitoba is proud of our Provincial Nominee Program that was created by a Progressive Conservative government, led by Bonnie Mitchelson, and under the leadership of then-premier Gary Filmon. We believe that it's the strongest program of its kind in Canada, having brought thousands of talented, hard workers and their families to live and participate in our economy and help build our communities.

To date, this program has been responsible for bringing in over 100,000 people to our great province, and I know many people who have used this program and many employers who have benefited from the highly skilled labour that helped them build and grow their businesses.

Just a few years ago, we had the 20th anniversary celebration of the Provincial Nominee Program here at the Manitoba Legislature, and the event attracted a number of business owners ranging from owners of small business all the way to entrepreneurs who started up SkipTheDishes.

While there is much to like about our program, our government understands that there is always room for improvement. We will work with the federal government to strengthen this program further and continue consulting with those with lived experiences in the program on new ways to improve. Our government knows that the people who understand the program best are those who have used it.

As Manitoba continues to be home to people from all over the world, our government understands the importance of retaining Manitoba workers and

encourage Manitobans to stay here by investing in communities to make Manitoba even more vibrant place to live.

I've seen first-hand the impacts of what access to capital or the lack thereof can do for small business, especially in a start-up space. I'm involved with the Technology Accelerator on a voluntary basis. I have no financial interests in any of the start-ups or the organization itself, but I have seen what access to capital can do for a small start-up company. Having proper access to capital is 'crucial' for businesses, especially during the start-up and their growth phase. Many business owners and industrial groups have told me that access to capital is something that Manitoba needs in order to remain competitive within Canada and internationally.

One fast-growing sector in Manitoba that many people in our province may not be acutely aware of is the burgeoning tech sector, which is, I believe, the future of not only our economy, but the global economy. With the standardization of remote workplaces, urban centres like Winnipeg, Brandon and some of our rural communities, such as Lac du Bonnet, can now better compete in a global marketplace, which has traditionally been dominated by much larger urban centres.

Madam Speaker—or Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for your time to speak to the Throne Speech today and I want to say that I am very proud of our government and the direction that our new Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) is taking our government, taking our party and taking all Manitobans on a journey that I believe will lead to prosperity, inclusion and a much better Manitoban for all of us.

Thank you.

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River): I want to begin by saying it is an honour to speak to the Speech from the Throne at the opening of the Fourth Session of the 42nd Legislature.

I would like to further congratulate my colleague, the Honourable Heather Stefanson, on becoming the first female Premier of Manitoba.

I have had the pleasure of working with the Premier when she was a minister and have observed first-hand her professional manner—

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): I'd like to interrupt the member for Seine River about not using a person's name, but only refer to them by their title.

Ms. Morley-Lecomte: Madam Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) has shown many times over her ability to collaborate, co-operate and reconcile within many areas of government.

Manitoba is also making history. This is the first time four women hold positions in government, respectively representing the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker, the Premier and the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly all at the same time. I want to acknowledge you in your role and thank you for the work that you have done to raise recognition of the importance of women in our Legislature and the value you bring to our Assembly.

Deputy Speaker, this is a new beginning for us. As we look forward, we embrace the many who have partnered to make Manitoba a strong province. The time to heal and listen is now. The Throne Speech highlights many areas that will help with the social and economic recovery of Manitoba.

Reconciliation, health care, families and businesses are all areas highlighted and included in Manitoba's recovery plan, a plan with a brighter future where understanding and listening to individuals is the norm, where people can come together to work through the challenges and build on those areas to ensure all Manitobans are a part of our future.

The findings and recommendations of the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the murdered and missing women inquiry reports together with United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are instructive on what work needs to be done.

Jurisdictional responsibilities, economic opportunities, community development and reconciliation are essential to partnerships. Our government is committed to listening and learning from Indigenous leaders, elders and families.

Health care has been and continues to be a priority. The past 20 months have been a time of disruption. COVID has affected Manitobans and people throughout the world. Many areas in our health system have been disrupted and the lives and livelihoods of Manitobans have been affected.

I want to thank all the front-line workers who have gone above and beyond to ensure the health and safety of everyone. The past months have proven that Manitobans are resilient and strong in times of crisis.

We are implementing a task force of medical professionals who will focus on the backlogs and resources needed to alleviate the number of individuals waiting for receive surgery and diagnostic testing.

Through the nursing program at University College of the North, an increase in students enrolled in nursing programs will help meet the demands for nurses in our province. Prospective nurses will be given employment upon their graduation from the college, which will help with our health-care crisis.

Firefighters have long protected our homes and been there when we are most vulnerable. They put their lives at risk for our safety and with this risk comes exposure to many chemicals. As part of our promise to recognize the danger these men and women encounter, we are expanding the list of presumptive work-related cancers for firefighters.

Seniors are the backbone of our economy. Their contributions have helped develop and grow businesses, lay the foundation for society and future generations and been the glue to which we turn to when we look for ways to learn from our past. In essence, our investment of time and talent has resulted in making Manitoba the strong province it is.

* (15:10)

To ensure seniors are taken care of, we are investing in supports and resources to help ensure seniors can enjoy their retirement years in the comfort of their home and be close to those most important in their lives: their family.

Deputy Speaker, COVID has impacted many families. Families are the base for our future generations—the safe place where children learn to trust and respect the people closest to them. The past months have been stressful, and, unfortunately, the family unit has not been free from any of the stress. The number of domestic violence cases, overdoses and suicides has increased.

Families, now more than ever, need to be able to seek comfort from each other and build for their future. Children need to feel protected and not vulnerable. Spouses need to not fear for their safety.

The investment of money into additional supports for domestic violence, child-care facilities and housing will provide much-needed support for families feeling the additional pressures. The additional network of resources will relieve unexpected pressures that families are enduring.

Families have felt the effects of COVID. The past 20 months created environments where both work and schooling were conducted from the home. The need for space, quiet areas and computers put additional demands on families. Families commented on how their children had difficulty coping with the limited social interactions.

In addition, more people interacted through online resources. Some examples are FaceTime, phone calls, virtual meetings, shopping and grocery delivery. Investing in more supports and resources available to assist individuals struggling with their current life situations is crucial. Front-line supports and resources for family, assistance with housing, schooling and momentary respite from present challenges will be important as we move forward.

Deputy Speaker, a stand-alone government department was created committing—committed to Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery. This department has since engaged many Manitobans in creating a system that is responsive to the needs of Manitobans.

I am not alone in saying COVID has had an impact on the mental health and lifestyles of people. I have friends who have lost loved ones to overdoses and suicide. The last few months have tested the resilience of everyone.

As we move forward with consultations, we will determine ways to assist those in crisis and struggling with addictions, housing and homelessness. Stable housing provides the foundations for families to build on and pursue future goals.

Investment in Manitoba's economy is essential as we move forward from the pandemic. Through investments in education and training, attracting workers from other parts of the globe, building on our Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy and focusing on labour supply needs, both rural and urban Manitoba organizations will benefit. Investing in our future begins with investments in our businesses and labour force.

Deputy Speaker, Manitoba is a great province to live in and raise a family. To continue to grow our economy, Manitoba will invest in our education and training institutions. Expanding our immigration and Provincial Nominee Program fulfills our obligation to welcoming new refugees into Manitoba. Further recognition of foreign credentials will assist professionals in finding meaningful work and will

strengthen our economy and create security for employees and employers.

Local businesses have benefited and developed as a result of our nominee program. The influx of workers has added to the local economy while providing an income and future for families. This is evident in towns where business has set up and invested in the local economy workers and their families.

The influx of professionals and trained labour has injected money into economies and helped re-establish financial equity in these and surrounding communities: Neepawa has springs farms, Portage la Prairie has Roquette, Simplot. And these all represent success stories to the local economy and for the families that have made these communities their home.

The past summer provided an opportunity to listen to parents and hear what their thoughts and concerns were. Parents, teachers, community leaders and students all provided input into how they believed our education system could improve. All geographic areas of Manitoba had an opportunity to provide feedback. It was interesting listening to the many ways schools and communities offer support and educational outreach.

Students were taught about culture, connected with staff and parents and elders to assist with social and personal growth. The most fascinating was learning how adaptive schools are and how families feel welcomed through the many programs created to identify with specific family and children's needs. This information will help guide plans as we re-engage with the many stakeholders to help prepare our children for their future.

Deputy Speaker, the Throne Speech highlights a recovery plan for all Manitobans. Areas of concern include Indigenous relations, families, ongoing mental health and health-care supports and economic growth. We need to continue to build our economy in both the rural and urban areas through capital investment. In highlighting and restating what has previously been discussed, our government is here to listen to Manitobans and to engage and collaborate on many levels and in—with Indigenous leaders with all levels of government, with business leaders, business owners, people in public and private sectors and not-for-profit organizations.

Businesses and producers need to rebound and prosper along with the many areas in our downtown cities and communities throughout Manitoba.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Lieutenant Governor for her many years of service and for her role in working with our government.

Thank you for your time.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Thank you, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker; appreciate that very much.

I just want to begin my remarks and reply to the government's Throne Speech by reminding our colleagues that the first two speakers that the government puts up in reply to their Throne Speech has always been a symbolic choice. It's always a symbolic choice of the first two speakers that the government puts up. It's typically a situation where you get the first two speakers to be, perhaps, young and up-and-coming members of a government to highlight some folks that the government wants to shine a spotlight on, or you put somebody forward who represents your government.

And so with that in mind, I just want to (1) say thanks to the government for indicating to us that they are worried about the Lagimodière seat—certainly helps us to target our resources in planning for the next election, But I do want to call out this government for putting up the member for Seine River (Ms. Morley-Lecomte) in a symbolic speaking position in reply to the Throne Speech.

I'm sure we've all seen that the member for Seine River had a bit of an Aaron Rodgers-type situation over the past weekend, and it's really inexcusable. Everyone knows about the QR code requirement for proof of vaccination to be valid, and the fact that the government continues to put this member forward without having brought forward any discipline or without having chastised it publicly, I think, reveals that nothing has changed with the PCs since Brian Pallister left.

On the note of Mr. Pallister's name, I do want to point out that this government has a few words that, apparently, they're not allowed to say, you know, and one of them is Brian Pallister. The other one that comes to mind is bill 64. You'll see the government in their Throne Speech and throne replies studiously avoid having to say the words bill 64.

And, of course, like, there's all this talk about a new approach and now we're going to start listening and we're changing directions and we're going to be collaborative, but there's never a mention from the

PCs as to which approach they are changing from. Who was the leader that they all previously didn't find collaborative enough? Who was the premier that they now need to go on a rebranding exercise for?

Well, let me remind the PCs: it's the very same leader that they were all clapping for for the past four and a half, five years; same leader who they tolerated saying racist things in public; the very same leader that pushed through bill 64 and that they all stood and gave standing ovations for time and time again.

So, again, let me put those words on the record that the PCs seem to be unable to say themselves: Brian Pallister, Brian Pallister, Brian Pallister.

Now, there are many—conspicuously, there's a number of things that are left out. One of them is the city of Brandon. It's right there on the map in the Westman region of Manitoba, it's in Western Manitoba, it's a hub. It's the second largest city in Manitoba, but, apparently, the government is not aware of that, and so even though it has been the practice, including under Brian Pallister's throne speeches, to include a shout-out of the city of Brandon, the current PC administration failed to do so.

* (15:20)

When we talk about the No. 1 issue facing so many families in our province, it's got to be the cost of living. For so many folks around Manitoba, the cost of living keeps going up.

Of course, we know that Manitoba Hydro, under the PCs, keeps getting more and more expensive, the bills get higher and higher. We know that this government continues to cheer on Mr. Pallister's approach of downloading costs onto municipalities, which forces costs to increase on the average family—not just in the form of property taxes but also in the form of fees that they have to pay.

And when we talk about the North End water treatment plant, we know that the approach the PCs are pushing with that is not only going to lead to jobs not being given to Manitobans—it'll probably be given to people from Alberta instead—but it will be more expensive for the average family on their utility bills and on their water bills.

So again, life gets more expensive, the PCs are at fault for many of those cost drivers and they have no plan to make life more affordable for folks in

Manitoba. So it's a major problem that the government did not even mention cost of living, inflation or affordability in their Throne Speech. And it's clearly because they have no plan for how to deal with it.

Similarly, left out of the Throne Speech is that this government refuses to call an inquiry into their handling of the pandemic. Now, we know that the government probably doesn't want to ask any tough questions or hear honest answers because their performance and the pandemic response has been so poor. And they just went through a very contested leadership contest in which their current leader just eked out a victory over somebody who is now disputing the results of that leadership.

But the reason why I mention that is because the new leader is the person who was in charge of the health-care system during the very disastrous third wave. So it's going to be pretty challenging for this government, I think, to hear some of the very difficult truths that need to be shared about the pandemic response.

But, you know, the discomfort that the government feels at looking in the mirror and facing their failures in the pandemic response are not an excuse, not an adequate excuse. You know, we really do need an inquiry. It needs to be forward-facing, it needs to answer some of the tough questions but, most importantly, to provide some great recommendations for the future. It's the smart thing to do. It's the responsible thing to do.

Any person, organization or even province that goes through something as disruptive and life-changing as the pandemic would be wise to just sit there and ask: What worked? What didn't? What have we got to do now? And so of course we continue to push for that public inquiry into the pandemic and we think that it's a smart thing to do to give Manitobans some answers.

In terms of what was in the Throne Speech, well, there's some very challenging rhetoric there that I want to call out. First and foremost, let's remind folks that this government, in their most recent budget, had no new money for the operation of seniors care homes, personal-care homes across Manitoba.

And then they have the audacity in this Throne Speech to pat themselves on the back and hang up a mission-accomplished banner and tell themselves that they've done a great job when it comes to long-term care. No—and it's particularly offensive that they do so

at a time when seniors are being forced by this government to move to personal-care homes hundreds and hundreds of kilometres away from their families.

We also know that when the government tries to pat itself on the back, in this Throne Speech, on the health-care consolidation, that that's just wrong. And it reflects a continuation of the rhetoric that they used, the talking points that they used throughout Brian Pallister's time in office, right? I think the vast majority of Manitobans were turned off by this government when all the PC MLAs would stand and give a standing ovation to Brian Pallister as he declared that Manitoba's health-care system was, you know, stronger than ever because of the cuts that he made. And then we saw the second wave, and then we saw the third wave.

So again, here we are in the fourth wave and we've got a PC government trying to pat themselves on the back when it comes to health care, when the reality is that nurses are stressed out. They've left the profession in record numbers. And the PCs' low targets mean that even if they manage to meet some of the commitments that they lay out in their Throne Speech, we still will not have repaired all the damage that they've caused to health care in Manitoba throughout their time in office.

And then, of course, for them to comment on what they call the good work that they've done on education so far, to me is a clear indication that they're bringing bill 64 back; though, of course, as I said at the outset, they're not allowed to say the words bill 64.

So, again, we're wise to their plan; it's very clear that they want to continue with that same sort of rhetoric and the same sort of damaging cuts to education that prompted a pretty unique outpouring of public organizing and support for our position, which is to invest in education rather than to cut it.

So, I will leave my remarks at that, just to highlight some of the major flaws with the government's approach in the Throne Speech. And, again, we know what the PCs are trying to do right now. We know what they're trying to do with this Throne Speech. They're trying to change the channel from Brian Pallister. But, again, it just looks like more of a bad repeat from what was in place during Mr. Pallister's time.

So I'm going to move an amendment, one that I think not only our team is on board with, but also the

vast, vast majority of Manitobans, and so I move, seconded by the member for the Wolseley,

THAT the motion be amended by adding at the end the following words:

But this House regrets that the provincial government has:

- (a) failed to provide any plan to make life more affordable for Manitobans by not mentioning affordability and the rising cost of living due to higher hydro bills, grocery bills and more as Manitobans head into the holiday season; and
- (b) failed to call an independent public inquiry into Manitoba's pandemic response to learn from its mistakes and bring forward changes to improve the lives of Manitoba families to strengthen the health-care system; and
- (c) failed to provide any immediate supports to address the health-care crisis across the province from the north to the south; and,
- (d) failed seniors and elders in part by forcing them to move across Manitoba to make room in hospitals because of its failure to build new personal-care-home beds and address the health-care crisis in the province; and
- (e) failed to commit any real investments or changes to address the growing surgical and diagnostic backlog in the province; and
- (f) tried to change the channel from former premier Brian Pallister, but failed by repeating 16 of his previous commitments; and
- (g) continued to put the long-term success of Manitoba students at risk by pushing ahead with an out-of-date, quote, review, unquote, of the education system commissioned by former premier Brian Pallister; and
- (h) continued the interference initiated by former premier Brian Pallister and post-secondary institutions leading to an ongoing strike at the University of Manitoba, which is impacting the ability of students to learn; and
- (i) offered no commitment to implement a living wage, paid sick days or health and safety supports for working Manitobans to help them out of poverty and keep them safe and healthy at work; and
- (j) failed to mention Manitoba Hydro and offer a plan to use a clean advantage of Hydro to address climate change, create jobs, advance reconciliation and keep rates low and keep life affordable; and
- (k) continued to fight with the City of Winnipeg by pushing a failed attempt at privatization that will cost Manitobans jobs, delaying upgrades to the North End water-wastewater treatment plant, which would help protect the lakes and rivers of the province; and
- (l) failed to provide any substantial targets or initiatives to address climate change to prevent devastating weather events that impact producers, the length and quality of winter roads, the environment, the economy and all Manitobans; and
- (m) neglected to provide any real commitments to advancing reconciliation or apologize for the failures and racially insensitive comments of former Premier Brian Pallister; and
- (n) failed to present clear measures to support women and gender-diverse Manitobans by committing to support the provision of menstrual products for women, girls and gender-diverse people in schools or committing to ensure reproductive health falls under the purview of the Minister of Health and Seniors Care; and
- (o) failed to commit to supports for other major communities such as Brandon and Dauphin, and ending the funding freeze for municipalities; and,
- (p) failed to produce a meaningful strategy to revive Manitoba's creative industries or present a real strategy for Manitoba jobs in different sectors; and
- (q) refused to address the addictions and housing crisis by failing to provide long-term investments into harm reduction initiatives and affordable housing.

As a consequence, these and many other failings the provincial government has thereby lost the trust

and confidence of the people of Manitoba and this House.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): I'd like to bring it to the House that there were a few different words used in the speech as compared to what is printed, so is it the will of the House to accept the motion as printed? Is it agreed? *[Agreed]*

THAT the motion be amended by adding at the end the following words:

But this House regrets that the Provincial Government has:

- (a) failed to provide any plan to make life more affordable for Manitobans by not mentioning affordability and the rising cost of living due to higher hydro bills, grocery bills, and more as Manitobans head into the holiday season; and*
- (b) failed to call an independent public inquiry into Manitoba's pandemic response to learn from its mistakes and bring forward changes to improve the lives of Manitoba families and strengthen the healthcare system; and*
- (c) failed to provide any immediate supports to address the healthcare crisis across the province, from the north to the south; and*
- (d) failed seniors and elders in part by forcing them to move across Manitoba to make room in hospitals because of its failure to build new personal care home beds and address the healthcare crisis in the province; and*
- (e) failed to commit to any real investments or changes to address the growing surgical and diagnostic backlog in the province; and*
- (f) tried to change the channel from former Premier Brian Pallister but failed by repeating 16 of his previous commitments; and*
- (g) continued to put the long-term success of Manitoba students at risk by pushing ahead with an out of date "review" of the education system commissioned by former Premier, Brian Pallister; and*
- (h) continued the interference initiated by former Premier Brian Pallister in post-secondary institutions, leading to an ongoing strike at the University of Manitoba which is impacting the ability of students to learn; and*
- (i) offered no commitment to implement a living wage, paid sick days or health and safety supports*

for working Manitobans to help them out of poverty and keep them safe and healthy at work; and

- (j) failed to mention Manitoba Hydro and offer a plan to use the clean advantage of Hydro to address climate change, create jobs, advance reconciliation and keep rates low and keep life affordable; and*
- (k) continued to fight with the City of Winnipeg by pushing a failed attempt at privatization that will cost Manitobans jobs, delaying upgrades to the North End Waste Water Treatment plant which would help protect the lakes and rivers of the province; and*
- (l) failed to provide any substantial targets or initiatives to address climate change, to prevent devastating weather events that impact producers, the length and quality of winter roads, the environment, the economy, and all Manitobans; and*
- (m) neglected to provide any real commitments to advancing reconciliation or apologize for the failures and racially insensitive comments of former Premier Brian Pallister; and*
- (n) failed to present clear measures to support women and gender-diverse Manitobans by committing to support the provision of menstrual products for women, girls and gender diverse people in schools or committing to ensure reproductive health care falls under the purview of the Minister of Health and Seniors Care; and*
- (o) failed to commit to supports for other major communities such as Brandon and Dauphin, and ending the funding freeze to municipalities; and*
- (p) failed to produce a meaningful strategy to revive Manitoba's creative industries or present a real strategy for Manitoba jobs in different sectors; and*
- (q) refused to address the addictions and housing crisis by failing to provide long-term investments into harm reduction initiatives and affordable social housing.*

As a consequence of these and many other failings, the Provincial Government has thereby lost the trust and confidence of the people of Manitoba and this House.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): It has been moved by the honourable Leader of the Opposition, seconded by the member for Wolseley (Ms. Naylor),

That the motion be amended by adding the—to the end the following words—

* (15:30)

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

The Acting Speaker (Dennis Smook): Dispense.

The motion is in order. Debate may proceed.

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): It truly is an honour to stand here and speak before a historical Throne Speech that our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) has—Premier and the Lieutenant Governor—through the Lieutenant Governor has given. The Speech from the Throne really lays out a pathway for progress that we can work together as Manitobans. With a new Premier, our government has embarked on Manitoba's path for a new direction.

And I do want to say that it is a historic day as we're having our first female Premier that introduced the Throne Speech as well as give it. We think it's an important milestone for Manitoba. We also think that the government embraces the values of equity, inclusion and understanding. It really sets a refresh for the government in terms of the approach that we want to take with Manitobans, listening to Manitobans and dealing with other issues.

We know one of the cornerstones of a way forward through the pandemic, of course, is through economic recovery. We'll continue to support businesses so they can produce goods and services we rely on and produce jobs.

We know that we've done a whole number of things through the pandemic. You look at what we made—investments in Public Accounts as well as last year in the budget, we put copious amounts of dollars on the table to support businesses.

In fact, when you look at the supports for businesses just over the last two years alone, we know that there's been over \$407 million of supports for businesses as they get through the pandemic. That helped them. These are programs—much-needed programs: things like the wage subsidy program; things like the block grant support program; or, you know, things like other support initiatives that really helped businesses when they needed it most.

We also know that individuals needed support and this will continue on, as the Throne Speech laid out in the pathway for supports for individuals. We know to help address the challenge we'll have to increase our investment in things like education and

training with a focus on work with businesses to attract workers around—really, around the province to do it.

As a provincial government—and this is something that really distinguishes ourselves from our opposition, the leaders of the opposition, others who are very much supportive of increasing taxes—you hear the word inflation, it kind of rings hollow because we know what the former NDP did in terms of taxing people to the max.

When you're looking for—when you have the type of inflation that we're seeing, potentially driven because of some of the excess spending that all governments have had to do, we know that the amount of money it takes to buy groceries is going to be more and that's why our government has taken such a big focus of putting more money in the pockets of Manitobans and we think that's important, whether that be things like reductions in the PST in our first term, reductions in education property tax; whether that be things like increasing the—or rather reducing the education property tax; but also things like the basic personal exemption.

And that is something that's going to help things like poverty. We hear from the leaders of the opposition that talk about poverty. Well, when you're able to take thousands of people off the payrolls altogether, or the tax rolls altogether through the basic personal exemption we think is really important.

We also think that being competitive as a province is extremely important and that's on all tax levels. Our government—and we'll continue as was outlined in Throne Speech—to work with businesses to gain employment from growth industries.

Some that just come to mind, I would suggest, is some of the tax credits we've introduced for a digital media tax credit that's allowing new, high-priced jobs to come to the province here, of Manitoba, things like the film tax credit, that's something obviously the Filmon government and others introduced earlier on that's attracted hundreds of millions of dollars of new productions. I was watching one just on Sunday with my family that was produced here in Manitoba, largely we—do with some of the tax credits that are in place. So we think that's important to take advantage—it's a competitive advantage.

Another area where the Manitoba economy is doing well—and I think, as we look forward through our Throne Speech as a vision for the future—is things like the manufacturing sector. Manitoba's done

extremely well in things like food processing, right, that's a really important part. You look at places like— or rather McCain and Simplot and places like Roquette that have made—or companies like Roquette that have made substantial investments, hundreds of millions of dollars of investments in the province. So we need to continue to work with these areas.

What is also important is that we need to support closer collaborations with advanced education and training institutions or employment in Manitoba. Strong alignment provides Manitobans with the right skills to succeed and build careers right here in Manitoba. And that's really what we've done with some of the post-secondary education as well as some of the technical colleges, making sure the labour force, the types of skills and employment that is needed, is really produced here in-province. So I think we're off to the right track in terms of that.

I'm also very proud of the fact that during the pandemic—and it's been a very challenging time for a few things. Number 1, probably the most significant—it is the most significant health crisis that our province has ever faced, as well as an economic crisis; we had over 90,000 Manitobans that were put out of work because of the pandemic with—some of the work we've done and the hard work, really, of Manitobans, we've pretty much are back at the same level as we were before the pandemic in terms of employment. One thing that we very—are very proud of, even though the numbers are still too high, is we have the lowest unemployment in the country, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as well as very low levels of youth and female unemployment. We know that certain sectors and certain elements, things like people in the accommodation services, things like travel and tourism, got hit really hard. Restaurants—and we know that's predominantly where you'll see more women as well as more youth involved in these areas. So we really need to make sure there's policies in place.

And some of the policies that we have done, for instance, wage subsidies; it's allowed businesses to grow and prosper. And I can tell you, from a Throne Speech perspective, of where we want to go as a government. That's something that we see going forward, working—continuing to work with businesses, businesses that may need some support, businesses and supports that are allowing people to grow and prosper here in the province.

We also know that Manitoba's proud of our Provincial Nominee Program. We believe it's the strongest program of its kind in Canada, and we

brought thousands of talented, hard-working families to live here and participate in our economy. That's something that, you know, in our government, the Filmon government—I think it was Bonnie Mitchelson who introduced the nominee program. I think we can be very proud of the fact that this is the legacy of our province and something we're very proud of, and we want to build on to make sure we have the right people, the right skills, the right time that's going to improve our economy.

We also want to make sure that we're continuing to work with the federal government to strengthen different programs, whether it be related to reskills in terms of Manitoba labour force and workforce agreements. In fact, we had struck an agreement with the federal government for an additional \$47 million to get people back in the work world. Maybe they needed the skills or what have you to get in the work world initially or also to train through some of the labour force agreements, train and retrain people to ensure businesses that they're going to have expansions, like major businesses here in the province, are there.

So we're very proud of the work that we've done with the federal government. I think there's a renewed sense of optimism of working with the federal government in a number of different areas. We as Finance ministers meet on a bi-weekly—used to be weekly—basis with all the Finance ministers during the pandemic. And we worked extremely well with the federal Finance Minister, Chrystia Freeland, in terms of elements. In fact, I can give you kind of a hard and fast example of this in terms of child care. Just before the federal election, the federal government had offered a very good partnership with the provinces in terms of child care.

So Chrystia Freeland, beyond the agreements that were in place, because of a working relationship we had, had called myself, and we ensured that we had all the ministers in place over a weekend to establish a working agreement on child care. We think that child care is really important for an economic growth strategy, and so we're very happy that we're able to have a partnership for \$1.2 billion in federal government. And what that's going to do is going to reduce child care cost to \$10 a day, which we think is really important. It's also going to increase the wage salaries for people like ECEs that work in the system, by upwards of \$2 a day as well as building up to 23,000 spots. And I can tell you, as a working parent, child care is extremely important for an economic recharge.

And that's really the process going forward is something that we think is really important as was outlined in the Throne Speech.

Terms of our overall thought, the government has listened to Manitobans. We want to re-engage. That's something that we've done. From a budgeting point of view, we just announced, just over the last few days, our budget process. We're hard at work with that. We want to work with Manitobans. There's a number of dates that we want to go around the province. Last year we weren't able to, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but we did virtual sessions and were able, through new technologies, to engage with about 51,000 Manitobans in terms of our budget process.

So what we're going to be doing is going to every corner of the province. We're going to be doing some in-community sessions. We're having people that come out; of course, you need to be fully vaccinated and follow health rules that are part of that.

* (15:40)

We're also going to have some virtual sessions, you know, for people that are still concerned and don't want to come out. They'll be able to participate as well as other means in terms of getting the word out. We used some technologies through some of the town hall meetings, and I know the Throne Speech that was put forth talked about engaging Manitobans. And we're able to engage over 51,000 Manitobans, like we did last year. We'd like to build upon that to ensure that we're getting all the activities, all the things that are important to Manitobans there.

We also know, in terms of driving the economy, is the terms of making sure that there's a competitive environment, and why that's important isn't just to grow business. If you grow businesses that means jobs in Manitoba. So if you can reduce red tape you can allow businesses to grow and prosper. If you can, as mentioned earlier on, talk about pro-growth economies, we think that's going to make sense, as well as resource development, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We think that's really important.

We have the mining industry. The Minister of Agriculture and myself were recently up in Snow Lake for an important investment. There's over \$165-million investment that'll be going to Snow Lake for mining; I believe upwards to 200 to 300 jobs that are there. That's something that we worked with the mining tax. It can draw businesses there. If we can make these investments, that's going to drive economic development in rural parts of Manitoba.

In terms of reconciliation, our government is committed to collaboration, co-operation and reconciliation. I think we've got a new, refreshed restart with Indigenous leaders; that's here. We know that a lot of Indigenous leadership were here, of course, for our Throne Speech and are looking forward to re-engagement with our government in terms of listening and ensuring that Indigenous—not just economic development—recognition is there. Our government is—affirms our commitment to working with Indigenous peoples, advance the goals and promote truth and reconciliation, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We must rebuild the relationships on a foundation of meaningful dialogue, really engage First Nations, Métis and Inuit leaders for co-development.

And I think that's something, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the Throne Speech that outlined talking about future development, working with Indigenous communities, working with other communities here in the province. That's going to grow our economy, which I think is good and it's going to be something that will help with reconciliation, in my humble opinion.

Our government recognizes the deep damage caused by residential schools and colonization, and is committed to helping with that healing. Accordingly, we are fully committed to listening and learning with Indigenous leaders, elders and families as we work together to truly ensure that things are there. We've also committed to dollars in terms of excavation of residential schools, so we think that's a first step.

In terms of health care, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know how important health care is in the province of Manitoba. We also know where we came from. We know that under the former NDP government you had some of the longest wait times in the country. We knew that that'd need to be—for a forum when we came to office. In fact, before the pandemic, we saw a dramatic reduction in terms of the wait times where people would wait in ER capacity.

I can tell you from a budgeting point of view that we're investing more than \$1.1 billion more in the health-care system when we first came to office. Our province and our country have been confounded, of course, since then with COVID-19; that it's been some of the most challenging times for all individuals—and, as I mentioned earlier on, some of the biggest health issues that we've faced in Manitoba.

I can also tell you that our investments in things like COVID-19—close to \$2 billion in last year's budget—showed substantial investments to protect

Manitobans: over \$666 million were invested that included things like funding for regional health authorities, over \$223 million; things like added funding for personal-care homes.

I know the Leader of the Opposition was here saying that somehow there wasn't money for personal-care homes. I can tell you as a fact—in fact, I would recommend he go to the Public Accounts document, because what it'll show is, year over year, there is a \$56 million increase in personal-care homes. We know that under the NDP, personal-care homes were not built and they should have been built. And that's why we made a commitment to build over 1,200 personal-care homes in the province; we're well under the way to doing that in places like Carman and Steinbach and Waverley West and other areas of the province, which we think is important. And we're not done yet, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We think that's extremely important.

We also know that we want to thank the tireless workers, the front-line workers that are working non-stop to protect Manitobans in so many different ways. We're happy that we're able to recently sign an agreement with the nurses' union to make sure that they're supported. That's the way these agreements should happen: you go to the bargaining table and you're able to work out an agreement. And that's really important.

We're also committed to ensuring things like the wait times and surgical backlog. We know that, of course, that's happened throughout the country; unfortunately, one of the by-products of the pandemic that has taken place. So there will be a task force that's in place to make sure we're guided toward it. The Minister of Health earlier on today talked about the \$50-million commitment we had in the budget. Think there's been over \$13 million that have been invested in those areas, somewhere in the neighbourhood of 87,000–8,700 different procedures that have happened. And we're not done yet with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We also know that—important to have a nursing strategy in place, with 400 additional nursing seats. Working with post-secondary education and some of the technical colleges is important for—there. And that is something that we need to make sure continues to happen.

This budget and our agenda talks about, obviously, our support working with firefighters. Our government recognized cancers that are directly result of dangerous work conditions. Firefighters in particular are often exposed to a whole bunch of toxic

chemicals as they serve and protect us, and we'll expand the list of presumptive work-related cancers for firefighters.

You know, I can tell you one thing about firefighters—and I know a lot of them. We—just in our personal friends. We have personal friends that we hang around with that are firefighters, and the one thing I've noticed about firefighters is when there's a fire happening, everyone's running out of the building. They're the ones that are running in the building to protect us, and so I just think it makes a lot of sense to support these individuals. I—my hope is that the opposition does support that as well. I think they probably will, but that's our hope.

We also know that it's important to invest in mental health. That's one thing that's come out of the pandemic. Since coming to office, we initially formed a report that gave us an outline of where we go. We signed agreements with the federal government. I believe it's upwards of somewhere around \$300 million, so invest mental health treatments. There's been over 60 to 70 new projects that have been developed over the years—one particularly close to my area, the Bruce Oake Foundation. We were able to tour and, of course, open it up fairly recently. That provides a lot of support for individuals. We're not done with that yet.

Part of our process, as the Throne Speech indicated, is to re-engage Manitobans and that's exactly what the minister of health and mental health and seniors did with consulting in terms of the next phase of mental health, which was really important.

We also know that families, homelessness and child care, especially during the pandemic—it's always been a big issue and an important issue for our government, but has been even a bigger since the pandemic. We'll continue to work with community partners to develop innovative approaches to a whole bunch of different areas.

We're very proud of the fact, under our government, instead of being the child poverty capital of Canada, which, of course, was the legacy of the NDP government, we've moved that up. We're not the child poverty capital. Still, there's way too many children living in poverty, but that number's been dramatically reduced, by—I believe it's around 16, 17 per cent overall, and, in fact, the number of people living in poverty has dramatically dropped as well because of that.

So we think that's important. That's some of the direct responsibilities—is—I would say, and I was the minister at one point—not, you know—it's Manitobans that did this, but what I'm saying is with programs like the Rent Assist program, where you're having over 3,300 more people that are supported under the Rent Assist program, giving more money into people's pockets is important.

I mentioned the importance of child care. Child care, again, is the focal point and something that was identified. Something was identified. We signed a deal for \$1.2 billion with the federal government. We worked with the federal government at that point to have \$10-a-day child care. We know the NDP couldn't get that done, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We're getting that done. We're going to build 23,000 more spots. We know the NDP weren't funding ECEs properly. That's why part of the agreement we made, we made to ensure that ECEs get over \$2 a day—\$2 an hour more because of that. And that's really important.

We also know that the education system is extremely important. When we came to office, we knew, with the legacy of the NDP government of being the last in the nation in terms of our outcomes—that's not good enough, and that's still why we need to ensure that the education system is the best that we can. We've committed to \$1.6 billion in education spending over the next four years. That includes building 20 new schools. There's a variety of stages of building. Some have been built, some are in the process, some are being designed. That's 20 new schools that should have been built a long time ago.

There's more investments in things like making sure the air quality is there. I suggest he maybe stay tuned for other important initiatives that we'll look in respect to that, but we do think that these things, as laid out in this Throne Speech, is extremely important to our government.

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm going to close my comments. I do want to thank the new Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) for her leadership as we move forward in setting a new path for Manitobans. I think it's important to listen to Manitobans. Sometimes you go back and you can reset in terms of your approach, your style, aspect of it, and I think that's—we picked the right person at the right time for Manitobans.

So, excited with our pathway forward to the Throne Speech. Thank you very much.

* (15:50)

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I'm just going to put a couple of words on the record in respect of the Throne Speech that we heard yesterday—or heard in the morning because some of us heard it in the morning on CBC prior to hearing it in the Chamber here.

I did say this publicly on Twitter, but I do want to say it in the House. I want to congratulate the new Premier who made history by becoming the first woman premier here in Manitoba. Certainly, it took a long time to get here, but I do want to congratulate her on that.

You know, it is not enough to just have a woman in the position of premier. It's more important than that. In fact, those are moments that, yes, it's a historical moment for Manitoba to say that we now have a woman premier. But we have to go beyond that. Those are moments, actually, of transformation. Those can be moments of transformation if you have women that are willing to ensure that they're standing up for women's rights and girls' rights and gender-diverse folks' rights.

Otherwise, if you're just a woman in the position of—an extraordinary position of privilege, but yet you don't participate at dismantling the very systems that actually ensured it took us 150 years to get the first woman premier, your—you become nothing more than just a foot soldier of patriarchy. And we have seen many, many women who are the foot soldiers of patriarchy. All of the women that voted for Trump are the foot soldiers of patriarchy. Regardless of the things that were said about Trump and that are known about Trump, he had an extraordinary amount of support from women, which boggles my mind. As a woman I could never vote for or support a man who has been accused of raping women and even the words from his own mouth, and yet that's what we see and because there is power in proximity to men in positions of power.

And so, you know, my hope is it's not enough just to have a woman as the Premier of Manitoba. She has to actively work at dismantling patriarchy. And one of the ways in which she can do that—and she can do that next week, today, whenever—I will be introducing my abortion buffer-zone act bill again. I'll be introducing that next week. That will be the fourth time that I'm introducing that bill into this Manitoba Legislative Assembly.

And the Premier can stand on the side of women and gender-diverse folks who are accessing a range of reproductive health care and actually support the bill—

allow the bill, support the bill to pass and receive royal assent which would establish buffer zones around institutions and health-care facilities that provide abortion services.

I want to take a couple of minutes or just a quick second to acknowledge and commend citizens who got together to offer services to folks who want to access the Women's Hospital or any health-care facility, accessing abortion, providing that service of walking in with them. I thought that that was quite extraordinary that Manitoba citizens recognize the need to protect women and gender-diverse folks accessing health care, and so much so that they were willing to take time out of their lives to go and walk in and protect these folks trying to access reproductive justice. So I don't know who they are, but I just want to say *miigwech* for that and *miigwech* for that work and that commitment to protecting accessing reproductive health care.

So new Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) can get on the side of right, can do the right thing, can stand up in solidarity with women and gender-diverse folks and pass the abortion buffer-zone act. We'll see if she does, Deputy Speaker.

You know, the new Premier has an opportunity to put measures in place and policies in place that lift up and ensure that women and gender-diverse folks' needs are taken care of. Another thing that the new Premier can do is that she can make birth control free to folks up until the age of 25 or 26 or 30; whatever she would like to do. But there's an opportunity for her as the first woman premier to provide birth control free to Manitobans who need to access it.

The other thing that the new Premier can do as the first woman premier here in Manitoba is that she can commit to free menstrual products and help end period poverty for folks who struggle paying for those products, Deputy Speaker.

These are actually relatively simple things to do and are—can be done immediately. It doesn't need, you know, an advisory committee or a research committee or, you know, folks to come together and do more consultation. All that work has already been done. And, in fact, if you look across other countries, they're already doing that work, right? We know that Ontario partnered with Shoppers Drug Mart, that they now offer free menstrual products. We know that BC has a program for free menstrual products. We know that France just announced that they are going to be offering free birth control to their citizens.

All of this work is being done right now, recognizing the role that government has to play in lifting up women and gender-diverse folks in creating a more equitable society and helping women and gender-diverse folks get the resources that they need in order to succeed and thrive. Easy-peasy, Deputy Speaker. The Premier can do that tomorrow. She can give direction that that's what she'd like to do moving forward tomorrow—today, in fact.

So again, I'm waiting to see what the new Premier will do, where her commitment and dedication towards women and gender-diverse folks lies. Does it lie just in words or just in occupying space within a patriarchal framework and environment that we all work in right here, or is she prepared to step up and dismantle those systems?

While she hopefully is stepping up to dismantle those systems and patriarchy, I hope, too, that she will choose to get her government's nose out of the University of Manitoba's Faculty Association negotiations. That is as simple as a call: we're no longer going to be mandating those wage freezes and all of that. She can do that today and allow the U of M faculty to get back to work, which is what they want to be doing, and it can allow the University of Manitoba to start paying faculty what they're worth and start attracting folks to the University of Manitoba from across the country.

We're losing faculty because—I had a meeting a couple of weeks ago and I can't remember what faculty it was but they lost one of their colleagues because the University of Calgary—or in Calgary, they offered her a \$30,000 raise. Who is not going to take that? Of course people are going to move and take the increase to their wages of which they are entitled and their labour dictates they should be paid. Anybody is going to do that.

We're losing valuable professors and knowledge and experience because of this government's interference over the last five and a half years. It is a pretty sad commentary when in only five and a half years, the University of Manitoba has been forced to go on strike two times and affecting students; not children. Again, I know that both the Finance Minister and the new Premier kept referring to students as children. Quite a disconnect on who actually is—students at universities—allow students to get back to school. And here's the minister also responsible who doesn't really have anything substantial to say about the strike and actually seems to just be applauding what is the continuation of Brian Pallister.

* (16:00)

This is, again, all of the work that Brian Pallister put in place because he was so obsessed with money and his austerity agenda and every single member of the PC caucus are still applauding that and still ensuring that that goes through. That's—there's no difference then, Deputy Speaker. There's no difference between Brian Pallister, then, and this current administration.

What I will say is this: we're only on, like, officially in this Chamber, day 2 of the Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) administration—the new Premier's administration. There is lots of time. She can go back home and she can say yes, you know what? We're going to separate ourselves from the decisions that Brian Pallister made, and I'm going to pick up the phone and ensure that UMFA is able to get back to work.

I know that—I've shared with many people, my son is in his second year of university and is—was really looking forward to actually experiencing university for the first time by going to classes in January, and yet now he still can't.

So, I want my son, like everybody else's children and everybody else's husbands and wives and partners and all of that, to be able to get back to accessing their education and pursuing their education, as is their right. So, hopefully the Premier will get going on that starting right away.

Finally, I'm going to say this—I'm going to keep my comments very, very brief so that we have lots of time for other folks. It's not enough—I think that we were, you know, all very honoured to hear the honour song that was played for the LG yesterday, but it's not enough just to have, you know, somebody in the Chamber drumming. It's not enough, hopefully, you know, that we're going to be having a land acknowledgement. It's not enough that we say that we believe in reconciliation and we're moving towards reconciliation without concrete action and measures. And yesterday's Throne Speech, we did not once hear anything in respect of MMIWG2S—not one word was uttered on that, except for the national inquiry that was mentioned.

The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry was mentioned, the national inquiry, I think the RCAP was mentioned—that's fine that those documents are mentioned in the Throne Speech, but if there's no actions to support it, if there's no definitive policies

and money behind policies for Indigenous peoples or organizations, none of it means anything.

And I know that our colleague, the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie), got up and asked the minister for reconciliation and northern affairs, and asked the Premier whether or not they were going to apologize for Brian Pallister's comments. And I truly don't think they understand why we're asking that in this House they apologize for Brian Pallister's racism—because you can't move towards reconciliation without, as uncomfortable as it may make folks, to look that straight in the eyes and say that was wrong and we're sorry. You can't have reconciliation without acknowledgement, and you can't have it without an apology.

And that's why, on this side of the House, we are asking the minister and the new Premier to apologize on behalf of the racism that we, as Indigenous members in this Chamber, have had to endure for the last five and a half years. But, certainly more importantly, the racism that Indigenous peoples here in Manitoba across our territories had to put up and witness from the former premier who, only until a couple of months ago, sat in this very Chamber with us. Indigenous peoples in Manitoba, including members in this House, deserve an apology.

So, I started this by saying congratulations to the new Premier. And, as I said, it's not enough just to have a woman sitting in that chair or occupying that title. It's no different than any other leader previously if you're not working to dismantle the systems and the oppressions that create inequitable—an inequitable province.

And she can start by all of the things that I lifted—listed out and she certainly can start with an apology first thing tomorrow.

Miigwech.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I would also like to offer my congratulations to the Premier and to the PC party for electing their first woman leader. I'm very proud to lead a party that was the first party to elect a woman MLA and as well as the first party to elect more than—actually, several women leaders.

When it comes to the Throne Speech, I am concerned on the emphasis—on a change in style because it seems to suggest that the problem with this government has been its style and not its substance.

You know, the great Winnipeg artist, songwriter and activist Neil Young once ironically talked about a

kinder, gentler machine gun hand because there was a much deeper problem with this government than the superficial style, it was with this government's decisions. Because in every meaningful way this is still the same government and the same Cabinet, the same policies, many of the same talking points but with a few changes and plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose [*The more things change, the more they remain the same.*]-doesn't begin to cover it.

It's not just style, it's about substance because style is not going to be what changes Manitobans' lives. It's about the choices, the action and inaction of this government because right now, we have doctors and nurses and other people working in health care quitting their health-care system and it's not just because of the pandemic because they were quitting before of-it.

It's because they have no supports. They're burned out. They're overworked, understaffed and they say that basic decisions can't happen because of dysfunction in the system. That was from a letter written to me by a doctor who runs the PET scanner which is—he is no longer going to be doing.

We have a massive nursing shortage because people working in health care have been burned out. I received an email just the other day from a nurse at St. Boniface and they're—talked about their colleagues who've had to quit to preserve their mental, physical and moral health. And when I say moral health, that's because they are afraid that, because they are so worked past the point of exhaustion, that they will either hurt or kill a patient through a mistake, or that through a mistake they will end up losing their ability to practice as a nurse.

That's incredibly serious and I've heard it over and over again. And these are from ERs that have been overwhelmed because they were closed when the government was told not to do them. It—but they were—they're people who are overwhelmed and burned out because they've been mandated and forced to work 16- and 20-hour shifts and then as soon as they get home, are sent back again because there's understaffing.

And signing a new agreement with the Manitoba Nurses Union is positive but it doesn't address the massive shortage or the reasons those shortages are in—there in the first place.

And one of the challenges of this—we talk about mental health and everything, the terrible things that have happened to people in this pandemic and the

struggles people have had, and it's partly because the most conscientious workers are the ones facing a terrible toll of burnout. It's the people who are—care the most that are being broken by this.

And it isn't happening because of the previous government's style; it happened because of the previous government's choices. The pandemic didn't cause these problems, it revealed them. And when we hear some very positive things, statements that are being made about Indigenous relations, and they're very welcome but it is hard to square some of them with the fact this government is currently being sued right now for the return of \$338 million in children's allowances—federal children's allowances that belong to First Nations children in care.

And when those children were taken from their families and their communities, the Manitoba government went further and took their money as well. And then they kept it. And then they passed a law shielding anyone from ever being sued or from ever holding anyone who was accountable for that decision to be taken to account, to be sued in court.

You had children, Indigenous children taken from their families, who had everything taken from them, and the government is shielding themselves, the people who made those have passed a law protecting themselves from ever facing responsibility for that.

* (16:10)

It's terrible, but if this government were truly interested in doing this, because this is something that happened under multiple governments, this would be an enormous contribution to reconciliation—to return—to end that court case and return those funds. And I talked to a First Nations advocate who mentioned a single year of the PST—a single year of the PST—that was cut early could have paid for this.

So we saved a penny on a Tim Hortons cup of coffee here and a penny on a doughnut here, but there are First Nations children who are—lost out on \$90,000. Their actual—that's how much they are short. And who have been left sleeping under bridges and homeless. So that's a long way to go.

And the other aspect of it is that this is something—and if we think about the discovery of graves at Kamloops—these are things that have been known about for many, many years but have been revealed by the pandemic. We all know that First Nations have been treated abysmally for decades and that residential schools and colonization are something that we have to deal with. But we also have to deal with the

issue of CFS and stop taking children away from First Nations families and their communities.

The backlogs for surgeries and diagnostic tests was pre-pandemic. It was getting worse year after year after year. We put out a response to the Manitoba state of the province a couple of years ago because knee replacements, hip replacements and cataract surgeries were all getting worse every single year leading into the pandemic. These are not, as the Throne Speech states, these are not issues that are solely created by the pandemic, and the issues with backlogs in Manitoba are the worst in Canada by a long shot. Especially if you look at the second wave, our health-care system collapsed, because we were having to divert, but it collapsed worse in Manitoba than anywhere else.

And that second wave was the worst in Canada. It is important to note because I think in another point in the Throne Speech it actually says that they contained the outbreak in seniors' homes. Look, and this actually has to be repeated, the death toll in—not just in Manitoba, across Canada—the death toll in seniors' homes in Canada was some of the worst in OECD countries. It was abysmal. It was terrible.

And Manitoba, in the second wave, was worse than any other province. We didn't learn any of the lessons of the first wave despite many warnings, despite every MLA getting an e-mail from the long term care association throughout last summer, the summer of 2020, pleading and warning to get ready. So I have a lot of trouble when the Throne Speech tries to take credit for blunting a second wave that really was a disaster and a third wave that was worse than worst-case scenario.

Instead what we really need, and what we've needed, is policies that are for everyone. But instead we have a number of niche policies that really ignore an entire herd of elephants in the room. We have a promise for a one-time program to train up to 20 students in Thompson—that's positive—but we also have the U of M on strike. Their nursing faculty is on strike. We could be training and graduating nurses and attracting—and expanding the capacity to train nurses at the University of Manitoba if that strike were settled. But instead, that's not happening.

There is a promise to reform rural health care but not to reverse cuts and recognize the incredibly damaging changes that have been made in Winnipeg, which serves all of Manitoba. Health Sciences Centre is a trauma centre for—not just for all of Manitoba—Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nunavut, northwestern

Ontario. The same is true for the 'nic'—NICU neonatal intensive care unit at St. Boniface and cardiac at St. Boniface.

During the third wave, our health-care system stopped being able to serve Manitobans. We could not care for our own. And that's a terrible—that's an indictment of the failures of this government to prayer—to prepare. And the fact that we're only talking about rural health care, and not about the supports that are required in Winnipeg, which will ultimately serve rural and northern communities because there are some procedures that cannot be done elsewhere. That needs to be addressed.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

It's very positive that firefighters are getting recognition. My own father worked in Flin Flon in the 1950s, sweeping out the smelter, and he and everyone he worked with died young of cancer.

The question is where is the protection for workers with burnout, workers who are not firefighters who also face these on-the-job challenges. But burnout in particular, because that's been one of the things that's been putting people's physical health, mental health and careers at risk. That's why we're losing doctors, nurses and others in our health-care system, because they cannot, they cannot work.

And burnout is not recognized or protected as a compensable injury under the CWB, under the Workers Compensation Board. That is—or the WCB, sorry. It's a—that is long, long overdue because we have probably thousands of people who are suffering terribly because of burnout, because they've had to work 20-, 24-hour shifts, because they've had to hold the hands of people in ICU when their family can't be there, who have been incredibly dedicated, and they don't have respite. And when they can no longer work—even if they feel they can no longer safely work—there's nothing for them. And that's something that should have been there.

I—look, in the last year—I know that there are a fair number of things in this Throne Speech that are things we've touched on and we've touched on them, frankly, in far greater depth with more plans. We released—the Manitoba Liberal MLAs released major reports defining and detailing 40-plus years of neglect when it comes to people who are homeless and especially to seniors homes where there are cases where there was no increased funding for 15 years for operational funding, and two years of cuts prior to the pandemic and 25 years of infrastructure funding.

And when you look at the fact that we've got public versus private care, private care—private infrastructure funding is only a third of the infrastructure funding that is provided to publicly funded seniors homes, all of which were completely inadequate. There are issues that were—we were talking about in 1980 that have not been addressed in 2021.

And that, again—it says, we put our long-term care under the microscope and acted to stabilizing the pandemic. I have a lot of trouble accepting that.

Ultimately, when we talk about early learning and child care this is positive. But there was a national child-care program which was being set up around 2006. There were spaces that were created in Manitoba. That program was cancelled by a Conservative government at the time. We just had a federal election, and, ironically, had the outcome been different, the Conservative government would have cancelled this national program which these PCs are now touting. So I'll just make note of that because of the hypocrisy involved.

When it comes to—well, I'll say bill 64, but especially our K-to-12 system, it says: we want to help a school system that's fair, transparent and equitable. It would be really positive if we have a school system where we can make sure that students know how to read, do math and aren't hungry. That equity and fairness and transparency are all positive, but what we really need to do is to do something about the 20 per cent of students who struggle and who struggle largely because their families are living in poverty.

And I will say, because this has come up very many times, family poverty and child poverty is getting worse in Manitoba again. And it is quite frustrating when EIA has not been meaningfully touched since 1986, to hear that this government has done anything about child poverty when we're talking about things like Rent Assist or a tax scheme that doesn't affect people who don't pay taxes.

The Throne Speech does mention labour shortages. Again, there's two issues here: (1) we have to recognize that one of the reasons that there are labour shortages is that people are poorly paid. There are people—there have been wonderful examples across the world where if people suddenly started paying their workers better, and all of a sudden they didn't have quite the problems with retention that they thought.

This is true at the University of Manitoba. It is also true of people who might be considered

precarious workers from people who have—people in the gig economy. They are not paid enough. Part of the reason people are not going back to work is because the work is not safe, and they can't actually put food on the table or pay their mortgages or pay their bills or pay their debt. That is the reality, and instead of actually addressing that, we are—or addressing the fact that people can't make enough money to pay their bills or have a living wage, that instead we are having to—we're talking about bringing people here, which is great and excellent, but I, really—we need to be asking ourselves whether it's a fair thing to ask new Canadians to come and work at jobs we're not willing to do, at wages we're not willing to work at—that, ultimately, proper wages and fair wages are a benefit to everybody.

* (16:20)

It is incredibly disappointing that this government is continuing with its plans around labour market reforms, around universities. I've written a letter about this. The fact is is that, in a global pandemic, we should maybe put a pause on trying to reform universities and retool them for labour market conditions when we don't know what the labour market is going to look like in a year.

As for—[interjection]—yes, I'm just wrapping up. Yes. So, and on other issues, you know, with—when it comes to things like mining, these are—there are lot of issues that we've been talking about for years, if not decades, that have not been dealt with. And it's not even clear now that they're going to be dealt with because there is no action attached to them, there are no funds attached to them, and it sounds like more listening and planning to plan.

So, with all that said, I will make—offer my subamended motion.

I move, seconded by the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard),

That the motion be amended by adding after clause (q) the following clauses:

- (r) failed to provide any substantial change in course or concrete action to address multiple crises currently facing Manitobans that desperately require bold action while the provincial government only produced a plan to plan; and
- (s) failed to provide solutions for all Manitobans, instead offering boutique policies that cater

to a few while leaving the majority out in the cold; and

- (t) failed to refrain from continuing to engage in a pitched battle with talented Manitoba researchers and educators to the extent that many are pondering leaving the province; and
- (u) failed to commit to free and fair bargaining with public sector workers or meddling with Crown corporations and allowing them—for them to operate independently as they are intended; and
- (v) failed to commit to reconsidering all of the disastrous health-care reforms and only reconsidering changes for rural Manitoba, not for care centres in the city of Winnipeg, which serve the entire province; and
- (w) which failed to bring in the critically needed province-wide prevention approaches to conditions like diabetes, osteoporosis, heart, kidney, lung and brain diseases, including learning disabilities, addictions, stroke and dementia; and
- (x) failed to recognize the role of low wages in Manitoba labour shortages, commit to increasing the minimum wage or outline how the Province will utilize the Provincial Nominee Program to address gaps in Manitoba's workforce; and
- (y) failed to articulate any meaningful plan for the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, choosing empty platitudes about, quote, attracting investment, end quote, over concrete actions, and leaving Manitobans and Manitoba businesses on their own to continue to be innovative and to be resilient in true Manitoba fashion; and
- (z) failed to commit to return the \$338 million of federal special allowance for children in care that was taken and put into general revenue by previous PC and NDP provincial governments; and
- (aa) failed to make commitments on making Manitoba more sustainable; and
- (bb) failed to recognize anything related to the safety of Manitobans when substance use, overdose deaths are at an all-time high and the mental health of Manitobans requires urgent attention.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont), seconded by the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard),

That the motion be amended by adding after clause (q) the following clauses:

- (r) failed to provide any substantial change in course or concrete actions to address multiple crises currently facing Manitobans that desperately require bold action while the provincial government only produced a plan to plan; and
- (s) failed to provide solutions for all Manitobans, instead offering boutique policies that cater to a few while leaving the majority out in the cold; and
- (t) failed to refrain from continuing to engage in a pitched battle with talented Manitoba researchers and educators to the extent that many are pondering leaving the province; and
- (u) failed to commit to fair and free bargaining with public sector workers or meddling with Crown corporations and allowing for them to operate independently as they are intended; and
- (v) failed to commit to reconsidering all of its disastrous health-care reforms and only reconsidering changes for rural Manitoba and not for care centres in the city of Winnipeg, which serve the entire province; and
- (w) failed to bring in the critically needed province-wide prevention approaches to conditions like diabetes, osteoporosis, heart, kidney, lung and brain diseases, including learning disabilities, addictions, stroke and dementia; and
- (x) failed to recognize the role of low wages in Manitoba's labour shortages, commit to increasing the minimum wage, or outline how the Province will utilize the Provincial Nominee Program to address gaps in Manitoba's workforce; and
- (y) failed to articulate any meaningful plan for economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, choosing empty platitudes about—and I quote—attracting investment—end quote—over concrete actions, and leaving Manitobans and Manitoba businesses on their

own to continue to be innovative and be resilient in true Manitoba fashion; and

- (z) failed to commit to return the \$338 million of federal special allowance for children in care that was taken and put into general revenue by previous PC and NDP provincial governments; and
- (aa) failed to make commitments on making Manitoba more sustainable; and
- (bb) failed to recognize anything related to the safety of Manitobans, when substance use overdose deaths are at all time highs and the mental health of Manitobans requires urgent attention.

The subamendment is in order.

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): I do want to start by taking this opportunity to welcome everybody back to the Fourth session of the 42nd Legislature, and it is truly a great honour to be in the Stefanson government and bring forward many changes coming forward.

We hear all the time, and it truly is—and I believe this to be true from heart—from everybody that stands up and speaks in this House, that it truly is an honour to stand up and represent our constituents, to represent our thoughts in how we behave and what we bring forward in response to especially a throne speech. It really gives us the opportunity to not only talk about the great results about the past but an opportunity to look to the future and to talk about things that we can certainly do in the future.

We know on Tuesday that our government delivered the Throne Speech, and it lays out our path to progress and together with a new direction of our future. I am proud to be a member of a government which not only embraces the values of equality, 'inclusivity' and understanding, but work as a team to build a better Manitoba.

The people of Manitoba, like millions around the globe, have weathered the pandemic storm over the past 22 months or so. I have always said that there are no tougher people than those living right here in our great province. We can bask in the 40-degree summer weather and also enjoy winter activities when it's 40 below. I am sure that we all look forward to a stronger, healthier and more inclusive province with a brighter view of the horizon.

I do want to take this opportunity to thank Gail Cullen, Jason Gobeil and Frank Tacan, and the entire team at the Brandon Friendship Centre for the work

that they do in Brandon and Westman. I have personally always been committed to collaboration, co-operation and reconciliation, now being a critical time to listen, to heal and bring Manitobans together.

Madam Speaker, I received my first smudge and experienced my first sharing circle because of Frank Tacan, an elder in the community, a few years ago. Since being introduced to Frank, I have had the extreme pleasure of attending many events, celebrations, ceremonies and meetings with the Brandon Friendship Centre. I am excited to continue to build my relationship with not only the Brandon Friendship Centre but also with Leah LaPlante and her team at the Manitoba Metis Federation's southwest regional office in Brandon.

With our government's commitment to working with Indigenous peoples to advance shared goals and promote truth and reconciliation, we all have an opportunity to rebuild this relationship on a foundation of meaningful dialogue and engagement with First Nations, Metis and Inuit leaders to co-develop action plans. This is not something that just one government department is responsible for. It is a responsibility of each and every MLA in this House, alongside every citizen in our great province.

* (16:30)

Madam Speaker, I want to take a few short minutes to talk about our current pandemic and the impact it has had on our province. We have seen some unprecedented challenges as we have 'moosed' forward through the last 22 months dealing with the effects of COVID-19. Families have been greatly affected, businesses have faced extreme hurdles and all governments, big and small, have had to make some tough decisions. I truly believe that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, but we just need to keep working hard and not lose sight of the best interests of Manitobans.

Madam Speaker, I recently had a great meeting with Brian Schoonbaert, the CEO of Prairie Mountain Health. As I had the pleasure of working with Brian for over 20 years, we were able to reminisce about the past but also had a heartfelt discussion regarding the pandemic and the future of health care in Manitoba. I personally want to thank all of our health-care workers for their hard work, their dedication and commitment that they have shown and continue to show as this pandemic continues.

We all have a responsibility to take necessary measures to ensure the safety of all Manitobans and

we need to guarantee proper care is there when we and our loved ones need it. To this end, our government is creating a task force to address both the surgical and diagnostic backlogs. We must work with our health-care professionals to shorten wait times that support the health care of our most vulnerable.

Madam Speaker, we heard in the Throne Speech that our government's nursing strategy will target the nursing shortages and increase training spaces with a goal of 400 additional nursing seats. I have received numerous phone calls from friends of mine who I maintain that friendship in the health-care industry and they're extremely pleased and happy to see that we can start to work on filling the demand for nurses and retaining them as we go forward.

We will see more nurses being trained and developing their skills by working in institutions as part of their curriculum. In addition, every single graduate from these nursing programs as we've heard will receive a job offer to stay right here in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, Brandon continues to grow at a rapid pace, and this Throne Speech identifies a number of areas that will truly benefit my constituents and all Manitobans. I look back on my Throne Speech response from a couple of years ago and it reminded me of the work that we had committed to in providing those who may be experiencing mental health and addiction issues.

I stood before you that day and I stated, and I quote, our government is also committed to helping Manitobans who are struggling with drug and alcohol addiction. Investments are being made in prevention and early intervention activities, as these are critical to minimizing harm, reducing costs associated with substance abuse. The needs of constituents of Brandon and Westman are being heard loud and clear by our government with the installation of a new Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine Clinic in downtown Brandon.

This clinic provides services for patients including treatment programs and primary-care physicians. I need to thank Vicky Lagasse and her team at the 7th Street Health Access Centre for their work in that area. Again, that was a couple of years ago. The work has definitely progressed. They continued to do some amazing work for the folks in downtown Brandon and all of Westman.

Madam Speaker, we have some amazing volunteers who continue to collaboratively work with the City of Brandon and our government on the needs

of those experiencing issues with mental health and addiction. Our government was listening and continues to listen to this day. In addition to the RAAM clinic, we established a new department of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery. We have and continue to be active in engaging with Manitobans and the hundreds of organizations, clinicians and front-line service providers to discuss how to make the system more responsive and reliable to support Manitobans who are struggling.

We have all heard that our government will be introducing a homeless strategy this winter, while emphasizing a whole-of-government approach for consultations with Manitobans. Community partners are a valuable resource for our government and we will continue to work with them to develop innovative approaches to meet the needs of single parents, Indigenous youth and people with disabilities, while also helping those unable to work through the new disability support program.

Our government, along with the hard work of the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) wants to ensure all Manitobans have the chance to succeed in their careers and their lives, starting with children. The federal-provincial agreement on early learning and child care will be 'expedited' to ensure that these opportunities are readily available for families in need.

We all know the importance of a good education and an education system that provides for our children starting at a very young age. Early childhood development is essential if children are to succeed in their kindergarten to grade 12 years. We are pleased to see the opening of Maryland Park School in Brandon and are equally excited to see the commitment of this government for more schools that are so desperately needed.

Our government realizes the benefit early learning—pardon me. Our government realizes the benefit from early learning, but also the availability of child-care spaces, so that young families never have to miss an opportunity to receive an education. We are building a fair, transparent and equitable public education system with child-care facilities incorporated into the design.

Madam Speaker, this year's Throne Speech brings a new path forward while enhancing the work of local MLAs and the work that we do for our constituents. In Brandon, regular meetings with Mayor Rick Chrest, the chamber president Barry Cooper and others from the City of Brandon and the Brandon

Chamber of Commerce continues to build and enhance increased opportunities to work together in supporting and growing local business. Our government has committed to continue to support businesses so they can produce the goods and services that we rely on while providing jobs to Manitobans.

As is the same across our great country, we, too, are experiencing labour shortage, which the pandemic has definitely helped create. We will be increasing our investments in education and training and focus our work with businesses to attract workers from around the world to fill the labour gaps.

Madam Speaker, everyone in this House is proud of our Provincial Nominee Program. Just this past Monday, I had the honour of attending a key ceremony for Habitat for Humanity of Winnipeg with the member from Maples. Yoseph, Roza and their son Kalab immigrated to Canada and settled here in Manitoba in 2015 under the Provincial Nominee Program. They then had another son, Noha while here in Manitoba and have now become homeowners in this great province. At this ceremony, the member from Maples also mentioned the benefits of this program in bringing great folks to Manitoba and praised the outcome of this program.

While we believe this is the strongest program of its kind in Canada, having brought thousands of talented, hard-working individuals and their families to live right here and participate in our economy and our communities, we will continue to work with the federal government to strengthen the program further.

When I was listening to Her Honour present the Throne Speech, I couldn't help but think of the great work being done by Lindsay Hargreaves and the members of the Brandon Environment Committee. While we know that it is imperative that we do our share to address climate change, it is also great to know that Manitobans are taking this seriously and doing their own work in helping us meet our goals of creating a healthier planet.

Madam Speaker, Manitoba is committed to working with our federal government on a mutually agreed national approach based on co-operation and consultation with provinces. I am excited to work with a government that has an energy policy framework that focuses on opportunity to use innovative technologies, including those developed here in Manitoba, by Manitobans, to reduce emissions while stimulating our economy.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to working with you and all of my colleagues in the 'legislature'—'slature' as we build a better Manitoba for generations and generations to come.

Thank you.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Before I begin, I would be remiss if I didn't start off by acknowledging that we are on Treaty 1 Territory, home of the Ojibwe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, Dene, Inuit people and homeland of the Métis nation. I'd also like to acknowledge the drummer from yesterday who opened this up. It was quite humbling to be able to see that in this Chamber. It was a day of firsts, and that being one of them.

I'd also like to congratulate the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) on being the first woman elected to that position. I'm sure that's quite an honour for her, and she'll do her best to do that position proud.

So there was a number of things yesterday. It was also—when I say a lot of firsts, the first thing I would say happened is there was a missed opportunity, and there was a missed opportunity in the Throne Speech to do a lot of the right thing instead of just talking about talking or planning to plan. There was no real, concrete commitments, investments towards basically anything—health care, education, justice, the gist of the people—other than saying they will, we'll listen; we'll talk, too. But we all know those—that's just a play on words. It's really coming into, we're going to talk to you. You better listen to us. That's really what that comes down to.

* (16:40)

So, in the First Minister's first few days here, first couple of weeks, there's been a lot of missed opportunities. And I realize she believes she is trying to do the right thing and change the narrative and change the direction of Brian Pallister, but that's still a legacy that's going to exist within that government and that exists today.

The First Minister, in one of her promises, I guess it would be, is that she was going to let the ministers do what they need to do. She wasn't going to overrule. She wasn't going to speak for them. They were, in fact, going to be allowed to do their own jobs.

But keep in mind, Madam Speaker, these are the same ministers that were still there under Brian Pallister. Not one of them has changed—not one. The only one that's changed is, in fact, Brian Pallister. He's the only one that's no longer there. So if they're—she's

going to allow them to do that then it begs the question, exactly what is the First Minister going to do? Is she going to be, quote unquote, working behind the scenes again? We all know how much validity that had—excuse me—when she put that effort into it because that was the claim to fame while Brian Pallister was out there spewing all that racist rhetoric on colonialism, racism and Indigenous people. She was supposedly working behind the scenes then, so obviously, that didn't work if that was, in fact, happening.

So these ministers on that side of the Chamber are still the same ministers that supported all of that. And this Throne Speech just goes to show that that support for that Brian Pallister agenda is still there. It's still there in a great deal.

These are the same ministers who said during the pandemic, we got this. That was a couple of waves ago. So clearly that was not the case. The same minister on that side who, when referencing residential schools, claimed they were trying to do the right thing. Again, wrong on that point, too. Same minister on that side who said, even just during this global crisis, during this climate change and global warming, considered this past firefighting season a success when we had hundreds and hundreds of people displaced for weeks and months at a time. Same ministers on that side of the Chamber that 'sold' bill 64 was a great thing for Manitobans.

So all of these statements that were made and that reflected in the Throne Speech, if those statements were, in fact, true and that's something you believed at the time, why didn't you speak up if you didn't believe in it? Why didn't you speak up against bill 64? Why didn't you speak up against Brian Pallister? Why didn't you speak up against the racist rhetoric?

Brian Pallister's continuously said we're on team Manitoba. Everybody get on team Manitoba. Well, team Manitoba, on that side of the Chamber, still has all the same players. There's only one person gone. That one person did not have veto power. That one person had one vote just like everybody else in this Chamber here. But collectively you stood behind that that one vote. You applauded all that legislation that was brought forward. And there was some legislation there that was really well-meaning for Manitobans; there was. I'm not going to sit here and say that everything that comes across these tables and comes into this Chamber is entirely the wrong thing to do. But you know you absolutely knew that the rhetoric that Brian Pallister was spitting out on that side of the

Chamber was wrong, and you didn't do it. You didn't speak up.

It took the member from Agassiz to, in fact, risk her—sorry, not risk her life—risk her job, risk her position in this Chamber, to say, you know what? Enough is enough. But still isolated, I didn't see a big round of support for her. I didn't hear the clapping. I didn't hear everybody stand up and say, yes, that was the right thing to do. To this day I still don't hear an apology. I still don't hear a condemning of Pallister's comments.

And in fact, during question period today when Brian Pallister's name was brought up I hear chirping about get over it; get over it already. He's not here; get over it.

Then I ask you, what's the timeline for that? What's the timeline for getting over a leadership and government that spews racism, colonialism, genocide, assimilation, extermination of a people and supports that in the rhetoric that's brought forward? I ask, then, what's that timeline? Because I want to go home as an Indigenous person and tell my three, four, five, six-year-old daughters, nephews and nieces that this is the timeline. On this day is when you need to get over it. That doesn't happen. That's not going to happen.

So, members opposite, when we're talking about reconciliation, the start is an apology. The start is condemning that rhetoric and that—those comments that are made, and this Throne Speech did not do that. I know, and I—quite honestly, I think you believe that it does and it's a start, but it's not. The Throne Speech was 11 pages long, and Indigenous issues which are at the forefront of Manitoba and Canada today received three-quarters of a page on an 11-page document—less than 10 per cent. It was warranted less than 10 per cent of the issues of the day.

And, albeit, I'll be the first one to admit also, health care and those kind of issues are right in front of all of us today, so that absolutely deserves the priority. But those Indigenous issues have been building for a long time. They came to the forefront and everybody on—members opposite all seen that. You've seen that come to the forefront right up in everybody's face. We've seen that around in the Chamber. We see that around the building and we see that on the front lawn. So why did it only warrant 10 per cent of the Throne Speech? Why was there only a commitment to talk?

When I walked in here yesterday and I seen that drum sitting there and I seen our grand chiefs up there,

the only thing I regretted is that we couldn't have more—we couldn't have more people. But we all know that's why—there's reasons why we couldn't do that, the pandemic. But that shouldn't have been just a token moment to say we have that. Again, chirping during the QP when we talked about the reconciliation, did you not see who was in the—who's in the gallery? Again, was that the point of it? Was that the point to do that?

Our leadership, our communities are strong in believing in reconciliation. But please—and I implore the government—don't take advantage and continue to take advantage of First Nations' and Indigenous peoples' willingness to give you a chance. Because that's exactly what the comments made after the Throne Speech, by leadership, by community members, is doing. They like that commitment, but there has to be follow-through on that and there can't be talk and no action. We need to call for that action all the time.

As I mentioned, there was a lot of issues that were, in my heart and in my personal feelings, warranted—you know, a lot of the Throne Speech and a lot of commitment from this government, Indigenous issues obviously being one, but health care being another.

And there's no commitment here; there's no real commitment. Months ago there was an announcement to make another health department to deal with mental health and well-being, seniors care and active living. Now is made into two departments; and rightfully so. That was a commitment that needed to happen. Those resources needed to be committed. That commitment by this government and by those ministers to say this portfolio needs it, and this portfolio needs all this attention. Then, quietly, those two portfolios were combined back again into one minister.

So do we really have, then, just a part-time minister in both of those departments? Do we have that strong dedication to mental health? Do we have that strong dedication towards health care for our seniors and our people that are going through this pandemic?

No, we don't. We have that split as a part-time, because what did we have during this pandemic? In fact, we had three failed—two failed health ministers and one failing health minister, because that's what's happened. That's truly what's happening. The First Minister herself is a failed Health Minister. I'm going to do whatever it takes, fight tooth and nail until I find

a better opportunity. Then I'm going to go, and that's how this comes across.

So this Throne Speech was a very missed opportunity to be able to do that, and this can't be a government of just simply announcements. You have to have that action. So the Throne Speech was very vague in that sense, and, albeit, we weren't expecting a 300-page Throne Speech yesterday, 300-page document to say this is exactly what we're going to do.

But there was an opportunity to hit the highlights in there, to make strong, firm commitments in there. None of this behind-the-scenes stuff anymore. None of this we're working behind the scenes, stay tuned, we have an announcement coming. Let's deal with this today. Let's deal with it now. We can't be about putting money over people.

* (16:50)

We've had a number of stages of this pandemic, a number of grim milestones for cases, positive cases, deaths, the ages of people that we've lost here in Manitoba, and all ages, all age brackets; it's not specific to a gender; it's not specific to an ethnicity. It's all of us; we're all in this together. So let's truly be all in this together. Let's all work together to get this done no matter where you are.

And that hits, for me, again, on the Indigenous component here. When I think about Indigenous communities, on-reserve here in Manitoba, two words always jump out at me: gaps and responsibility. I had the opportunity to speak at a personal-care home gathering yesterday for the eight First Nation care homes on-reserve. And we talked about the gaps and responsibility. So I sat in this Chamber and I listened to the Health minister of the day when an outbreak was discussed and brought up in question period about an outbreak at a personal-care home on-reserve. First response: federal responsibility.

Those people in that care home are Canadians and they're Manitobans. So why weren't we doing whatever we can, pulling out all the stops, not worrying about jurisdictional issues, to deal with Manitobans just because they're on-reserve. And that's something that's missing. That's something that's really missing from this government, really missing from this Throne Speech to be able to identify those gaps not only in Indigenous communities, just gaps in Manitoba, in the demographics, in the financial standings of Manitobans. There's no definition of those gaps; instead, it's, let's pawn that off; let's get rid of this responsibility.

There's rising numbers going on right now. There's outbreaks in schools, there's outbreaks in care homes, there's surgery backlogs, and, again, this government is still trying to put a spin on: it's not that bad. It's catastrophic. So don't try and fool Manitobans to say it's not that bad. If you need help, ask for it. If you need assistance, ask for it. This shouldn't be about trying to claim fame and claim a victory. This pandemic should be all-party, all Manitobans, all Canadians, and instead we have this divisiveness in here because we're not treating it as a crisis it is. Instead we're trying to score political points on the lives of Manitobans.

Madam Speaker, Indigenous issues are very prominent in what we're doing. They're embedded in every single department. So when an Indigenous issue or a First Nations issue comes up, we shouldn't just be referred to the Indigenous relations reconciliation minister wherein it's in Health, in Justice, in Education, Agriculture, Conservation. It covers all aspects, so we should be able to take that. I've heard the words all-of-government approach. Then let's do that. Let's do that to those Indigenous issues. Let's get out there and condemn those comments. Let's get out there and work together.

If you really want to reconcile with Indigenous communities and Indigenous peoples with the stroke of a pen and one word, so much of that can be advanced with an I'm sorry, with the stroke of a pen to get rid of the lawsuits for the CSA, the channel projects. So many of our people are before the courts for hunting and fishing. With the stroke of a pen, you could simply eliminate all of that in the spirit of reconciliation.

Don't be above that. Don't be above the ability to say that was wrong, because I've heard it. I've heard practices of previous governments have been this way, have done this, have done that. Well, 2016, so it's been a while. So you could also consider yourselves to be the previous government. So let's sit there and do that. There's nothing wrong with admitting there was a flawed part of work that was being done on behalf of your government, flawed piece of legislation.

Yes, I'm sure there'll be some people back and forth jumping on the government about that, but at the end of the day, it is the right thing to do and is the right thing to do by Manitobans.

And don't believe for once that staying silent is the right thing. You need to speak up and truly

represent all of Manitobans. Don't speak at Manitobans, speak truly for Manitobans.

Bill 64. Brian Pallister, bill 64. I know that gets eyes rolling on that side of the Chamber, but it needs to be said. They were flawed pieces—that was a—bill 64 was a flawed piece of potential dictatorship. Brian Pallister was the epitome of dictatorship.

So let's get rid of those things, which happened but that's the start. When we talk about the start, there you go. Whatever happened on the inner workings to push Brian Pallister out of this Chamber, fantastic. I celebrate with you on that.

But when he talked about bill 64, that wasn't speaking for Manitobans, that wasn't representative of Manitoba and Manitobans spoke loud and clear on what that was going to be.

Bill 64, seconded by the now-Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) of Manitoba. Bill 64, supported by the Minister of Education (Mr. Cullen). And then, bill 64 was retracted by those same people. So again, I say Brian Pallister was not a dictatorship; Brian Pallister was but one vote on that side.

So today, we sit here with, hopefully, renewed voice and renewed optimism on that side to in fact do the right things on a number of pieces of legislation. There's so much legislation out there that can do good but there's also a lot that's very detrimental to what we are as people here in Manitoba.

And it needs to improve. We need to be able to do that and speak out collectively on all of those things.

So withdrawal of bill 64 was a start. Brian Pallister out the door was a start. Well, let's not continue that Brian Pallister legacy, but that's what's happening here today. All those remnants of Brian Pallister were dripping all over that Throne Speech announcement.

And that's just unfortunate. Another missed opportunity to be able to do that and do the right thing. And again, that just didn't happen.

So today, Throne Speech, here we are, second day going into the third day of a very short session here. You still have the opportunity off this time to do something. Maybe things will change December 10th, who knows.

But when we get that opportunity, let's get out there and speak up on behalf of Manitobans and represent your constituents because your constituents are also very diverse and your constituents are going

to be heard on election day. Because we're hearing them, we're listening to them, we're talking to them. We're not up here bringing out own personal opinions up here. This is the voice of the diverse caucus that we have here of Manitobans and that's what needs to be done.

So, Madam Speaker, in closing, I'd like to go back to kind of the three-word slogan to describe this Throne Speech: another missed opportunity.

Miigwech.

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate): I want to begin by saying that the government of Manitoba has the right person in the right job for the right reasons and it's pretty cool that she also happens to be the first female Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) in the province's history.

Restoring relationships will be key to any success as we recover from the pandemic's devastating effects.

Our Premier gets that and she has a clear path to achieving collaboration with all Manitobans. And that starts with humility: humility on the part of everybody recognizing that, collectively, we have to get out of this very dark time that we've all been going through. And I am determined to be a part of the successes and part of the restoration of those relationships that are key for success.

Madam Speaker, I really would like to speak a little bit about the Climate and Green Plan. Obviously, that's where I spend a lot of my time and focus—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands—oh, when this matter is again before the House, the honourable minister will have 19 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, November 24, 2021

CONTENTS

Matter of Privilege		Surgical and Diagnostic Backlog	
Fontaine	7	Asagwara	16
Goertzen	7	Gordon	16
Gerrard	8	University of Manitoba Labour Dispute	
		Moses	17
Tabling of Reports		Fielding	17
Driedger	8	Ewasko	17
		Indigenous-Government Relations	
Ministerial Statements		Bushie	18
National Addictions Awareness Week		Lagimodiere	18
Gordon	8	University of Manitoba Labour Dispute	
B. Smith	9	Lamont	19
Gerrard	10	Stefanson	19
		University of Manitoba Labour Dispute	
Members' Statements		Gerrard	19
CareImpact		Ewasko	19
Micklefield	10	Individuals Experiencing Homelessness	
Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation Family and Community Wellness Centre		Micklefield	19
Adams	10	Squires	20
Lisa Spring		Rolling River School Division	
Lagassé	11	Altomare	20
		Cullen	20
COVID-19 Outbreaks in Schools		Petitions	
Wasyliw	11	Louise Bridge	
Ken Wiebe		Maloway	21
Friesen	12	National Drug Plan	
		Lamoureux	21
Oral Questions		Cochlear Implant Program	
New PC Leader and Premier		Gerrard	22
Kinew	12		
Stefanson	12		
		ORDERS OF THE DAY	
Throne Speech		GOVERNMENT BUSINESS	
Kinew	13	Throne Speech	
Stefanson	13	(First Day of Debate)	
Health System Reform		A. Smith	23
Kinew	13	Morley-Lecomte	25
Stefanson	13	Kinew	28
Surgical and Diagnostic Backlog		Fielding	32
Kinew	14	Fontaine	36
Stefanson	14	Lamont	38
Manitoba's Pandemic Response		Isleifson	43
Fontaine	15	Bushie	45
Gordon	15	Guillemard	49

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